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Leaf Fall #1

Sue Matheson

EDITORIAL

It is September, and summer is reluctant to leave the North this year. The birds, however, are beginning to gather together, and the light is starting to shorten. Accordingly, *the quint's* sixty fourth's issue, offers reading for our longer nights and shorter days. Articles by authors from, the Tunisia, Nigeria, the United States, India, and France grace this very catholic issue. Wiem Krifa's "Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*: The Feminist Journey from Homeland to Hinterland" begins this issue's offerings. Krifa finds Angela Carter's treatment of space is always related to critical change at in *The Magic Toyshop, a* feminist, postmodern critique of patriarchy that promotes the New Woman of the 1960s. Next, Olusola Smith Adeyemi and Hungbo Ovisemeho Kotin's "Aesthetics in *Vothun* Ritual Theatre Among The Ogu in Badagry, Nigeria" examine *Vothun* ritual performances of the *Ogu* ethnic group in Badagry, Nigeria, and deem its aesthetics designed to strengthen the bonds between families, members of the clan, and their religious belief system. Following, Chad Clem and Colleen Cooper Harrison's "Eaten Out of House and Home: Robert Marasco's *Burnt Offerings*, Gothic Literature, and the Hungry House Trope" considers Gothic fiction's *hungry house*, arguing that it is like a classic monster of horror literature subsisting on its inhabitants. Clem and Harrison offer Robert Marasco's underappreciated *Burnt Offerings* as a core text belongingto this subgenre.

Next, in "*Onomonresoa*: Poetry in Celebration of Mother and Motherhood," Idaevbor Bello and Ben Egede adopts African feminist theory and uses Africa's cultural nationalism to discuss poems that eulogise the attributes of the African mother, who is shown to inspire hope and be an icon in perseverance and an embodiment of sacrifice—

one who gives of herself willingly for family and society and one who unites all around common issues that are beneficial to humanity. Then, Dairo Afolorunso Olalekan and Abolaji Tosin Success' "The Church and Technology: a Re-examination of the Use of Technology Among Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria**"** examines the impetus behind the harnessing of faith and technology in the 21st-century's Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria. Following, Collins Osayuki Edigin's "The Philosophy of Tribute Payment in the Benin Kingdom" examines the indigenous tribute system that evolved among the people of Benin before colonial rule in 1897. Edigin discusses the origin, development, and philosophy behind tribute and tax exaction in pre-colonial Benin, foregrounding political, economic, religious, and philosophical foundations of tribute payment in the Benin Kingdom,

Then, Peter Memga Kertyo questions feminist scholars' widely-held view that low turnouts of women in Nigeria's elections are due to the country's politics being controlled by men. In "Interrogating Women's Representation and Participation in Nigeria's Electoral Processes from 1999-2023," Kertyo argues Nigerian women are the architects of their electoral plight. He concludes they need to engineer mass mobilizations and their own support for the campaign trail. Next, in "Theatre and Health Education through Kwagh-hir Theatre," Jonathan Desen Mbachaga discusses *Kwagh-hir* theatre performances as a model for health education. showing how *Kwagh-hir* plays raise consciousness regarding health issues. Mbachaga finds *Kwagh-hir* theatre an alternative communication approach to health issues that engages its audiences. Finally, Irene N. Osemeka and Friday Aworawo's "Historicizing the Theory and Practice of Cosmopolitan Conflict Resolution Approach in Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, 2000-2015" considers the extent to which third-party intervention in both

states reflected cosmopolitan conflict resolution ideals, demonstrates the difficulties involved in Mali's and Cote d'Ivoire's examples, and recommends comprehensive peacebuilding to address the sources of conflict with the aim of increasing local capacities for peace.

Three film reviews are also housed in this issue. In "'When the truth beckons!' Or 'On the trail of truth,'" Sudeep Gosh argues that Rajat Kapoor's Hindi film *Ankhon Dekhi* (*Through My Own Eyes*, 2013*)* offers a deeper bond of existence tied to what is primitive in nature. Kapoor, he says, seeks new, tantalizing territory in his enigmatic depiction of its protagonist's salvation. Francis Mickus, in "The Count of Monte Cristo: Can Right Be Done?" shows that Alexandre de La Patellière and Matthieu Delaporte have brought us a screen adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' novel that is striking in its imagery. The film's production values which rival the best that Hollywood can put out. Shradha Umesh's "*Bulbbul* and the Play of Contrasts" deems Anvita Dutt Guptan's directorial debut a predictable story of revenge that is not original. However, she finds the film's symbolic elements, its inspiration drawn from Raja Ravi Varma's paintings (Sachdeva), Amit Trivedi's score, and Siddharth Diwan's cinematography transcend the plot's clichés and make an experience that is haunting and memorable.

No issue of *the quint* can be complete without its creative component. We are proud to present Richard Loydell's stunning, taut verse from TIME SENSITIVE! A study of our changing flora, LeafFall records the end of this year's autumn in my North—I invite you to enjoy what is the last of this year's colour. as the monochrome of our winter approaches. There is a particularly interesting treat from *the quint* to look forward to this Christmas. In December, our sixty fifth issue will be a special

issue that features Nigerian journalism. We are honoured that the talented Ene Obaje will be its guest editor. In the meantime, as the cold and darkness deepens at the 34th Parallel, we are pleased to offer you more thought-provoking material for your reading, viewing, and consideration.

Sue Matheson
Editor

Leaf Fall #2

Sue Matheson

THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO NOSTALGIA

'Morbid nostalgia is the evil twin
of technological modernity.'
– Alex Niven, New Model Island

Lost hours and days, forgotten memories,
the music you used to love, places where
you grew up, old friends, can all turn into
something relevant. Self-parody, yearning,
rich harmonics... Are you feeling it yet?

If you are absent or uncooperative then
clean integration will be impossible, even
if the songs are terrific. Memory is wonder:
thoughtful and surprising refashionings of
personality and personal troubles, dramatic

re-enactments of trauma, strife and self.
If you are as old as me then you should be
very much excited about the things you
never had or always wished you'd done,
personal and geographical histories which

inform your deepest reminiscences, stop
decades collapsing on top of each other.
Feeling sentimental? Wistful? Lean into
the possible, document the good times,
buy books filled with fake memory traps,

permanently damaging new interpretations.
Make up what happened, embrace what has
been swimming around in your brain since
the fickle fluctuations of public approval
created an idealized reality, with both past

and present thrown into rhapsodic memoir
and sometimes-magnificent throwback pop.
History cannot absolve personal indiscretion
or grant a necessary vision, you must deal
with the difficulties of navigating both

silence and pain to find the closest thing
to an open gateway into time. Everyone is
a little bit right about reimagining places
we inhabited, the moments we remember,
the things we long for; to self-medicate

and seek out romantic interludes, sunsets
and sunrises in the past-tense, sequenced
to match more complicated emotions in
reconstructed fantasy versions of ourself,
stitching the whole thing together then

taking the whole thing apart. Farewell
to the past, hello yearning and purpose.
Time is more intuitive and inventive
than we think, moves on and leaves us
with pervasive sadness, rescued outtakes,

distorted fragments and distant glimmers.
There's simply no precedent for tomorrow
when we live in the moment and weave
together ideas of health and happiness;
we must abandon obsession with the past

and embrace digital narratives, elastic
memories, prepare ourselves for the bleak
world ahead, frustrating any closure and
new intersections of culture and content.
A constant state of déjà vu can save all

the hassle of backtracking or travel, there
are many things left when you die, so make
a comeback now, jump into the narrative,
become responsible for the past tomorrow.
Do you feel ready and able to begin again?

—Rupert M. Loydell

Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*: The Feminist Journey from Homeland to Hinterland

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Abstract

In Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop*, the events take place in two contradictory locations. The fifteen-year-old Melanie blossoms in her parental homeland where she discovers her growing female body and sexuality before relocating to the South of London: the hinterland where her maternal Uncle lives. Her homeland setting denotes the beginning of her postmodern female development towards liberation. She goes through a moment of awakening in her luxurious house, which stands for late modernism and the inception of postmodernism. Her bourgeoning dream is dashed with the death of her parents following an air crash and her settlement, together with her younger siblings, in their Uncle Phillip's archaic and Victorian household.

His antiquated house and toyshop, symbolizing traditional patriarchy and bygone Victorian tenets, become a hinterland for Melanie as she strugggles to survive her uncle's misogyny and being alienated from her contemporaries. It is only after the collapse of this male-dominated realm that Melanie can begin to recuperate as a New Woman.

Keywords: Feminist postmodernism, patriarchy, gender, new woman, new man

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Introduction

In general, locations, homes, and countries play substantial roles in developing human identity or restraining its progress. Whether explicit or implicit, the impact of spatial setting on characters is also undeniable. Physically and psychologically, space affects the growth and freedom of characters in Angela Carter's *The Magic Toyshop* as it traces the pilgrimage of an adolescent from her childhood home. In the countryside, Melanie's home houses her sexual awareness and supports the progress she makes towards female independence. Leaving home for Melanie, however, is not just a matter of spatial movement. Borrowing from Judith Kegan Gardiner's insights,[1] ideological and gendered alterations also deeply affect Melanie's identity-acquisition process. Her Uncle's world, to which she is driven with her siblings following the death of their parents, is a place where women are ill-treated and subordinated to men. For

1. Judith Kegan Gardiner proposes'the female identity is a process' in 'On Female Identity and Writing by Women ', *Critical Inquiry* 8 (2), p. 349.

Melanie, it is a hinterland,[2] antithetical to her earlier experiences of gender equality.

Critics Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar view "the woman's quest for self-definition"[3] as the main plot of the feminist nineteenth-century writing. Elaine Showalter, too, shares the same opinion by advocating for "self-discovery,"[4] and the "search for identity,"[5] within women's literature. Belonging to this tradition, Melanie, like most female characters of the nineteenth feminist writing, goes through a process of growth. Angela Carter's adolescent heroine, however, she is also a 1960's new woman who rejects being submissive. Her struggle highlights, in paticular, the role that space plays in defining the position of women in society and determining gender relations. In part, her movement from homeland to hinterland recalls Fevvers' opposite trajectory which takes place in *Nights at The Circus*, from a brothel to Siberia's open space where she achieves female subjectivity and gender equality.[6] Though they head in converse directions, both female heroines are in search of their female identities and liberation from crippling patriarchal power.This article first explores Melanie's sexual, psychological, romantic, and gendered awareness in her parents' home before studying the oppressiveness of Uncle Philip's hinterland. Melanie's imprisonment

2. The word, hinterland, in this article, is used in opposition to Melanie's homeland (her parental house) and as an archaic patriarchal location, isolated from the exterior postmodern world, to which Melanie is driven by force after the loss of her parents.

3. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 76.

4. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*: *British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 13.

5.Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, p. 13.

6. In *Nights at The Circus,* Carter sketches a different spatial movement for her heroine Fevvers who, at the beginning starts her journey in a brothel which hinders her liberation both psychologically and physically. However, with the burning of the brothel, Fevvers indulges in a journey that grants her freedom and secures her female subjectivity and gender equality. In this context, Fevvers' migration from the brothel to the natural landscape of Siberia can be studied as her movement from a hinterland to a homeland, in contradistinction to Melanie who is forced to leave her homeland and head to the prison-like patriarchal hinterland of her Uncle Philip.

ends with her feminist insurrection and the recuperation of her freedom with Finn, a new man who rejects Philip and patriarchy.

Melanie's Growth: Female Space

To begin, Melanie's sexual and psychological growth is well suited to the bourgeoning spirit of feminist criticism,[7] and in particular to the postmodern wave of Phallocentric criticism[8] in the 1960's that focused on masculinist bias and literary mechanisms that foregrounded women's passivity as a natural state of affairs in the period's canonical texts. Subverting the canonical, *The Magic Toyshop* exposes latent gender ideologies inserted in what seems to be the natural transmission of gender relations by bringing feminine space, the spaces "women themselves have occupied" to life. [9]

The concept of the female space, of course, is a versatile concept, being interpreted differently from one feminist critic to another. Elaine Showalter, for example, analyses "Women's space" as the recent contemporary female writings or "the historical space of women's writing."[10] In "Women's Time," Julia Kristeva

7. "A development and movement in critical theory and in the evaluation of literature which was well underway by the late 1960s and which has burgeoned steadily since. It is an attempt to describe and interpret (and reinterpret) women's experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature- especially the novel […] and to a lesser extent, poetry and drama. It questions the long-standing, dominant, male, phallocentric ideologies (which add up to a kind of male conspiracy), patriarchal attitudes and male interpretations in literature. […] It attacks male notions of value in literature- by offering critiques of male authors and representations of men in literature and also by privileging women writers. In addition, it challenges traditional and accepted male ideas about the nature of women and about how women feel, act and think." See page 315 in J. A. Cuddon's *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 1976).

8. "A term derived from Lacanian PSYCHOANALYSIS, designating the Patriarchal SYMBOLIC order in which the phallus is positioned as the primary SIGNIFIER, privileging MASCULINITY at the expense of FEMININITY. The feminist critique DECONSTRUCTS the phallocentrism of male DISCOURSES, not least psychoanalysis itself which in its Freudian form sees the girl infant as a 'little man', and women as 'the castrated' victims of penis envy." See page 198 in Sonya Andermahr, Terry Lovell, and Carol Wolkowitz's *A Glossary of Feminist Theory* (New York: Arnold, 2000).

9. Ruth Salvaggio, "Theory and Space, Space and Woman," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, (1988) ,Vol. 7 (2), p. 262.

10. Salvaggio, "Theory and Space, Space and Woman," p. 261.

modifies Showalter's definition, averring "when evoking the name and destiny of women, one thinks more of the space generating and forming the human species than of time, becoming, or history."[11] Kristeva emphasizes the spatial experience of women in shaping their identities and psychological development. She goes further to justify her analysis by examining Freud's diagnosis of female hysteria in relation to space, finding male controlled spaces have caused female hysteria whereby the feminist urgent need to appropriate a personal space that helps build their identities, rather than suppressing them. Kristeva stresses the relationship between the appeal for a "space" and the birth of the third generation of feminists who believe in gender equality and consider "the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities […] as belonging to metaphysics"[12]. Kristeva advocates for the appeal for "space," proclaiming that "a *third* generation is now forming […]. My usage of the word "generation" implies less a chronology than a *signifying space*, a both corporeal and desiring mental space."[13] She views the new feminist generation as a new space itself in which to deconstruct the metaphysical binarism of men and women.

Whether textual, physical, or psychological, the female space should be preserved for every woman. As a feminist postmodernist, Carter, in her writings, also opposes binarism and upholds gender equality between the new man and the new woman. In this way, Melanie embodies the typical new woman in the 1960's. With her nascent sexuality, romantic spirit and tendency to build her own female mental and physical world, she is totally different from the woman designed by phallocentric writers.

11. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time" translated by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, in *Signs*, Vol. 7 no. 1 (1981), p. 15.
12. Kristeva, "Women's Time," p. 33.
13. Ibid., p. 33.

Melanie's Process of Identity: Acquisition

Melanie's hopes of sexual freedom, gender equality and true romance are conveyed in her parents' home. In the privacy of her bedroom which stands for her female space, Melanie is excited to discover her growing female body.

> The summer she was fifteen, [she] discovered she was made of flesh and blood. O, my America, my new found land. She embarked on a tranced voyage, exploring the whole of herself. […] For hours she stared at herself, naked, in the mirror of her wardrobe. […] And then she would writhe about, clasping herself, laughing, sometimes doing cartwheels and handstands out of sheer exhilaration at the supple surprise of herself now she was no longer a little girl.[14]

Melanie's exploration of her body during her adolescence is very telling. Alone in her room, and without any parental control, the teenager indulges in exploring her body and acknowledging her awakening sexuality. Her state of innocent freedom matches the naturalness of her country setting. Like Eve in Eden, Melanie rejoices her unbridled female ecstasy at the discovery of her sexual awakening. Occupying a personal space helps in stirring her female psychology and sexual growth. Her room becomes an extension of her own female body: both spaces reflecting each other and interacting through a harmonious melody, orchestrated by Melanie's imagination. The room and the mirror become reflections of Melanie's psychological and physical states and parts of her female identity. She writes about her own female psychological and sexual experience in spatial terms via her playful movements and feminine bodily

14. Angela Carter, *The Magic Toyshop* (New York: Penguin Group, 1996), 1.

gestures. Her performativity within her female space stands for her existence as an independent woman who liberates her body and mind. Her experience of adolescence is etched via her performative body as a means to concretize her psychological realm. Her feminine bedroom attests to her gradual development and course of identity achievement. Contrary to the patriarchal spirit and space which cripple women's sexual drives and result in women's mental disarrangement, Melanie's space allows her to celebrate the birth of her sexual life and rejoice in contemplating her burgeoning female body.

Melanie experiences her growing sexuality as a natural impulse during adolescence. To ensure her "psychic development," she is required to go through the stage of "libidinal satisfaction" and to accept her physical change. As Jane Flax points out,

> [l]ibidinal satisfaction is a basic human need. Different "Zones" of the body become the primary focus of such satisfaction at preset points in psychic development. […] The varied impulses of childhood are combined "into unity, an impulsion with a single aim" genitally oriented, heterosexual intercourse.[15]

Her process of self- exploration, is executed via the mirror as a prerequisite tool that would be missed in Uncle Philip's house. As a teenager, Melanie fantazies about her future sex life and her bridegroom whom she visualizes as the new man.[16] Her sexual arousal is displayed as a biological need regardless of culturally restrained

15. Jane Flax, *Thinking Fragments: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and Postmodernism in Contemporary West* (California: University of California Press, 1999), p. 80.

16. The concept of the new man refers to the new generation of males who cut with the patriarchal tradition and appeal for gender equality.

gender[17] divisions. Here, space plays a fundamental role in emancipating her body and soul. Steps to attaining fulfillment, Melanie's inner monologue and physical performativity, metaphorically, are her own way of feminine writing, her bedroom's its spatial paradigm.

The absence of a patriarchal figure makes it easier for Melanie to blossom naturally. Without cultural and ideological interference in her parents' home, Melanie gives free vent to her instincts, liberated from the patriarchal control that denies and controls female sexual power. The writer initiates her narrative by deconstructing pre-given presumptions about women's sexual passivity. The spatial setting of Melanie's room plays a huge role in building the female self. The scene evolves smoothly connoting the naturalness of Melanie's bodily exploration and performance. Being located in the countryside, Melanie's home offers her female being a chance to grow spontaneously without the cultural constraints and patriarchal-constructed tenets. Her physical and sexual emancipation parallels her psychological freedom to contemplating her future life with her imagined new man.

> She gift-wrapped herself for a phantom bridegroom taking a shower and cleaning his teeth in an extra-dimensional bathroom of the future in honeymoon Cannes. Or Venice. Or Miami Beach. She conjured him so intensely to leap the spacetime barrier on her cheek and his voice husking 'darling'.[18]

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17. "Early second-wave feminists adopted the distinction formulated by the psychologist Robert Stoller (1968) between SEX and gender to differentiate the socio-cultural meanings ('masculinity' and 'femininity') from the base of biological sex DIFFERENCES ('male' and 'female') on which they were erected." See page 102 in Sonya Andermahr, Terry Lovell, and Carol Wolkowitz's *A Glossary of Feminist Theory* (New York: Arnold, 2000).
18. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 2.

Melanie's visualized future husband does not adhere to patriarchy's image of maleness. She does not think of him in terms of being a superior figure or a dominant controlling male. Carter's feminist postmodern spirit is conveyed in her writing and via her characters' psychological worlds. Through Melanie's cogitation, the principles of gender equality and the birth of the new man are neatly presented to show the contrast between her own homeland and her Uncle's Victorian hinterland. The choice of a countryside location for Melanie's growing sexual life is significant, because it asserts the absence of any cultural or ideological interference in the natural world. This reveals the problem of gender inequality and the patriarchal control of female sexuality are, merely, ideological and cultural constructions rather than naturally-acquired. The female private space plays a substantial role in concretizing natural human desires that are governed by social and cultural norms. Melanie's feminine room is depicted as a theater for her free performance, helping in her identity construction. We are told that "[a]ll this went on behind a locked door in her pastel, innocent room […]. This is what Melanie did the summer she was fifteen,"[19] forecasting a successful future as she owns and explores her own space, building her own identity.

The writer's emphasis on Melanie's freedom she is when inside her room is reminiscent of Virginia Wolf's *A Room of One's Own*. In the 1970s, various feminist literary critics were influenced, explicitly or implicitly, by Wolf's philosophy which states that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."[20] Most female writers appealed for a room of their own in the academic

19. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 3.
20. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1929), p. 1.

society. Carter played a significant part in incorporating this wish in her fiction as her female protagonist's desire for her own private space, a place where she could unleash her self-expression. Melanie's spatial and psychological "room of [her] own" is found in her parents' home in the countryside where she releases her desires, through performance.

In this vein, psychologist Jessica Benjamin views female desire as an "intersubjective space," a space where women are "both with and distinct from the other," a female-created space "where subject meets subject."[21]. Though she is physically alone, Melanie is not lonely, because she does not exclude the "other," the embodiment of the new man from her space. Rather she incorporates him as her fanciful bridegroom. Her room serves as the "intersubjective space," which grants her union with her new man in the absence of traditional patriarchal figures. As such, Melanie's growing desire is mirrored through this common and shared personal space between her and her concept of masculinity.

Though its critics vary in their definitions of the female space, they all agree on its importance in the female liberation journey. In *The History of Sexuality*, Michael Foucault explains the relation between the subject and sexuality and avers that the suppression of sexual desires for males has made part of the moral contract since the Greek period and even before the Enlightenment period and humanism. Taking into account the fact that only males have been considered as subjects, women were not concerned with the topic of sexuality. "Women were not governed by this code because it was defined as an ethics of men; women figured only as objects [and...]

21. Jessica Benjamin, *Shadow of The Other: Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 7.

were systematically excluded from the moral realm."[22] Carter, however, deconstructs this moral code and its patriarchal dogmatic tenets as a whole system. Placed far from the sanctioned, civilized world, she releases her female heroine from any moral codes that might restrict her innate freedom and empowers Melanie by positioning her as an independent subject, no longer the object of the traditional male desire. What the writer endeavors to convey is that men and women are equally free in any way of the gender divisions designed by patriarchy. Carter's central claim, of course, is concerned with the connection between the subject and sexuality. Women were not viewed as subjects standing on their own, but rather objects of males' desire which entailed the deprivation of their right to explore their own sexuality.

In particular, Carter aspires to spotlight the crucial role that space plays in constructing the female subject. We are told that

> [m]eanwhile, they lived in a house in the country, with a bedroom each and several to spare, and a Shetland pony in a field, and an apple tree that held the moon in its twiggy fingers up outside Melanie's window so that she could see it when lay in her bed [23].

Here, Melanie's room is described as a heavenly location, situated in the heart of nature, with enough rooms for every family member. The emphasis on "rooms" implies the importance of private spaces for human beings, regardless of sex or gender. The presence of the apple tree near her bedroom window is very symbolic.

22. Susan Hekman, *Gender and Knowledge: Elements of a Postmodern Feminism* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), p. 34.
23. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 5.

Melanie's homeland is surrounded by the beautiful nature which implies her free female self, uncontrolled by the patriarchal ideology. She is also a symbolic Eve on earth who is about to sin, fall, and be taken to her Uncle's patriarchal, hellish world. The presence of the apple tree is tightly linked to Melanie's innocence while she is in her home. This demonstrates that gender divisions, masculine sexual dominance over women, the objectification of the female body, and canonical denial of woman's subjectivity are all man-made codes, meant to create an ideological gender gap that has no biological reliability.

Melanie's sexual maturity drives her to think about the opposite sex whom she always views in romantic terms and as an equal partner. We learn that

> Melanie was fifteen years old, beautiful and had never even been out with a boy, when, for example, Juliet had been married and dead of love at fourteen. She felt that she was growing old. Cupping her bare breasts […] she thought: "Physically, I have probably reached my peak and can do nothing but deteriorate from now on. Or perhaps, mature."[24]

She is, in short, a female subject who believes in gender equality and a heterogeneous conjugal relation based on romance to the point of comparing herself to Juliet who looks for her Romeo,[25] her imagined bridegroom. Ironically, Melanie's fall from grace is caused by her empathy for her mother' as a traditional bride. Should Uncle Philip's world be considered punishment for her identification with this traditional female

24. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 5.
25. Carter refers to many intertexts in *The Magic Toyshop*. Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, is used to deconstruct and criticize canonical literature.

role? It is as if by magical realism that Melanie violates her innocent female self by entering her parents' bedroom before daring to put on that symbol of patriarchal dominance, her mother's wedding dress. One summer night, in her parents' bedroom (while they are in America), she starts imagining their lovemaking:

> [l]eaning over the wicker heart which formed the bed stock, Melanie tried to imagine her parents making love. This seemed a very daring thing to think of on such a hot night. She tried hard to picture their embraces in this bed but her mother always seemed to be wearing her black, going to town suit, and Daddy had on the hairy tweed jacket with leather elbow-patches. […] Melanie tried but could not imagine her parents' nakedness. When she thought of her mother and father, their clothes seemed part of their bodies, like hair or toenails.[26]

Melanie's inability to imagine her parents' sex life points to the suppression of sexual freedom in the bygone ages. Carter's covert criticism of sexual taboos is revealed by Melanie's ironic depiction of her mother as a woman who never experienced nakedness which demonstrates that the female body, proscribed tas a free entity, has always been concealed behind the male subject. Her parents' room stands as the typical patriarchal space where human desires are suppressed, and even imagination is blurred. Melanie's nakedness in her bedroom is contrasted with her mother's entirely covered body. The writer hints at the patriarchal control of the traditional maternal female body, in contradistinction to the sexually-emancipated Melanie living in an age when women appeal for equal rights, including sexual ones. Carter shows that

26. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 10.

bodily and sexually subordination is a cultural construct with no biological validity. What's more, the reader is invited to compare both spaces: Melanie's private room which manifests the feminist spirit of the new woman and her parents' patriarchal room which typifies the traditional masculine place where her mother, aan example of the submissive woman, is denied her rights and suffocated to death.

Melanie wearing her mother's wedding dress can be interpreted as foreshadowing her entrapment in the horrors of her Uncle's patriarchal space and as her killing of the traditional submissive female image justified by her mother's sudden death following this very scene. Metaphorically speaking, Melanie's innocence is soiled by the remnants of patriarchy symbolized by her mother's dress. The significance of her room in relation to her parents' is highly important, demonstrating differences between the two generations of women, represented by daughter and mother.

> All the moonlight in the room focused on its rich and mysterious fold. Melanie tore off her pyjama's and clambered into the dress. It was very cold to the touch. It slithered over her, cold as a slow hosing with ice-water, and she shivered and caught her breath. It was too big for her, as the dress had been. She was too young for it. The loneliness seized her by the throat and suddenly she could not bear it.[27]

Symbolically, Melanie fails to play the role of the traditional, obedient woman. The psychological unrest which she experiences demonstrates her inability to step into her mother's shoes. Traditional conjugal life appears to be unsuitablefor the new

27. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 11.

woman: Melanie has to be supported, even though this is an unreal fantasy. The coldness of the dress refers to the absence of love and romance for which Melanie seeks: "[s]he examine[s] the wedding dress more closely. It seem[s] a strange way to dress up just in order to lose your virginity."[28] Carter's ironic criticism of the traditional institution of marriage is revealed through her protagonist's inner contemplations. Melanie's image of love, and conjugal life are different than her mother's. It is as if by magical realist coincidence that Melanie causes the death of her mother, together with her father, in an air crash. And by putting on her mother's dress, Melanie puts an end to the traditional passive woman and paves the way for the birth of the triumphant new woman. Remarkably, the scene of the wedding dress is very intricate. Running into the garden with her mother's dress on, Melanie discovers that the door to her room is closed. Subsequently, she is excluded from her previous innocent world. This scene can be interpreted as foreshadowing Melanie's expulsion from her heavenly house. Melanie's only way out of the garden is through the symbolic mythic apple tree which witnesses her trespass into the world of patriarchy. Coming into her bedroom, she realizes the seriousness of her action and the difference between her free female life in her room and the awaiting, suffocating patriarchal life in her Uncle's space.

Melanie's Hinterland: Loss of Identity In The Confines of Patriarchy

The unexpected news of her parents' death following her bridal experience pricks Melanie's feelings of guilt. Like Eve, she and her siblings are driven from the garden world, where she experienced her sexual awakening, into the sinful, archaic, hinterland of Philip Flower, where she ceases to be an independent new woman, The contrast

28. Ibid..

between Melanie's homeland and hinterland is an ideological and cultural one with the status of women and gender being its problematic questions. Flavia Forcatho points out that Carter's narrator informs us

> [a]fter the Bohemian countryside life, Melanie arrives in a hectic (sub)urban Southern London, in the smouldering homestead of an orgish and god-like Uncle. All the other inhabitants, including the dog, are mere puppets in Philip Flower's toyshop, a bunch of objects meant for common use, and at times good for display.[29]

The spatial discrepancy between Melanie's room and her new patriarchal abode also cast ideological and gendered differences. The absence of free will demonstrates the tight authority of the patriarchal figure. As Sarah Gamble says, Carter's choice of Uncle Philip's job as a puppet-maker is very revealing, showing the nature of his dominance over his silent wife, Margaret; his brothers-in-law, Finn and Francie, and his niece, Melanie. Carter "treats the relations between puppet-master and puppet as symbolic of the control exerted by a patriarchal culture on women and the roles available to them."[30] Melanie's entrapment in Uncle Philip's hinterland signifies her loss of female independence and status as a new woman, along with her divine homeland. Doing so, Carter "foregrounds the contradiction between the romantic images of femininity reproduced in culture and art, and the facts of sexual violence"[31]

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29. Flavia Forcatho, *Postmodern Politic: Feminism, Identity, and Gender in Angela Carter's The Magic Toyshop, Nights at The Circus, and Other Selected Works* (Belo Horizonte, 2019), p. 9.
30. Sarah Gamble, "Shadow Dance (1966), Several Perceptions (1968) and Love (1971)," *The Fiction of Angela Carter: a Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2001), p. 12.
31. Gamble, "Shadow Dance (1966), Several Perceptions (1968) and Love (1971)," p. 14.

that Melanie experiences under the roof of the misogynist, Uncle Philip.

At their first meeting, Finn warns Melanie that Uncle Philip does not tolerate free women and gives her some instructions to abide by, while living in his space. The Puppet maker exercises his misogyny in his workplace as well as his household. Finn insists

> Trousers. One of your Uncle Philip's ways. He can't abide a woman in trousers. He won't have a woman in the shop if she's got trousers on her and he sees her. He shouts her out into the street for a harlot. […] 'No make-up, mind. And only speak when you're spoken to. He likes you know, silent women.[32]

Melanie's free life is turned upside down within the patriarchal milieu. Uncle Philip's masculine dominance allows him to shape her according to his wishes. Trousers are considered a token of masculinity; therefore, he can't accept a woman in trousers. Figuratively speaking, he denies there is equality between sexes and views women being subordinate to himself. Finn also warns Melanie that Aunt Margaret has been dumb since her wedding night. This reveals Uncle Philip's control over his wife and his deprivation of self-expression within the institution of marriage. Firstt, he enjoys silencing his wife, then he turns his attentions to his niece. When Melanie enters her uncle's house, her

> loss of autonomy becomes apparent. Recognizing her powerlessness, she feels herself to be like one of her uncle's puppets […]. Her feelings of powerlessness intensify, in relation to both her Uncle Philip and her cousin

32. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 20.

> Finn. She no longer has a mirror in which to see herself, a further factor contributing to her loss of subjectivity.[33]

In her Uncle's masculine space, Melanie's "autonomy" is totally usurped. She loses her new woman's determination and her new identity in the presence of the old patriarchy. The absence of a mirror in this hinterland is symbolic. Melanie who used to see her growing female subject in her bedroom mirror is now unable to find herself. "She [is] seized with panic, remembering that she had not seen her own face for so long."[34] Melanie not only cares greatly about her physical appearance; she also pays equal attention to her psychological and mental female spaces. With Lacan's concept of the mirror stage in mind, the disruption of her psychological progress is understandable. Melanie's exterior image grows in parallel with her interior psychological one. According to Lacan, the mirror stage is necessary for the child's growth, through which s/he achieves her/his bodily awareness. Lacan defines this as

> a drama […] which manufactures for all the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body- image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic and lastly to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the infants entire mental development.[35]

As Lacan explains, the role the mirror occupies in achieving the human identity within the stage of the "spatial identification" is paramount, because one's identity

33. Gamble, "Shadow Dance (1966), Several Perceptions (1968) and Love (1971)," p. 20.
34. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 70.
35. Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits*, translated by Alan Sheridan, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company. Inc., 1977), 3.

is progressively constructed within her/his space via the mirror which serves as as a tool that associates one's physical look with one's psyche. Melanie lacks the physical and psychological self-identification the mirror in her homeland offered. This also implies her loss of self under patriarchy and signals the disruption of her psychological development. She is no longer an adolescent who is conscious of her emancipated sexuality and dreams about her romantic new man. Suddenly, she is aware of her metamorphosis from being a naturally-flourishing girl to a male-dominated, submissive woman.

The archaic Victorian architecture of Uncle Philip's house and toyshop emphasizes how obsolete his patriarchal world and its principles are. Uncle Philip's subordination of Melanie reaches its peak when he forces her to play the role of the mythological Leda[36] in one of his puppet shows. Incongruously, "[t]he scene is that where the sky-god Jove (or Zeus) the father of gods and men, the supreme ruler, the originator of law-and-order rapes the mortal Leda, in the form of a swan. Uncle Philip has made a model of a swan and he has the thing mount Melanie as Leda."[37] Finn is allocated the role of the swan purposefully to violate Melanie. Because sexual violence lies at the heart of patriarchal institutions, with women being the sexual victims, Melanie can no longer be in control of her sexuality. First, Uncle Philip complains about her growing body. "I wanted my Leda to be a little girl. Your tits are

36. "Leda, in Greek legend, usually is believed to be the daughter of Thestius, King of Aetolia, and wife of Tyndareus, king of Lacedaemon. Some ancient writers thought she was the mother of Tyndareus of Clymnestra, wife of Agamemnon, and of Castor, one of the heavenly twins. She was believed to have been the mother of the other twin, Polllux, and Helen, both of whom hatched from eggs." In *The Magic Toyshop* and *Nights at The Circus*, Carter uses and abuses the myth to deconstruct its ideological background. See the *Encyclopedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022).

37. Aidan, Day, *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass* (Manchester: Manchester University Press., 1998), p. 27.

too big," he protests.[38]

Gamble observes, for Carter "myths are lies designed to make people unfree."[39] Notably, Melanie is denied "her own sexuality. She must take on the role of angel-passive and virginal."[40] Usurping her sexual freedom and denying her female subjectivity, Philip drags his niece into the abyss of the mythological world, inflicting a male sexual atrocity on her. Carter's choice of the myth of Leda and The Swan is deployed to show Melanie's sexual victimization by the classical male character who represents the ending of patriarchy. Philip aims to relegate Melanie into submission by "a mythology of awakening in which women blossom into shuddering subordination."[41] Melanie's subordination, however, is only temporal and represents the first step towards her emancipation and the recuperation of her female identity.

Carter's heavy reliance on myths within Uncle Philip's hinterland points to his conventional and old beliefs. His patriarchal spirit affects the whole setting and ruins Melanie's psychological, sexual and subjective development. As Gamble remarks, "Carter emphasizes that the closed space of the family doubles as cultural space by superimposing the myth of Leda and the Swan on Melanie's oedipal initiation."[42] Uncle Philip's hinterland works as a patriarchal ideological site where females are sexually abused. The disparity between her homeland- sexual freedom and her puppet-like status in her Uncle's hinterland transforms her. As Gamble says, "She must take on the role of angel-passive and virginal."[43] Carter also highlights the role traditional

38. Angela Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 93.
39. Gamble, "*The Magic Toyshop* (1967)," p. 38
40. Gamble, "Shadow Dance (1966), Several Perceptions (1968) and Love (1971)," p. 22.
41. Sue Roe, "The Disorder of Love: Angela Carter's Surrealist Collage," *Flesh and The Mirror: Essays on The Art of Angela Carter*, edited by Lorna Sage, 60-97. (GB: Virago Press, 2001), 27.
42. Gamble, "*The Magic Toyshop* (1967)," p. 38.
43. Ibid., p. 22.

family units play in reinforcing the culturally-constructed sexual violence against women. Within her patriarchal prison, Melanie succumbs to her domestic female role, charged with the motherly responsibility of her siblings. Nonetheless, she still romanticizes her future conjugal life with Finn as her equal partner.

Finn does not adhere to the tenents of Philip's hinterland and struggles to rescue Melanie from sexual violence. In this male-dominated space, Finn is Carter's ideal new man who saves Melanie from the violence of her maternal Uncle. He refuses to take part in Philip's Leda and The Swan show and warns Melanie about her sexual objectification. He tells Melanie, "You see,' […] he wanted me to fuck you."[44] As the embodiment of the new man, Finn refuses to play a role in the patriarchal mythology that aimed to exploit Melanie physically and erase her subjectivity. Philip's attempt to rape Malanie (by a proxy) fails, and he himself is cuckolded in the wreckage of his burned hinterland. He nonetheless Melanie's evolution and endangers her psychology to the point of hallucination. Right after the performance, Melanie becomes delirious and imagines seeing a bloody severed hand in the drawer of the kitchen, with the character of Bluebeard. This scene is reminiscent of Freud's assertion that "hysteria [is] linked to place."[45] Melanie's fantasy expands to the point where she mistakes her Uncle and Bluebeard for the same figure. "Bluebeard was here, I'm going out of my mind," she says.[46] Her frenzy reveals her fear of being sexually exploited. For Luce Irigary, women's hysteria is a reaction that demonstrates their refusal to be bodily appropriated or exploited.[47] Helen Cixous concurs, defining a hysteric woman as

44. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 80.
45. Sigmund Freud and Carl G. Jung, *Correspndance* 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), p. 87.
46. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p, 60.
47. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 20.

> the one who resists the system… Yes, the hysteric with her way of questioning others (because if she succeeds in bringing down the men who surround her, it is by questioning them, by ceaselessly reflecting to them the image that truly castrates them, to the extent that the power they have wished to impose is illegitimate power of rape and violence), the hysteric is, to my eyes, the typical woman in all her force.[48]

So, Melanie revolts against the patriarchal attempt to expropriate her body and take over her free sexuality. Her hysteria is born out of her strong female identity, as a way to preserve her psychological balance. She has endured excessive patriarchal control and sexual assault to become an hysteric. Ironically, Carter endorses Bluebeard's fairy tale as an intertext within the novel to contest the position of patriarchy. Philip's sexual threat is compared to Bluebeard's, connoting the imaginary nature of both. Like Bluebeard's castle which evidences the sexual abuse and then the death of the Marquis's wives, Uncle Philip's space witnesses Melanie's psychological torment and bodily torture.

The Birth of The New Man and The New Woman

In a gender revolution, Melanie and Finn's resistance to patriarchy is transformed into explicit insurrection, following Finn's destruction of Uncle Philip's swan. Finn

> buries the pieces of the swan in a derelict park that had been established in 1852 to house and celebrate the achievements of Victorian capitalism.

48. Helene Cixous, *The newly born woman*, translated by Catherine Clément (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 18.

> A fallen statue of Queen Victoria herself, snapped in two, lies in the park. The park and the fallen statue symbolize the old order of values that still sustains Uncle Philip's patriarchy.[49]

Sarcastically described in Carter's novel, the burial of the swan beside the "fallen statue of Queen Victoria" this park presages the collapse of Uncle Philip's hinterland. Finn, the embodiment of the new man, undermines his brother-in-law's wishes during his absence. Every family member sets himself/herself free and enjoys Christmas, in a carnivalesque atmosphere, celebrating the patriarch's nonattendance. Melanie and Aunt Margaret are emancipated. Melanie puts on trousers, forbidden in her Uncle's presence, and gives her nice green dress to her dumb aunt. "Melanie helped her aunt like a lady's maid, setting the dress fairly on the shoulders […] and she pulled out all the pins […] and let the hair fall down like a shower of sparks. […] Aunt Margaret was lovely, young and lovely."[50] Finn expresses his happiness and love for the revolution taking place behind the walls of Uncle Philip's prison. Overturned, the patriarchal space is transformed into a female space where the "other" new man is also recognized. As family members enjoy the fall of patriarchy, they give free rein to their instincts, and Aunt Margaret commits incest with her brother Francie.

Carter emphasizes the parodic aspect of patriarchy by portraying Uncle Philip as a cuckold who burns his own house after witnessing his wife's sexual revolution. The flaming house repesents the downfall of his ideologies and the deconstruction of patriarchy.

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49. Day, *Angela Carter: The Rational Glass*, pp. 29-30.
50. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 100.

> Trap them like rats and burn them out!' he shouted within insane glee. […] They were all to burn and gleefully he would watch them. […] Uncle Philip might have been roasting a herd of pigs. […] The house burnt like a chrysanthemum, all golden. […] All burning, everything burning, toys and puppets and masks and chairs and carpets. [51]

From furniture to inhabitants, everything is burnt in Uncle Philip's house, including himself. Only the new man, Finn and the new woman, Melanie are saved from the flaming space. "Nothing is left but us," concludes Melanie. Here, Carter revisits the myth of the fall as "[a]t night, in the garden, they [face] each other in a wild surmise,"[52] bringing to mind, Adam and Eve's expulsion from paradise to earth, Theirs, however, is a fortunate fall,[53] since Melanie and Finn are excluded from the flaming patriarchal space, to be reborn in a better world where gender equality and female identity are acknowledged.

Carter clearly deploys the myths of Leda and the Swan and The Fall in *The Magic Toyshop* to invalidate them. Melanie's banishment from her parents' idyllic home marks the loss of her female space and begins her suffering. Melanie's fortunate second fall takes her, with Finn, to a better space where she is able to regain her identity

51. Carter, *The Magic Toyshop*, p. 190.
52. Ibid., p. 208.
53. Carter's study of the biblical myth of Adam and Eve is twofold. The teenager Melanie, standing in the garden of her parents has the sensation that she is "the only woman [in] the world, which was only this garden, was empty as the sky, endless as eternity." See page 17 in *The Magic Toyshop*. The fall of Adam and Eve from Eden to earth is paralleled by the unfortunate fall of Melanie "from her home, the paradise of childhood, to London" (148), where she has to face her destiny under Uncle Philip's control. By the end of the novel, Carter reuses this myth to depict Melanie's second fortunate fall. In this case, Melanie is excluded from Uncle Philip's house and recuperates status as a new woman status and her female space.

as a new woman. This postmodern novel ends with Melanie and Finn watching the fire burn in Uncle Philip's house. As the new woman and the new man stand on the threshold of a new era, they contemplate their gender equality.

Conclusion

In *The Magic Toyshop*, Carter's treatment of space, which is always related to critical change at ideological, cultural, gendered, social and economic levels, is of paramount importance. A garden setting,Melanie's idyllic home confirms what are natural sexual and gendered human relations. In her parents' home, Melanie experiences spontaneous physical growth and psychological development. There she has agency, her own room, and her own space until her parents die. Moving to her Uncle Philip's oppressive home in the West of London, she loses her subjectivity, her free will, and her freedom. Living with a patriarchal maniac, she finds herself in danger of becoming like her unhappy relatives, one of her Uncle's passive puppets. Only the destruction of Philip and his house returns her female subjectivity and with it the opportunity to pursue her life with Finn. A feminist, postmodern critique of patriarchy, *The Magic Toyshop* promotes the new woman of the 1960s. Angela Carter powerfully appeals to women's need to enjoy their own personal, corporal, and psychological spaces (totally differentiated from the ones that patriarcy has fashioned for them). Promoting female subjectivity, *The Magic Toyshop* continues to encourage new women today to assert themselves in what is an increasingly postmodern world.

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Leaf Fall #3

Sue Matheson

Aesthetics in *Vothun* Ritual Theatre Among The Ogu in Badagry, Nigeria

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Abstract

Ritual practice or performance has been described by scholars as a phenomenon that has to do with some arranged set of activities undertaken by an individual or a group for the purpose of assessing and acquiring a stipulated desire through both spiritual and physical means. This paper examines the *Vothun* ritual performance of the *Ogu* ethnic group in Badagry, Nigeria—a form of theatre whose aesthetics are designed to

strengthen the bonds between families, members of the clan, and their religious belief system.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Ogu, Ritual, Theatre, *Vothun*, Worship

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Introduction

Ritual practice or performance is a global phenomenon. It cuts across diverse cultures in Africa, Asia, North America, and Europe. Omosule (2019) reports correspondences between ritual performances in Africa and the Greek world find expression in Dionysian festivals of cleansing and fertility (p. 327). Ritual practice that has to do with some arranged set of activities is undertaken by an individual or a group for the purpose of assessing and acquiring a stipulated desire through spiritual means. This paper takes its cue from Etim's (2019) critical assertion that ritual exercises and actions "have always generated serious metaphysical, epistemological and logical issues given its esoteric nature, its association with symbolism and its integration with belief, be it in civilized, non-civilized, developed or under-developed cultures"(p. 1). The questions that arise from this assertion are what is the real and natural essence of ritual performance? What are the efficacies of ritual? And what are the aesthetics in ritual performances? These questions are subjected to critical investigation in this paper as ways of expounding the performance aesthetics of ritual in traditional African Theatre, using *Vothun Hunwe* ritual theatre of the Ogu in Badagry, Lagos State, Nigeria as a micro-study.

The root word of the term, ritual is taken from the ancient Latin word 'ritus' which means 'customs' or 'rites.' The word, however, has expanded conceptually, into fields in the Humanities and Social Sciences, like Cultural Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Sociology, Philosophy, and Performance/Theatre Studies. Fromm (1952) in Etim (2019), for example, observes that ritual is a "series of actions that are always carried out in the same way especially as part of religious ceremony" (p. 2). This definition of the term shows that ritual practice may have connections with religious worship. Omosule (2009) traces the roots of rituals to the primeval era. According to him, "human endeavours have their roots in the primeval era. It is from such primordial examples that the archetypes are drawn" (p. 2). The Oxford Advanced Dictionary (2010) describes ritual consisting of "actions that are always done at fixed times and in the same way especially as part of religious or other of ceremonies" (p. 453). This definition extends beyond the connection of ritual with religion to any other form of ceremonies that involve people or an individual engaging in certain regular patterned symbolic action. However, the conceptualisation of the term that is relevant to this paper is given by Rangers (1972) and cited by Etim (2019) that ritual "is a dramatisation of ideals, values and expectations; a bridge between ideas and practical daily life" (p. 2). The applicability of Ranger's assertion to this paper is in its depicting ritual as dramatic actions that are performed for spiritual supplication and for continuity of living on earth.

In order to respond to the questions raised earlier, this paper takes recourse in the argument that ritual performances in Africa have existential realities and the consequence of benefits among the people, unlike the western belief system that places ritual essence on rationality. Omosule (2012) considers performance as

imbued with the power of regulating societies. According to him, "performance and the attempt towards regulating the conducts of the people in authorities in indigenous societies may take the form of renditions of flowery presentations at the arena" (p. 13). Ritual performances in African societies, according to Shujaa (2005), are "sets of forms or prescribed procedures for carrying out religious actions or ceremonies" (p. 575) that are expected to sustain the people's collective continuity and unity within the same conceptual belief system. The performances are viewed as procedural efforts, engaged by the people to connectthemselves to what is thought a luminous height through the ancestors. Omosule (2009/2010) considers ritual to be a "verbal art": that is "verbal art, as a performance, provides a link between the past and the present. Equally, it represents a significant reference to the future" (p. 105). It is seen as an effective mode of religious expression with the ultimate goal of maintaining harmonious relationships between the physical world and the divine realm for the purpose of fostering prosperous and peaceful living. The essence of ritual is captured by Handelmann (2004) as being a means of enhancing harmony between the people performing it and nature.

> [R]ituals were designed, one could say, in a great variety of social orders to deliberately change members of society, the relationships of society to cosmos, and so forth. The logic of ritual then becomes a crucial issue in understanding how ritual can make change within itself through its own operations. (p. 1)

It is generally believed that ritual practice is a germane aspect and spectrum of human existence. Because of this, different forms of ritual have been postulated by

scholars. Bocock (1974) identifies four major types: religious ritual, aesthetic ritual, life cycle/life crises ritual, and political ritual. To him, these forms have distinctive roles to play in society and other areas of human life. Ranger (1972) also argues for four other types: symbolic-constituent ritual, value-constituent ritual, Telic-constituent ritual, and role-constituent ritual. Symbolic constituent ritual sees ritual as a symbol of totality that aids adequate understanding in human society. The value-constituent ritual posits ritual as a medium to project expressive and authoritative messages/ feedback that are of crucial importance to society. Telic-constituent ritual consists of ritual that is performed for the purpose of achieving an end which is expected to have direct effects on the people for the prosperity for all and peace for future generations. Omosule (2009) considers all rituals to be geared to reconciling humankind with nature, arising from 'the daily profanity and beastly display of counterproductive selfish desires exhibited by people individually and collectively' (p.88); these, he says, 'are brought to a halt during the periodic performances'(p. 88). The aptness of this claim is apparent in the resolution of agrarian and physical problems through the deployment of rituals.

Role-structured ritual is a type of ritual that involves the generality of people living within a geographical space. Ogundeji (2003) gives four categories of these ritual performances in African settings: sacred ritual performances, ritual festival performances, deritualising performances, and deritualised performances. Citing the Yoruba experience, Ogundeji's analysis shows that in the sacred ritual performance, emphasis is laid more on the religious and cultic aspects of the performances, which only members and initiates are allowed to be part of, while non-initiates are excluded from the process, except when he or she is ready to go through stipulated process of

initiation. The *Igbagan* ritual ceremony in the Egungun masquerade cult among the Yoruba is an example of sacred ritual performance. The *Igbagan* ritual outing that always takes place the day before the beginning of the Egungun festival. The *Igbagan* ritual process is believed to be a sort of approval for the Egungun festival to begin, which to Ogundeji satisfies all the sacred ritual performances' criteria. Other examples are the *borin gida* ritual performance in the Northern part of Nigeria and the *gelede* masquerade ritual performance of the female powers of creation and destruction in *Egbado* and *Ketou* in Nigeria and Republic of Benin, respectively**.**

The ritual festival performance consists of traditional festival performances that are opened to both initiates and non-initiates, although there is a limitation to the extent to which a non-initiate can participate. For instance, he/she may not be able to touch the costume of the masque in the case of a masquerade performance. Unlike sacred ritual performances, ritual festival performances give equal emphasis to both their religio-cultic and aesthetic functionalities–that is, they have a blend of both religion and entertainment. The performances in this category can appear in two ways: as a stationary setting performance, where the entire events take place in a specifically identified location such as a market square and frontage of the shrine or in a processional or itinerant form in which the festival activities move in procession to an identified groove or shrine. Good examples are the *Osun Osogbo* ritual festival performance in Osun State and the Hausa *borin jama a* in the Northern part of Nigeria. This category also is where we place the *Vothun Hunwe* Ritual performance among the *Ogu* in Badagry.

The de-ritualising festival performance taxonomy slightly departs from the ritual festival performance, because its religio-cultic functionalities are de-emphasised and

relegated to the background. while its entertainment functions are foregrounded. Because the majority of this group hail from the category of sacred ritual festival performance, some aspects of religion may be injected into their ritual activities. This, however, does not undermine the entertainment function of deritualising festival performance. Such performances are always packaged for both general and secluded audiences as the case may be. While the secluded are the initiates, the general audiences are the members of the community. The total package, according to Ogundeji (2003), always 'involves the presentation of different characters, animals and human beings, gods, goddesses, spirits, moral and historical sketches by masked players before a general audience in an open area for the purpose of entertainment' (p. 11). A prime example of the de-ritualising festival performance is the *Eegun Alare* (Masquerade players) among the Yoruba *egungun* cult. The process of actualizing this form of festival performance, according to Olatunji and Koenane (2016), is the product of well-crafted, artistic ingenuity, because it.

> involves a blend of rituals, signs and arts including images, objects, features, musical sounds, movements, verbal and non-verbal expressions, and the complex associations of all of these, semiotically combined as one. Aside from the place and nature of arts and arts performance, this attitude explains three important and notable features and components of the performance (p. 49)

This paper adopts Ogundeji's method of analysing the ritual festival performance as its template, especially when discussing the aesthetic functionality of the Vothun Hunwe ritual Theatre of the *Ogu* in Badagry, Nigeria, because of its attention to the

ethics, values, morals, and religious attitude projected in ritual festival performance.

Aesthetics

Irele and Jeyifo (2010) have submitted that 'the nature and complexion of aesthetics differs from one culture to another, depending on the culture's history, mythology, and (often) religious values and dispositions' (p. 2). However, as a generic term, aesthetic has been described as the analysis, measurement and appreciation of the idea of beauty and taste in fine arts. Its etymology is derived from the Greek words, *aesthetikos* and *aisthanomai*, meaning "sense perception", "sensation", "sentient", and "I perceive respectively." "Aesthetics" is a field in philosophy interrogates our perceptions of beauty, taste, and feelings through the examination of art. In 1735, the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten, wishing to experience fine art as a means of knowing, gave the term the roles played by emotion, taste and feelings. The contemporary discourse of aesthetics also analyzes and appreciates beauty and ugliness in theatre, film, music and other performance arts. Ozumba and Alabi (2002) observe that

> [i]t is better to accept a broad based scope for fine arts to include architecture, film, video, photography, performance art, sound art, furniture, posters, earthwork, computer and electronics art; with the nature of taste, beauty, imagination, creativity, representation, expression and expressiveness. (p. 1)

Aesthetics also involves the practice of art criticism and appreciation, placing value on and judging creative and performing arts from the point of view of its beauty

or ugliness. In measuring the beauty and value of an art, Ukuma (2019) argues that there are four levels involved in the perception of art: the level of appreciation, the level of the object, the level of enjoyment of the appreciated object and the level of satisfying the purpose of the appreciated object. These demonstrate that a work of art, to be appreciated, must have some value it renders to society.

Re-emphasising Irele and Jeyifo's (2010) assertion, it is also germane to state that the understanding of the idea of beauty and its values is based on the cultural, religious, environmental, and educated understanding of the appreciator. One's aesthetical point of view therefore depends on the environment and the culture that produces the art. African aesthetics constitute an aspect of African philosophy that assesses the beauty and and functionality of all forms of African art, nature, and objects within the paradigms of African culture and tradition. According to Shava (2015),

> [t]he African aesthetic embraces a rich variety of creative forms and styles peculiar to people of African origin that incorporate a combination of practical, physical, material, temporal, and spiritual aspects. It includes African artistic expressions— visual and performative images, verbal arts (poetry, oratory performance), rhythm, music (song and dance), dress, hairstyles, cosmetics, designs (African architecture and decorative patterns), and crafts in and from Africa. It can be decorative and ceremonial as well as serve a functional purpose. (p. 3)

Here, the functionality of African aesthetics manifests itself in the purposefulness and functionality of the work of art to the society from which it emerges. Because the

appreciator must understand the cultural background of the art he/she is appreciating before giving a categorical assessment of the work, Welsh-Asante (1994) finds that 'African aesthetics is a set of culturally consistent elements that are based on historical and artistic content of a specific group or culture' (p. 4).

Two concepts come to the fore in the discourse of African aesthetics: communality and functionality. Communality shows the work originates from an established African society while functionality determines the purpose of the art to its immediate society. Together these concepts serve certain functions, either in terms of communal or spiritual cleansing or annual spiritual renewal and rejuvenation. Chinyowa (2015) explains that an African aesthetic "not only serves to reinforce what the people already know, but also provides the basis for new ideas, values and perception. It helps to mediate the way in which people interpret, understand and relate with their worldview" (p. 534). Among the African arts and performances that project their societies'intrinsic (and extrinsic) values is the annual *Vothun* ritual performance of the Ogu people of Badagry.

Theoretical Application

Interdisciplinary performance ethnographic theory interrogates the social-cultural and political implications of *Vothun* Ritual Performance (VTR). As Oberg (2008) points out, 'performance ethnography invites people into dialogue, the essential ingredient for facilitating socio-cultural change' (p. 3) and brings research alive as it translates theory into practice among ordinary people and everyday experience.

The Ogu of Badagry, Nigeria

In the South-Western part of Nigeria, the Ogu dominate the Badagry Local Government Area of Lagos State and some parts of Ogun State such as Ado-Odo/Ota Local Government and Ipokia Local Government Areas. Simpson (2001), cited in Adeyemi and Kotin (2018), claims that the Ogu's origin can be traced to

> [t]he movement from the Egun (Ogu) speaking areas of Dahomey, in the present day Republic of Benin, following the 16th, 17th and 18th century's war that seemed so endemic in the periods. The events that led to the settlement have been largely associated with the expansion of Dahomey, and in particular that of Ajah Tado. (p. 163)

Mesewaku et.al (2000), however, argue that at the origin of the Ogu and their ancestry in the words of can be linked with countries long the coastal area of West Africa like the Republic of Benin, Ghana, Togo, and the Ivory Coast. Another version of the ancestry of the Ogu from Ajiboye et al (2009) posits 'the Ogu speaking people are descendants of those who migrated from Whlah, Allada and Wheme which are now part of the Republic of Benin but were all geographically and politically one with Egun (Ogu) speaking people found before and after 1900 in Nigeria' (p. 42).

These differing opinions about the origin of Ogu ethnic group in Nigeria demonstrate the evolution of the tribe in Nigeria can be traced to the countries mentioned earlier, especially to the Republic of Benin as many of the people today have ancestral links with that country. Kunuji (2020) concludes that

> Badagry had strong relationships with other Ogu speaking societies in Benin Republic. Families in Badagry still maintained ties with their extended family members in Porto-Novo and other parts of Benin Republic up to the late twentieth century. During my childhood, members of our extended family from Porto-Novo attended our family functions, crossing the international border to strengthen family ties, which was common. Other families from Badagry also have relatives who are nationals of Benin Republic. (p. 17)

Aptly, the occupations of the people living in the coastal areas of West Africa are farming and fishing. Fishing, especially, forms a focal point in the peoples' economic endeavour, as the water way provides an easy access between Badagry in Nigeria and Porto-Novo in the Republic of Benin.

Vothun Religious Practice and Performance Among The Ogu

The word, "*Vothun"* or "*Vodoun"* in the *Ogu* language means supernatural. According to the Ogu's belief system, the supernatural is a phenomenon that cannot be described. Within the people's world view, a human being is mundane, while *Vothun* is an elevated being. The cultural understanding of *Vothun* also implies that human beings control the ordinary. while the *Vothun* are in charge of the extraordinary. According to the Ogu, spiritual essence brings three beings into existence: the Supreme Being, the supernatural being, and the human being. The *Jewheyewhe Aholudaho* is the Supreme

Being that begets the sub-beings, among them, the *Vothun* (supernatural being) and *Gbeto* (humans being). The Vothun and Gbeto occupy the *Agasapohepo,* which in the Ogu language consists of the realm of firmament, aquatic space, and the land space. *Vothun* became religious practice as an attempt by human being to understand the supernatural. According to Houessou-Adin (2009),

> [t]he word *Vodun* means "spirit" and is used to denote both African deities (*Vodun lèbi*: all deities, all divinities or gods) and the worship of the deities (*Vodun sin sèn*: the belief in and worship of Vodun). The meaning of *Vodun* is beyond the various representations or emblems that we may see because *Vodun* is, in fact, the invisible spiritual force that inhabits those representations. (p. 692)

As religious practice, *Vothun* follows a belief system and functions as intermediary between the Supreme Being and human being. Mesewaku et al (2000) have observed that '*Vothun* is a religion which evolved out of human experience of the mystery of the universe, an attempt by human to understand the environment. It has no founder' (p. 45). In part, what constitutes the universal features of religion are its mode of worship, times of worship, and place of worship. The *Vothun* religion has its liturgical progression from individual responsibility to a collective engagement. This liturgical practice follows a worship pattern which is ritualistic in nature.

In *Vothun* religious practice, the ritual is the constant re-engagement of certain doings such as prayers, evocation and supplication at every seven days in the *Vothun*

en sin (place of worship). In *Vothun* religion, the practice of worship is *Awonlonji* while the day of worship is *Awonlonzangbe*. Motive offerings and supplication are major principles of worship performance. Among the elements of worship are *Ovi* (kola nut, *Ahan* (gin), *Amin* (palm oil), *Esin* (water), and *Atakun* (alligator pepper). Its practice has a mode of operation that is rooted in the Ogu's cultural belief system in life, death in terms of the physical and the spiritual, and the environment. The aggregate of these belief systems are constantly conducted, protected, and promoted for the communal well-being of the people, causin the society of the *Ogu* to be highly revered through religious practice as it is manifested in the character and general attitudinal behavior of the people.

The Aesthetics of *Vothun* Ritual Theatre (VRT)

Vothun Ritual Theatre is an enactment of the relationships taking place between seen and the unseen forces, occasioned by motive, emotions, and psychological submission to the institutional procedures of existence. The ritual performance features a sacred procession of anthropomorphic representations. Culturally, Vothun ritual theatre involves every Ogu progeny, because it is through ritual engagement that every soul is regenerated. The ritual theatre draws its cultural spectacles from three elements: firmament, aquatic space, and land space. These rituals form the aesthetics of the Vothun theatrical performance. Each of these rituals' aesthetics has its own motives and level of engagements that can be housed in the following four categories:

1. The *Vothun* Ritual Worship Aesthetic: This is a worship practice popularly known as the *Awonlonji* (worship). It is performed every seventh day and involves the gathering of all clan members attached to

a *Vothun* shrine. Each family unit shares responsibilities and contributes materially and morally towards the successes of its engagement. The process of worship is an assemblage of human and material elements such as kolanut, palm oil, water, and alligator pepper, all brought together for the purpose of supplication to the spirit world through the evocation of songs and chants referred to as *Abobo* by the worshippers. During this period, the griots and elders reminisce with the past by narrating important events to the younger ones, as a way of boosting their sense of belonging and sharpening their minds for a firm belief in the culture and traditions of the Ogu. The purposes of the ritual worship are designed to bring the people closer to their ancestral spirits and to strengthen their religious beliefs as they become more responsible and functional members of the society. The aesthetic qualities of these ritual performances lie in the strengthening the bond of relationship between the families and members of the clan. It is believed that the supplications of the people will evoke the ancestors to render spiritual assistance to them on any aspect of life.

2. The *Vothun* Festival/Celebration Aesthetic: This aspect is referred to as *Hunwhe*. It is the most spectacular event in the Ogu people's cultural life. *Hunwhe* ritual theatre engagement unites everyone into a cultural sublimity as it reverberates in cognitive progression in the minds of both ordinary and serious members. Traditionally, members of *Vothun* religion recognise the impact of *hunwe* on their social wellbeing, as they always believe that the celebration rejuvenates, energises and sustains

them to move on with their physical and spiritual activities till another festival season. Hence, every member endeavours to participate in the festival activities. During this period, the worshippers carry different *Vothun* effigies in procession accompanied by music and dance to the rhythm produced by *ahilihun* drum.

The colourful procession is followed by a divination process, occasioned by invocation and emotive offerings, where adherents perform sacred chanting in an unusual mannerism. During the festival, myriad of contingents from sister shrines register their attendance at the grandeur. At the climax of the festival, the appearance of the apex deity is assuaged by the people. The carrier leads other with their maverick dance movements, accompanied by *Ahilihun* drum, a special drum carved for the purpose of the festival to thrill and excite the worshippers. The dance movement is very important because it serves as a means of communication between the human world and the world of the ancestors. They (the dancers) finally return to their sacred sanctuary leaving an unforgettable feeling in the mind of the cheering spectators.

During *Vothun* festival, the whole action is set at *Vothun honto* (the front of *Vothun* shrine). It is the outer part of the shrine where activities take place for villagers/audience to view and participate in the festival. The inner part of the shrine chamber, otherwise known as the *Hunpame* (groove), is where the effigies are prepared for open engagement between adherent, believers, and audience participants. The front of the shrine is shaped with *Avla* and *Loko (*trees) that give natural shade like an

umbrella to cover the audience at all times for open space performance. The overriding aesthetics of the celebrations before, during, and after the festival promote peace and progress.

Figure 1: Vothun effigies in procession during Vothun Festival Theatre in Badagry, Nigeria. (Source: The Researchers, 2024)

3. The Vothun Initiation Aesthetics: *Vothun* initiation ritual engagement allows a person of *Ogu* origin to transit from being an ordinary person to a more responsible and functional member of the society. Traditionally, *Vothun* initiation ritual is a religious regeneration. It is a process by which an individual is taken and remoulded into a new life. It is imperative, that, after the initiation ritual, such individual is bound to the norms, tenets, positive behaviour and other areas both material and non-material of the culture of the people. In *Vothun* initiation ritual goes through its liturgical pattern. The whole initiation process is called

Hunde-asi which follows a traditional family structure known as *Hennu* (family clan). The *Hunde-asi (Vothun* initiation process) begins with meeting of elder-initiates from respective households. The meeting is held at *Vothun ensin* (a sanctuary where worship and traditional matters are always moderated and disseminated for general consumption). The decision of this meeting is taken seriously and cannot be compromised by anyone. Traditionally, *Hunde-asi* always happens at the close of *Vothun Hunwhe* (*Vothun* festival) except on special cases which is precipitated by *Ofa* divination Oracle. The would-be initiates are those that have been chosen by *Vothun* through nomination by family Units. The able-bodied men search and comb every household to get those who have been chosen by the oracle or nominated by the family to be initiated. They are entrapped in traditional enchantment. Symbolically, they are dressed in traditionally prepared pristine clothes. It is a rite of passage that is celebrated by every member of the clan.

The aesthetics of *Vothun* initiation is that, during this period of *Hunde-asi*, the entire community is always charged. They sing special songs, classical songs, heroic songs, and drum to resonate emotions of total submission to seen and unseen forces. The sacred game follows a pattern with a target for each day; it could last for days but must not exceed nine days. At the end of the sacred game, they assemble. The prospective initiates will be accompanied to *Hunpame* (Traditional training ground). The elders are in charge: *Vothuno, Menhento, Hunno, Edeno, Ehega, and others* in their hierarchical order administer the initiation process.

The *Ehega* is the person who supervises the training of the initiates. The process starts with a re-christening; new names are given to the initiates, names such as, Hunga, *Hunjenukon, Hunpe, Hunwi, Hunge,* and *Hungbo Vonsewhe* in order of their ritual arrests. According to the tradition, the first initiates must be called or named *Hunga/Hunjenukon* while the last initiate is called *Agbodohonji.* These names are situational and have cultural relevance to their lives and to the society. Also, each initiate is given *Yansi-whe* (traditional incision; a sign of brotherhood).

The aesthetics in the initiation exercise determine that during the training, the initiates are taught traditional music and dances, and various occupational skills; bead making, painting, weaving, and arts and crafts respectively. They are also taught how to understand Ogu cultural values, cannons, tenets, and several stories about their forebears. The *Hunno* teaches them their history and heritage. It is a traditional school/ college (Vothun Seminary), where the initiates are taught different traditional arts and skill acquisitions such as mats weaving, brooms and basket making. They are kept in *Hunpameh* through-out the period that is expected to span not more than a year. Over two-hundred initiates are admitted into *Hunpame,* and sometimes, the admission could just be just for one person, depending on the *Ofa* direction.

4. The Graduation Aesthetics: The graduation ceremony is called *Hundeton/Hunton.* During *Hundeton,* the graduands are decorated with *Oyon/Hunje* (beads) and black linen cloths for their first 5-day visit to various shrines within their jurisdiction. At the end, a special day is fixed

as the grand finale. On this day, audiences are attracted from all nooks and crannies. They are all clad in white linen clothes. The whole

Figure 2: An initiate of *Vothun* during an initiation ceremony in Badagry, Nigeria. (Source: The Researchers, 2024)

performance is characterised by music and dance. Special dance movements are performed. The movements are choreographed with music, dance, chant, invocation, while costumes and make up are the most conspicuous features of the graduation. The graduands dance in

unison and each of them prove their dance dexterity by entertaining folks. At the climax of the performance, they fulfill their final rite of passage as they dance vehemently into the groove where they will be finally cleansed. And after the cleansing, they reunite with their families before they are released to the society.

Figure 3: One of the researchers with a carrier of *Vothun* effigy during a graduation ceremony in Badagry, Nigeria. (Source: The Researchers, 2024).

It is important to note that graduation ritual celebration is not the same thing as *Vothun Hunwhe* (Vothun festival), though they share symbiotic relationship but the engagements are segmented. While *Vothun Hunwhe* is a holistic, periodic celebration of existence that is associated with belief in life, death, cosmic elements and the environment, the *Hundeton* celebration is primarily designed for as an graduation of initiates who

have passed through the *Vothun* college popularly known as the *Vothun* Seminary (in time and space, there is a continuous recruitment of members into the *Vothun* religion). This performance takes place in tandem with what Omosule (2013) considers to be the Ogu's desire to elevate "the individual to lofty attainments as inspirations are rife during every spectacle and the desire to forge ahead" (7).

Once the curtain is drawn on the festival, *Hunde-asi* heralds the initiation of the new believers. The search begins. It begins at dusk when the principal deities wrap up the festivity with their special dance movements. They all sing in spirit, echoing ventriloquial voices in unison. The women voices are most distinctive, chanting *abobo* (chant) as they bid the deities a cheering farewell. Supplications rent the air as divine blessings are bestowed on believers in the midst of the pageantries. The atmosphere is enlivened by conviviality. The smaller deities exit the performance space to their conclave in their coordinated procession before the principal deity fades into the conclave. According to traditional laws, the *Vothun Hunwhe* can only last for specific days depending on the spiritual strength and life span of *Vothuno,* the traditional head of *Vothun* religion who superintends all its affairs. The death of *Vothuno* marks the end of a reign in the *Vothun* tradition while the emergence of a new *Vothuno* signals the beginning of another.

Conclusion

Vothun ritual worship, festival/celebration, initiation, and graduation all show that African ritual performances are theatre in their own right. Its aesthetics ignite collective religious consciousness, encouraging social cohesion. It is important to emphasize that *Vothun* ritual performance is one of several ritual performances in Africa that are still not recognized as professional theatre. Rather than being viewed as viewing as a quasi-theatrical phenomenon, *Vothun* ritual performance should be seen as an example of African total theatre with its full theatrical elements and performance aesthetics. This paper recommends that further research into this ritual performance is undertaken, particularly investigations into scenic design, costume/ make-up, performance dynamics, and its psychological impact.

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Sue Matheson

IN THE HOUSE OF DUST

‘The Palace of Dreams stands at
the centre of the kingdom of darkness.’
– back cover, Ismail Kadare, The Palace of Dreams

Always turning corners, we often meet
ourselves coming the other way, trying
to escape subconscious desire, find
a way out of dreams we have created
that have turned into visions of hell.

Every moment is a disruption of time,
a journey away from self-inflicted tyranny,
the organized sounds of timetable bells.
As fragile empires fall we each become
the same, lost in gardens of memory

where life was easier to manage and we
were not complicit in each other’s crimes.
Enjoying sunny pool days, long beach days,
classy entertainment and good service,
we did not consider the world to come.

Imagined futures never arrived, time tied
itself in complex knots, abandoned homes
and locked rooms stood where once there
had been none. Hell is having to apologise
for calling off the search, living with myself.

I exaggerate to make a point but these events
disturb everyone's lives and we need to argue
about whose fault they really are. Salvation
is a metaphor for renewal and redemption
so I travel around the world dancing badly

and making music when I can. The boundaries
between ancient and modern understanding are
as blurred as any synthesis of space and time
when architecture or desire's involved. If we
cannot be saved then surely we can dream?

—Rupert M. Loydell

Eaten Out of House and Home: Robert Marasco's *Burnt Offerings*, Gothic Literature, and the Hungry House Trope

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At its best, horror fiction transcends the trifles of its generic constraints. Horror lends itself to a deeper understanding of the psychological fears and motivations that often govern society: fear of the other, fear of the self, fear of those things which cannot be understood or comprehended. Among the most popular and enduring archetypal sub-genres in horror fiction is that of the haunted house story. Although the Victorian era contributed much to the early structure and tone of haunted house stories, the haunted house stories of the 20th century are just as captivating. In particula, there is one

version of the haunted house story that deserves critical attention: the *hungry house*.

The *hungry house* trope is often symbolic of the economic fears and personal frailties of the (often) middle-class characters in contemporary mythology. It provides a dramatic impediment to the characters' success and status by acting as a predator that feeds on their lives, livelihoods, and sanity, thus stripping them of their agency in the economic world. In this way, the *hungry house* is not unlike the classic monsters of horror literature, subsisting on the characters' essence and will. Works by authors like Robert Bloch and Stephen King have left their indelible mark on this sub-genre and elevated the work to new psychological heights. Robert Marasco's *Burnt Offerings* is also a core text that embodies the trope of the *hungry house* despite the dearth of critical attention it has received.

Burnt Offerings is a textbook example of a *hungry house*. In his introduction to *Burnt Offerings*, Stephen Graham Jones classifies the haunted house story into two categories: (1) a "Stay Away" house where the characters are "punish[ed] for [their] trespass" and (2), a "Hungry House" that "has to seduce [visitors] into its long embrace" (Marasco, 2015, p. 4). "Whereas Stay Away houses just want to be left alone," Jones says, "Hungry Houses aren't complete without people to digest for seasons or decades or centuries…A Hungry House knows the injuries you've been nursing in secret, and it uses them against you" (p. 4).

While the *hungry house* trope is worthy of scholarly study on its own, much can be gained by juxtaposing it against the literary tradition of vampirism to better understand the psychological impetus for why such stories remain a rich source of horror in fiction. Remarkably, the *hungry house*, the literary tradition of vampirism, socio-economic tensions, and psychological motivations converge specifically in

Robert Marasco's text. They also persist in Stephen King's *The Shining*, Robert Bloch's short story "The Hungry House," and even have echoes in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

What Makes a Story Gothic?

Gothic literature is a genre that presents "a pushing toward extremes and excess… of cruelty, rapacity and fear" (Lloyd-Smith, 2004, p. 5 as cited in Helmsing, 2014). Further, Novak (1979) explains that the grotesque appearance of Gothic structures in literature, from dilapidated buildings to worn-down cities, often includes "the combination of conventionalized organizational structures, ideas and characters in fiction dealing with the supernatural and bizarre" (p. 50). Indeed, Helmsing (2014) posits that there is a paradox between what is outside and what lies within, and Gothic literature provides readers with a means to express the dangers that exist under seemingly harmless guises. Gothic literature, argues Reeve (2012), is best analyzed through modernist lenses because "the same years that gave birth to the Gothic" (p. 235) also engendered modernist critical theory and is as much a political statement as it is a literary one.

The *Shine* of a *Hungry House*

The notion of the *hungry house* is certainly not unique to *Burnt Offerings*. King's *The Shining*, for example, makes references to historical events causing a building to be haunted, to the point where it must consume souls to persevere. Mackenthun (1998) argues that the "latent aggression stored within the typical American family – an aggression that the bad place brings to the surface" (p. 94) may act as a sort of sustenance for the Overlook Hotel. Indeed, this plays off the Freudian concept

of memory, causing a house to amplify memories in order to elicit fear. Bridging memory to the uncanny, if repression of negative events can "bring back to light forgotten or subjugated knowledges" (Makenthun, 1998, p. 97) through the psyche, perhaps "forgotten past[s] resurface in neurotic symptoms" (Freud, 2005, loc. 208).

For example, in the bar scene when Jack Torrence witnesses the spirits of the Overlook manifesting at a social and he sees one of the former tenants, Horace Derwent, force a colleague to humiliate himself by groveling on the floor like a dog (King, 1977). Classen (2017) argues that in this scene,

> [t]he public degradation of a friend may seem like a trivial pastime for a supernatural force of evil, but the scene does suggest that evil is at base human, that it is a product of human behavior, more specifically the behavior fostered by the ethos of organized crime, an ethos built around pure dominance and power hierarchies. Jack can get power and respect by collaborating with the hotel's forces, but those forces are antithetical to family sentiment, to compassion[,] and mutual love. (p. 84)

King uses his characters' inner demons, especially those of the tragic figure of Jack Torrance, as symbols of personal failure. Torrance is struggling to support his family, his career is in shambles, and he is looking forward to some time away to devote to his writing (King, 1977). Torrance is typical of middle-class America: reasonably educated, with a loving wife and child, doing his best to succeed according to the American Dream. Torrance's biggest flaw is his alcoholism, which becomes the chief source of the Overlook's power over him. The Overlook preys on Torrance's frailty and then turns it on his family. The horror of the *hungry house* that is represented

in the Overlook is not unlike the forces that prey on the Rolfe family in Marasco's novel. In fact, King claims that Marasco's text was a heavy influence on his own novel (Ragsdale, 2020).

If the spirit of a *hungry house* can manifest in the walls, the impact of inebriation may further that connection. Indeed, the spirits consuming Jack Torrence exist metaphysically and in liquid form, the latter causing Jack to succumb further to the former. The contents of a *hungry house* cause a similar type of inebriation, an intoxication by means of opulence and status.

The Psychology of Horror

Carroll (1981) explains that there is a correlation between nightmares and monsters. Indeed, the concept of a monster or horror story that originates in the dreams of the creator makes sense; however, there are additional hallmarks of horror literature to consider. Setting is perhaps one of the most telling hallmarks of the genre. But what if the setting were to go beyond where the story takes place, embodying the monster to be feared not within the walls of a dwelling, but *as* the dwelling, itself?

Of all literary genres, Richter (1983) explains that Gothic literature is the one whose origins remain easiest to trace. Authors use a variety of images to convey tone and setting and, in the case of horror literature, things that are unkempt are often reflective of evil (Carroll, 1981). Richter (1983) argues that the specific elements of plot, characterization, and setting are what set Gothic literature apart from other horror stories. For example, the more insane Jack Torrence becomes, his *appearance* reflectshis mental disorder. Is it therefore such a far stretch to posit that the more dilapidated a setting, the more dangerous the abode?

Robert Bloch and the Impact of Mirrors

The notion of the *hungry house* was explored by Robert Bloch in his aptly named short story, "The Hungry House." Published in *Classic Science Fiction: The Best of Robert Bloch*, "The Hungry House" follows a couple leasing a new home, only to find that it contains no mirrors (Bloch, 1977). After exploring the home, the couple finds that the mirrors were locked away. The couple initially uses compacts and windows as mirrors, only to find glimpses in the background that make them uneasy (Bloch, 1977). This continues as mirrors are rehung in the home.

During their housewarming party, the guests begin to see bearded men and witchy women in their reflections in the mirrors that have been installed (Bloch, 1977). Gwen Hacker, the realtor's wife, sees an image of a tenant who died in the home as she looked at her own reflection in the mirror. The Hackers then recount the story of Laura, a woman who would constantly look at herself in the mirror, but who appeared to not age (p. 70). When Laura was taken from the house and away from her mirrors, she danced into the window and was killed (p. 72). After the husband accidentally murders his wife while chasing the vision he saw in the reflection, he dies in a method similar to that of Laura (p. 76). After he dies, a reflection of an old woman, a child, a bearded man, and the recently deceased husband and wife all emerge in the pool of blood. Bloch ends the story by mentioning "it" admiring itself in the reflection of the pool of blood (p. 77).

Again, the *hungry house* trope is displayed. The husband and wife at the center of the story are seeking a house to settle down in and presumably begin their lives together. Seeking the American Dream through hard work and determination, they are able to support themselves and begin their economic futures. However, as the story

unfolds, the house seems to have different plans. The mirrors throughout the story act not only as a literal window into the face of evil, but also reflect the evil lying in the fringes of the characters' psyches. The financial success and social status represented by their new home proves to be a ruse as the figures in the backgrounds and margins of the mirrors represent the cost of existing in a capitalist system. In accordance with the spirit of free market competition, the couple's success means that others before them have had to fail.

It's All About the Setting

Burnt Offerings begins when the Rolfe family decides to spend summer vacation renting a dilapidated mansion in the country, leaving behind their city apartment for several weeks. While Ben, the patriarch of the Rolfe family, is not impressed by the property, his wife, Marian, is instantly enamored with the house. Marian Rolfe is a wife and homemaker, who has grown disgruntled with her family's life in their neighborhood in Queens, New York City. Her husband, Ben, a high school English teacher, seems to be particularly disaffected by city life—expressing issues with everything from parking to the congested population of the city (Marasco, 1973, p. 9). The mansion they move to, the Allardyce house, is enormous and impressive, with grounds that span several acres and features a gorgeous pool (Marasco, 1973). The lavish interior of the house seems to entrance Marian. Ben is more skeptical, especially about the price of the property. After some light negotiations, the Allardyces and the Rolfes settle on a price. However, the house comes with a catch: the family must look after the Allardyce's mother for the summer by setting out three meals per day. The siblings insist that Mrs. Allardyce will be no trouble at all, that the Rolfes will not even notice that the matriarch is there and will, in fact, remain in her room for the

entirety of their stay. The Rolfes, particularly Marian, agree to these terms and are looking forward to their summer away from the city.

The family begins to settle into a bit of a routine with the house before some strange events begin to happen (Marasco, 1973). The first incident, which happens during the Rolfes' tour of the property, seems to be rather innocuous. David, while exploring outside, falls and scrapes his knee. The Rolfes and the Allardyces stop the tour to tend to him. At the same time, Walker notices a seemingly dead plant he was asked to dispose of suddenly has new growth. The significance of this coincidence is never explicitly acknowledged but leads to some ominous implications about the predatory nature of the house.

Marian feels immediately drawn to the house as soon as she sees it: "the closer she looked…the lovelier and more irresistible the house became" (Marasco, 1973, p. 28). As the deal is closed, Marian struggles to articulate her feelings about the place aside from feeling that "the house was everything she had always wanted" (p.73). This is ironic because, aside from how lavish its appearance is from the outside, the inside looks and feels like an old estate in disrepair—like "Hollywood 'grand.' But gone, or going, to seed" (pg. 31). The furniture is a collection of different eras and styles that don't really fit together; "the rug so worn, and the walls peeling, and the drapes so heavy with dust" (p.31); there are clocks scattered throughout the house, none of which works properly; the greenhouse is filled with dead and rotting plants; the pool is filthy from a broken filter and the foundation is cracked, representative of the past lives consumed by the house.

Marian becomes instantly protective (and arguably possessive) of the house. When the family is exploring the house for the first time, before the deal has even

been discussed, Walker, the groundskeeper, greets them and, noticing a landscape painting that is crooked, goes to fix it. As he walks away, it falls and crashes. Marian cries out, admonishing Walker, before retreating and apologizing. Walker responds with a smile (Marasco, 1973).

Ownership

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison,* Michel Foucault (1977) explores Napoleon's quest to govern the world when he writes, "this memory lives within me, as an obsession never to be abandoned…that other world is the most important of all that I flatter myself I have discovered and when I think of it, my heart aches" (Foucault, 1977, p. 141). This feeling is reflected in Marian's sense of power and dominion over the contents of the house, something she was unable to conceive of in her apartment in the city, an apartment full of boxes, lacking in order or opulence (Marasco, 1973). Foucault's (1977) Napoleonic reflection can further be seen in "the idea of a house that would in a sense provide a universal pedagogy of work for those who had proven to be resistant to it" (p. 121). Ascribing to this notion, Marian views the house as essential to her happiness, a part of herself that had been missing in her humdrum city life (Marasco, 1973, p. 56).

Critical Approaches to Reading Gothic Literature

Traditionally, there have been three critical approaches to reading Gothic literature: structuralist, Marxist, and Freudian (Richter, 1983). However, while Freud's work may be more applicable to a vampire story, Lacan's theories may prove more useful when analyzing the trope of a *hungry house*.

The socioeconomic and cultural contexts under which Gothic literature was

written lend themselves to interpretations that investigation not only what was written, but *why it was written*. Richter (1983), for example, states that "Gothic [literature is] … a historically isolated phenomenon" (p. 281), making an analysis of such literature inseparable from the events surrounding its genesis. This differs greatly from the critical theory of the New Critics, who "regarded [any given work of literature] as independent of the intentions of the author…or this historical context of the work" (Felluga, 2015, p. 195).

Structuralism

Structuralism, which "refers to a variety of critical theories that have a common desire to understand the interrelation of elements as part of a larger system" (Felluga, 2015, p. 294), is one place to start analyzing Gothic literature, especially under the microscope of the *hungry house* trope. Looking at the literature in a close read, the strategy which was engendered by structuralism, certainly does lend itself nicely to understanding the trope. As with any analysis paper, a close read of *Burnt Offerings* is therefore a prudent approach. However, while what is present in the literature is certainly important, so too is what is *not* present.

Richter (1983) explains that Gothic literature can have both preconstructional and constructional modes, yet warns that "one result of th[e] constructional frame of reference would be that a number of works that are often linked with the Gothic through their use of traditional materials or conventions would have to be located in another class" (p. 283). A Marxist reading of Gothic literature, for example, may project "the conflict and terror of inter-class relations" (p. 284). Such conflict certainly lends itself to a *hungry house*, especially when juxtaposed with the social contexts under which a piece of Gothic literature was developed.

Did We Mention the Blood?

Marasco (1973) makes it clear that as Marian cares for the house, and as more and more ominous experiences continue to affect the Rolfes, the house begins to regenerate. Broken glasses found by the pool somehow repair themselves; the cracked foundation of the pool and the busted filter seem to have been restored good as new overnight, immediately after Ben and David's altercation; and most grisly of all, as the family succumbs to the house's will, the greenhouse becomes alive with verdant bloom. The house restores itself on the lives and sanity of its tenants.

This harkens the scene in *Dracula* where Stoker (1897) notes how Jonathan was subdued by the allure of the brides:

> [t]he fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me. Sweet it was in one sense, honey sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood. (p. 36)

Similarly, Marian finds that "there was something more immediate feeding her uneasiness – an emanation from somewhere else in the house that filled the greenhouse with a sickly, over-ripe sweetness" (Marasco, 1973, p. 141). If the "sweetness" refers to the blood that nourishes the brides, the same conclusion can be drawn about the blood that feeds Mrs. Allardyce's house. Indeed, "it was coming alive, bit by bit, and all through [Marian]" (Marasco, 1973, p. 126) – she would choose the house over her family.

Marxism and the *Hungry House* Trope

According to Lears (1985), Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci established the concept of cultural hegemony which can be described as:

> the 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. (p. 568)

Gramsci claims that this "dominant" group reinforces the hegemonic order in fundamental and pervasive ways throughout society, from propaganda, to institutional ethics, to coercion (Lears, 1985). The shades of this imposed order manifest in the subconscious of the masses who participate in the culture and direct individuals to conform to certain values consistent with the dominant order. This order is simultaneously prescriptive and predatory, as it places individuals into specific roles to restore or maintain the status quo.

Capitalism is representative of the "dominant fundamental group" that enacts its hegemonic influence on all aspects of American society. For example, the capitalist culture of 1960s and 1970s America was primarily patriarchal, being centered around the role of the male head of household who provides for his family as husband and father, but also as the provider of security: both financial and physical. The archetypal breadwinner sacrifices time, labor, and energy in pursuit of the proverbial American Dream, and in the fast-moving free market economy, there is no room for stagnation. All of the motivations of capitalism—free market, open competition, privately-

owned property—"[reveal] that the capitalist ideology in itself promotes a war among neighbors in its emphasis on the self before the community" (Davis, 1994, para. 2). This is a concept that plays a prominent role in the *hungry house* texts in this study.

In *The Shining*, The Overlook, according to Davis (1994), "is…the embodiment of the capitalist society surrounding it: it derives its power from the suffering and expendability of others" (para. 16). Jack Torrance is seeking a change in scenery to regain his life after uprooting his family, putting his career on the ropes, and damaging his burgeoning writing career—all due to his inability to control either his alcoholism or his anger (King, 1977). Torrance struggles to fulfill his role in the capitalist society of the 1970s: i.e. head of household, and chief financial source for his young family; father; and husband. The resulting humiliation (self-inflicted though it may be) makes Jack desperate to turn his life around and that is precisely what the opportunity to act as caretaker to the hotel represents for him: a chance for redemption.

Davis (1994) continues by saying that The Overlook "promises to provide [Jack] with a new sense of machismo" (para. 15). And it works, at least for a little while: removed from their former lives, Jack feels "powerful" and is "given a feeling of superiority and control of his life" (para. 15). The Overlook, "keen to Jacks' despair, … seduces him and capitalizes on his need for confidence" (para 15). But there is always a price to pay in a capitalistic society; for Jack, "The Overlook's promises [demand] that he alienate himself from his family so that he can concentrate on his own concerns of self-promotion" (para. 15).

The capitalist cultural hegemony that Jack is subject to is what ultimately leads to his downfall—it makes him vulnerable to the evil forces inside The Overlook. It is "[i]n tune with capitalist ideology [that] Jack is willing to sacrifice all in his pursuit to

better himself" (Davis, 1994, para. 15). The Overlook then represents, both as a force of capitalistic cultural hegemony and perhaps as the most famous *hungry house* of the 20th century, the notion of consumption. It (literally, in flames) consumes Jack, but also acts as a symbol for the often-predatory consumerist culture consistent with the system of capitalism from which the characters, Jack especially, struggle to escape. In *Burnt Offerings*, this cultural hegemony explains why the disaffected Rolfes, Marian especially, become so enamored of the house, not so much for the house itself, but for what it represents. While the Rolfes are also subject to the same patriarchal capitalistic hegemony that affects the Torrances, it is Marian, not her husband, who is the chief agent in the family's downfall (Marasco, 1973). Claustrophobic in their cramped New York City apartment, Marian wishes for the privacy of a place outside of the city. She is the one who answers the want ad in the paper asking for a caretaker of the Allardyce house for the summer. Dilapidated though it may be, it is lavish and eccentric in a classic way that symbolizes the kind of lifestyle that working middle-class people like the Rolfes wish to attain. It represents a legacy of opulence and success, even if it is currently run-down. The Allardyce house immediately casts its spell on Marian, luring her in with its lavish décor, impressive amenities (a pool, a greenhouse, etc.) and, of course its mysterious and reclusive owner and tenant, Mrs. Allardyce, who resides in her quarters for the entire duration of the Rolfe's stay.

Marian's affinity for the house turns into outright obsession by the novel's end: she spends most of her time compulsively cleaning and tending to Mrs. Allardyce, often at the expense of her family. In fact, once the Rolfes begin to settle in, Marian begins to take less and less of an interest in her family, focusing all her energy on the maintenance of the house. At a significant turning point in the novel, when Ben

confronts her and demands that she come home with him and their son, David, Marian's deranged response is "I CAN'T! I CAN'T! GOD! DON'T YOU SEE THAT YET? I CAN'T!" (Marasco, 1973, p. 224). Through the lens of cultural hegemony, Marian's actions can be read as those fulfilling the role of homemaker that is assigned to her from the dominant hegemonic forces of patriarchal capitalism.

In short, the Allardyce house represents the kind of lifestyle Marian believes she should be living, despite her otherwise modest social standing, fuelling Marian's obsession so completely that she begins to lose her grip on reality (Marasco, 1973). She takes on the role of homemaker as the principal force in her personality, serving Mrs. Allardyce and her house at the expense of her family. Marian engages in obsessive-compulsive cleaning and caring for the house for the duration of the Rolfe's stay, which Ben complains about (Marasco, 1973).Like Jack Torrance, Marian sacrifices her family for the fantasy of a life impossible for her to attain.

Attachment Theory

Grisham and Barlow (2005) explore the idea that "maladaptive beliefs and excessive emotional attachment to possessions are also posited to play a central role in the maintenance of compulsive hoarding" (p. 48). This may further contribute to the inability of an individual to form or maintain emotional connections with other people. Marian's desire to care for the house over her family showcases this in *Burnt Offerings*. "In extreme cases, … hoarding behavior leads to dangerous, life-threatening conditions" (Grisham & Barlow, 2005, p. 45). In *Dracula*, for example, Harker notices that

> there are certainly odd deficiencies in the house, considering the

> extraordinary evidences of wealth which are round [Jonathan]. The table service is of gold, and so beautifully wrought that it must be of immense value. The curtains and upholstery of the chairs and sofas and the hangings of my bed are of the costliest and most beautiful fabrics, and must have been of fabulous value when they were made, for they are centuries old, though in excellent order. (Stoker, 1897, p. 14)

Whereas Dracula's opulent belongings impress Harker, they only legitimize him as an eccentric; the gold and jewels do not cause Harker to fawn over the Count.

Marian, however, is so impressed by what the Allardyce wealth represents that she can think of nothing more than assimilating herself into the hoarded "treasures." Indeed, "the reverence had been infectious; it was based when she analyzed [Mrs. Allardyce's door], on nothing more than an idea and a house filled with its manifestations" (Marasco, 1973, p. 75). Since Marian is subject to a tiny box in the city where she cannot display her hoarded collection, the juxtaposition of the Allardyce's collected items to her stacks of boxes makes her want for such a life. Such an impact resonates where Stoker (1897) writes, "to live in a new house would kill me. A house cannot be made habitable in a day, and after all, how few days go to make up a century" (p. 17).

The Mirror Stage

What is a good haunted house story without mirrors? As Jacques Lacan (1990) explains that the formative nature of humanity lies in our identity, and our identity is nothing if not how we present ourselves to the world. The notion of the Other, which Lacan (1990) likens to the desires of the individual, can be represented in the things used

to reflect status, such as a grand house. Indeed, Lacan (1990) argues that "redefining in the unconscious the first ideal marks in which the tendencies are constituted as repressed in the substitution of the signifier for needs" (p. 619), Like Lacan, Richter (1983) also argues that Gothic villains represent the evil within, lending Gothic stories as the perfect literary environment for a psychoanalytical glimpse into the proverbial mirror. After all, psychoanalysis aims "to draw a clear line between the interior and the exterior" (Dolar, 1991, p. 6). Remarkably, Marian Rolfe uses the Allardyce house to represent her own frustrations with her social class.

Location, Location, Location

The part of the house that has the most dominant effect on Marian is Mrs. Allardyce's quarters. Marian uses the map the Allardyces left behind to locate Mrs. Allardyce's suite, occupying the west wing of the house. Crossing the five wide steps at the threshold, Marian follows a small dark hall with a door, on either side of which sat Canton bowls which read 'Our Mother':

> Beyond the door were a bedroom and a sitting room. Marian knocks and calls for Mrs. Allardyce, only to receive no answer. She opens the door and enters the room. To her right is "an enormous table draped in velvet, burgundy like the drapes, and filled with framed photographs…It was a great field of photographs, faces as far as she could make out, each of them framed differently in silver—square, round, sunburst, some larger, some mere cameos. (Marasco, 1973, p. 81)

The pictures appear to be of a variety of subjects, all portraits representing all ages

and eras, but all unique. Marian notices "that none of the faces was smiling, not one of them. The expressions were uniformly, and chillingly, blank. And one of the faces, an old man's, was looking out at her with what had to be outright terror" (p. 85). Marian is reminded of Miss Allardyce's statement about the house in general: "the memories of a lifetime" (p. 86).

Marian also notices a sound coming from the bedroom: "a very low and steady hum, barely audible, emphasizing the silence, like her own breathing" (Marasco, 1973, p. 81). The hum gradually becomes "deeper and stronger, but almost imperceptibly so" (p. 82). But then her attention drifts to the bedroom door itself:

> [i]t was white, and framed within the narrow, smooth border was an intricate pattern of lines and curves carved into the wood, so delicate in the room's dim light that she hadn't noticed the design until she came within a few feet. Swirls and garlands were cut into triangular panels that met in a small, raised pistil. She moved closer and the design became more intricate and abstract and impenetrable: a globe, a web. A sunburst, a maze, a slab carved with ancient pictographs. (p. 82)

She begins to lose focus, only to eventuallyemerge from her seemingly hypnotic state, unsure of what happened, to dismiss the whole ordeal as a result of little sleep. Like traditional monsters that hunt actively, the *hungry house* identifies, stalks, and lives off the essence of its prey. The plants regenerating in the Allardyce house are representative of a trap being set for the Rolfes, not unlike Venus flytraps which open patiently to lure their unsuspecting prey. In *Dracula*, for example, Count Dracula has no visible servants in his home, but he appears at first to be a good host to Jonathan

Harker, making him feel at home while he is there (Stoker, 1897). Dracula tells Jonathan, "Welcome to my house! Enter freely. Go safely, and leave something of the happiness you bring" (Stoker, 1897, p. 12). Like Stoker's vampire, the *hungry house* also feeds off its inhabitants, who all leave something of themselves behind.

Conclusion

The *hungry house* seems to target people with secrets that they are either struggling to control or may not even be aware of their impact on them until it is too late. The ability of the *hungry house* to attract those who can feed it is evident in *Burnt Offerings*. The notion of sacrificing one's humanity for the appearance of opulence and power motivates Marian to give up what she holds most dear for what she desires more. Her sacrifice is the ultimate betrayal of that which society holds sacrosanct.

In particular, Lacanian and structuralist readings of *hungry house* stories present opportunities to see not only what the texts reflect, but also how the absence of structure becomes structure, itself. In sum, the *hungry house* is a natural evolution from the Gothic setting of a haunted house. Because of its malleabilty, the *hungry house* is more than a trope about that which preys on the innocent to sustain its presence within the walls of their domicile—being representative of the decay that consumption of material goods engenders. A dwelling that reflects its inhabitants, the *hungry house* represents the stakes of sustaining economic stability in a consumerist culture. Ironically, its inhabitants they are eaten out of house and home. What they want as consumers ends up consuming them.

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Leaf Fall #5

Sue Matheson

Onomonresoa: Poetry in Celebration of Mother and Motherhood

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Abstract

Onomonresoa: An Anthology of Nigerian Poets on Mothers and Motherhood (2014) celebrates the passing of the mother of the Nigerian poet, Odia Ofeimun. In Nigeria's cultural landscape, the place of the mother is celebrated as an inspirer of hope, an icon in perseverance, an embodiment of sacrifice, one who gives of herself willingly for family and society, and one who unites all around common issues that are beneficial to humanity. This study adopts African feminist theory within the broad spectrum of cultural nationalism in its discussion of the poems selected for this study. We found

these poems eulogise the attributes of the mother , show her as a pillar of support who is willing to give all to see her children grow into responsible adults, and imply she supports her spouse through thick and thin, working for the good of the family.

Keywords: Mother, hope, perserverance, sacrifice, cultural nationalism

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Introduction

Since the first decades of the 20th century, poets have interrogated the lived experience of the Nigerian people. Modern Nigerian poets celebrated Africa's essence through the period of the struggle for independence. The image of the mother as the pillar of the family has always been present in their poetry. Among the negritude poets. Africa is often transmitted in the image of a woman, especially a mother, who cares deeply for her children.These poets, Oyeniyi Okunoye says, view "… Africa as a woman … [who] is at once mother, a cherished lover and a personification of the continent" (129). Venerating the maternal, modern African poets hold mother and motherhood in a very high regard, underscoring the sacredness of the institution of motherhood in their people's lives. *Onomonresoa: An Anthology of Nigerian Poets on Mothers and Motherhood* (*Onomonresoa)*, published to celebrate motherhood and the memory of Nigerian poet, Odia Ofeimun's mother, contains one hundred and forty seven (147) poems written by ninety three contributors (93). Aptly, *Onomonresoa,* a name that is common to the Owan and Esan people of Edo State, means the children one gives birth to who are recorded as one's success.

Generally, mothers are venerated and celebrated for their role in their families.

Proverbs abound demonstrating the importance of mothers in the lore of the people. Amongst the Afenmai people, for instance, it is said that no matter how far the urine of a child moves away it will always return to the mother's lap. Chinua Achebe captures the relationship between mother and child succinctly in *Things Fall Apart*, when he says, amongst the Igbo-Africans, "when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother's hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland" (107). A mother serves as a bulwark for the child to protect it in adversity. In Nigeria, and, on a broader scale, Africa, a mother is a protector, a shield,and a refuge, expected to sacrifice herself as she moulds her child into an adult.

Capturing the essence of motherhood, Remi Akujobi observes that

> [m]otherhood as experienced and practiced in Africa is influenced by religious mythologies and local lore and it is coloured with examples of self-sacrifice/giving and much more in the name of motherhood [sic]. While mothers are revered as creators, as providers, cradle rockers, nurturers, and goddesses, they also inspire awe because they are known to wedge huge powers in their children's lives. The idea of self-sacrifice emphasizes the centrality of motherhood in African society. (2)

Akujobi emphasizes the fact that the mother and the institution of motherhood are held in the highest esteem in Africa. Given mothers' unending sacrifices for their families, especially for the wellbeing of their children, it is no wonder that African poets eulogise the influence of their mothers in their lives. It is not unusual when Michael Mazuru and Oliver Nyambi label "mothers as first teachers, cultural bearers

and co-partners to their male partners" in the upbringing of their children (598).

Mazeru and Nyambi posit that "mothers are family finance ministers who always see to it that the needs of the family are taken care of as they handle their families' budgetary needs meticulously, cooperating with their male counterparts in sustaining the family" (598). These researchers depict the vital role of mothers in ensuring balance in the affairs of their homes. Because they are the managers of the home, the quintessential African mother works to avoid profligacy and unnecessary expenditure in the home to ensure that the essential needs of the home are met. In a most apt summation of a mother (even though the emphasis here is on àjé), Teresa N. Washington says she is "… a stately and reserved, respected elder woman of control, composure, and reticence who is recognized as having reached a social, psychological, and spiritual pinnacle" (16).

Pointing the vital place of mothers in the society, Faith Wambura Ngunjiri draws an analogy between her role and the place of true leadership in the lives of the people. She says, "As mothers, leaders are protectors, pillars, and community builders; they are invested in the welfare of their communities" (227). In the view of the African, mothers are not passive contributors to their homes, working as leaders, not just in their homes but in the community as a whole. Ngunjiri's observation also suggests that mothers are vital to the survival of the community in Africa. At the core of social progress, mothers contribute by shaping the lives of their children towards a profitable end for all. It is no wonder then that the modern writer in Africa, drawing on the vital role of mothers in their respective societies, have always witnessed to their invaluable contributions to the lives of their children. In African poetry in

particular, modern poets have drawn from theie bardic traditions to eulogize the roles their mothers have played. Here it should be noted that the poems for the study were not chosen arbitrarily, being selected from the various corners of the country, with at least one poem each from the geopolitical zone, to demonstrate how mothers are reverenced nationally. As well, only poems written by male writers were selected for this study to show the importance of mothers and other women in their sons' lives.

Theoretical Framework

In response to Carole Boyce Davies's observation that "a feminist consciousness is necessary in examining the position of women in African societies" (1), this study adopts African feminist theory within African cultural nationalism to investigate the relationship that exists between the mother and her male child. Usually, feminist theory engages a work from the perspective of women. As M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham point out, "feminist literary criticism continues …to be interrelated with the movement by political feminists for social, legal, and cultural freedom and equality" (121). Generally women scholars of feminist theory in African letters have argued that male writers, as pioneers in the modern literature, have handled issues relating to African women peripherally. This is the view expressed by Helen Chukwuma when she argues that in the works of male writers what the reader would find does not go beyond " female characters' trained ambition [which] revolved round marriage and procreation. Her other female obligations ranged further to cooking the family meals, honouring her husband's bed, on invitation; and other times merging with the home environment peacefully" (2). Chukwuma's view, it can be argued, is that male writers do not show much regard to women. Rose Acholonu takes the argument further to say that it was only the arrival of female writers on the literary scene that made "heard

the hitherto unheard voices, and giving some meaningful insights into the hitherto unexplored psyches of the female in our literature" (7).

However, in spite of the seeming antagonism that has intruded into feminist engagement with African life and literature, African feminism, according to Susan Z. Andrade, remains a channel for "celebrating the art of mothering" in the continent. And she goes further to posit that "African feminist literary criticism … is decidedly pro-nationalist … it affirms the value of women's status as mothers" (267). Andrade's assertions here compel attention by claiming feminist criticism in the context of African literature places a premium on the place of the mother. This value placed on motherhood does not go in search for scapegoats for the deplorable state of women in certain situations. As Idaevbor Bello has put it "women, as men, are victims of power profligates" (153) that constitute the ruling class in the society.

In the celebration of motherhood then, the focus is not about upholding the image of the sacrificing and unquestioning mother as an example for the female gender to aspire to, but about celebrating her vitality as the engine of the family unit as she works to guide her family on the right path as Mazuru and Nyabi assert. This is especially so when one recalls Mary E. Modupe Kolawole's position that "in spite of the existence of gender solipsism in African literature, some men and most women writers have created themes around women's oppression and need for self-realisation" (118). This study shows that in celebrating mothers and motherhood, the African male writer does uphold the virtue and the overarching place of women in African life.

Images of Motherhood in *Onomonresoa*

Our discussion begins with the very first poem in the anthology, a poem written by

the Nigerian novelist, Ben Okri, entitled "My Mother Sleeps" (3-4). In this poem, the reader is presented with the image of a sacrificing matriarch who deserves her rest after having given everything to see her children grow up right. Apparently, the mother in the poem is sleeping after a long and weary search,having finally located her son whom she has come to visit.

The sleeping figure of his mother on his "battered armchair" (3) reminds the poem's speaker of the sacrifices that the now sleeping mother underwent as she nurtured him and his siblings, from their infancy and through the years. Theirs were not lives of affluence and pleasure. Watching the sleeping mother, the speaker informs the reader: "It is night, and I have / Become a child again" (3). Going back in time, he remembers the sleepless nights the mother had while watching over them; now it his turn to reciprocate, even if tentatively.

Recalling the sacrifices of the sleeping mother and the deprivations in the entire family that the mother had to overcome, the speaker says,

I remember her in my childhood years
Sleeping in dark corners
Where the rats chew the garri sacks
In our hot little room,
Or on wooden chairs in the green
Darkness, or on cement platforms
Near the gutter of the unforgiving
Street, through the unhappy nights
And the suffering years.
The remembrance rouses

In me dreams of strength,

And dreams of fear. (3)

The reader is made aware of the poverty in which the speaker was brought up and the vigour with which the mother faced the task of raising her children in the midst of the general squalor around her. The speaker and his siblings had no comfort whatsoever in their growing years – they slept "in dark corners / Where the rats chew the garri sacks / In our little room." At other times, it was "on wooden chairs" or even "on cement platforms / Near the gutter of the unforgiving / Street." The implied communication here is that sometimes the "little room" would be so congested that the children would literally have to sleep out in the open street. In spite of the parlous state of things, the persona remembers the mother showing no weakness but only strength. "And [the] dreams of fear" he remembers of her mother are those of either losing any of her children or that they would not achieve the success she works so hard to help them attain.

In the present, the speaker, like the good son he has grown into, watches over the mother without complaining. He recalls only "How patiently she stayed awake / All those years, watching over us / In our heaving worrisome sleep" (4). Now the mother sleeps in some comfort and peace without any worrying anymore about the fate that awaits her children. They are all now grown up to fulfill her dreams. The son tells the reader as he watches his mother asleep on his "battered armchair" that "I know that she dreams well. / I am watching over her" (4).

In "Mother Torrents" (5-6), Lindsay Barret engages the anxiety, fear, and relief that are the lot of a mother as she nurtures her children from infancy through the years. The speaker in the poem which is structured into two parts tells his readers

about the constant anxiety that is the world of the mother, apparently, each time she conjectures where her children could be. He establishes the very turmoil that is the constant companion of a mother when he says that "A mother cannot confess / The bone of distress / That lives in her heart" (5). From the onset then, this speaker establishes that anxiety of mothering is akin to the anxiety of swallowing a bone. Her anxiety for the safety of her children is roused when there is seeming danger in her neighbourhood: that is why "She hears infant screams / In a pool of dreams / At the time of the flood" (5) in the Niger delta region of Nigeria, a riverine community.

The point of the poet-speaker is that when there is the likelihood of natural danger (as the possibility of the flood washing away a child), the instinct of a mother to protect her children is immediately ignited. Andher fears will not quieten down until she is assured of their safety. Even as the children sleep, the mother worries about whether they would wake to see the next day. As in the previous poem, she keeps watch over her children as they sleep. It is for this reason the speaker says "A mother's pain cuts deep / Into the boundaries of sleep / That embrace her children" (5). Even during the night, her mothering instinct to see that her children are safe will not allow her to rest. Her relief comes only when she has seen her children through the challenges and dangers associated with growing up.

The speaker in the poem concludes the poem's first part by telling his readers that "She can only sing / When the wing / Of shame is clipped" (5). This emphasizes the African worldview that the mother is the one usually held to account whenever any danger befalls any of her children as they grow up, or when her child brings "shame" to the family! The pressure that her society piles on the mother increases her anxiety and worries; she is constantly being driven by the fear of being a failure as a

mother, nearly the point of exhaustion, to gain societal approval for her mothering.

The second part of this poem follows a proverbial patterning in its four tercets, in which the single rhyme is found in the first two lines of each stanza. These stanzas transmit "short, pithy statements of widely accepted truths about everyday life" in each (Abrams and Harpham 10). For instance, the opening stanza of the first section reads: "Cold torrents of terror / Conceal the error / Of maternal loss" (5), expressing the lurking fear that drives a mother as she immerses herself totally in her task of guiding her children. Her pain and her anxiety are made palpable in a parabolic representation of her brooding fear of failure. What gives her courage to weather the storm is the hope that lurks in her bosom. The speaker assures his readers that a mother is always available as a pillar of support in all situations; hence "A mother's bare breast / As a place of rest / Is never weary" (6). In all situations, however, the mother is always calm on the outside and uncomplaining, understating the huge sacrifice she makes for her children. It is only when she is successful in her task that she speaks of her distress all through the journey. This that is why the speaker says "She can only confess /The presence of distress / When the heart is full" (6), and this occurs when she has successfully accomplished her onerous responsibility.

In "A Mother in a Refugee Camp" (13), Chinua Achebe presents a mother who, in spite of the pain of watching her son die, shows love and dedication to her child. All around the woman is evidence of pain and squalor. The poem, which is set in a refugee camp in a war situation, is drawn from the experience of the Nigerian civil war, offering images that have left permanent scars on its victims. The mother in the Achebe poem is holding and nursing her child with death hanging in the air; and in the love she shows, the speaker says "No Madonna and Child could touch

/ Her tenderness for a son / She soon would have to forget" (13). The allusion to "Madonna and Child" is especially striking, showing the depth of love of this hapless and helpless woman for her son whom she knows will soon die. She wields to the very last that inseparable bond that exists between mother and child. If the child must leave her, he must go being loved.

She is undefeated by the unfettered pain and agony around them, herself and her dying son. All around them, "The air was heavy with odors of diarrhea, / Of unwashed children with washed-out ribs / And dried-up bottoms waddling in labored steps" (13). The images here are tactile as the speaker appeals to the reader's senses of smell and sight. In the midst of all of this, this mother cannot abandon her son as the "Other mothers there [who] / Had long ceased to care" (13), communicating a living drama of love to the speaker who concludes on a brooding note of hanging despair:

> She took from her bundle of possessions
> A broken comb and combed
> The rust-colored hair left on his skull
> And then – humming in her eyes – began carefully to part it.
> In their former life this was perhaps
> A little daily act of no consequence
> Before his breakfast and school; now she did it
> Like putting flowers on a tiny grave. (13)

This combing, this ordinary simple act of a mother which "[i]n their former life …was perhaps / [a] daily act of no consequence / [b]efore his breakfast and

school" has assumed new meaning and significance in the relationship between the mother and her dying son. The action of the mother caring for her child validates Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's assertion that

Neither depth
Nor height
Can separate a mother
From her child
Her love is deep like a well. (80)

In his contribution "Genealogical" (102), Tade Ipadeola also pays tribute to the mothers in his life. His reference to "My mothers" could be interpreted in a number of ways, but the most plausible, as the title of the poem suggests, is those who have genealogical relationship with him, to his mother and grandmother(s). Ipadeolas speaker acknowledges the impact these women have made in his life, and hence "this … filial honour" to them. In the course of nursing their children, the speaker says,

They sit by their fires
And, sometimes, smoke
Gets in their watchful eyes –
My mothers. Their praise names
Are all I can now recall
In this hour of filial honour. (102)

It is not the fact that "they sit by the fires," apparently to cook the family's meal that is striking here but the sacrifice they make which is underscored by the epithet,

"their watchful eyes," which get smoked in the process without any complaining from them. The epithet also conveys to the reader that these mothers keep a protective eye on their children as they fend for them; in other words. They are always doubly engaged.

In the midst of this multi-tasking, the mothers share ideas about how to ensure their children do not get derailed in their life's journeys. Their environment is, without any doubt, a hard one. The setting in the poem is a kitchen in a rural home:

> They sat by hearths
> Of mud and stone, pondering,
> Beaming with maternal wisdom,
> The matriarchs, Their insight
> Going backwards and forwards
> Forever as only love can. (102)

Their experiences, "[b]eaming with maternal wisdom" echoe Chimalum Nwankwo's observation that "older women … project the oracular wisdom associated with the elderly in African societies" (87). Most of all, their undiluted and unconditional love for their families nurture them.

In "Mother" (168), a nine-line, single stanza poem, Musa Idris Okpanachi offers the image of a distraught child who is forever tortured by the loss of a dear mother. The speaker seems unable to grapple with life, because the pain of losing his mother cannot be waved away. he tells the reader, as

I sat before the mirror
Trying to draw my face
What emerged was my
Mother's face…. (168)

Thus the persona is submerged in the pain and sorrow of his loss; it is such that everything he does now is overshadowed by that loss. His situation, one may infer, arises from the love and care that the mother had given him while alive, and hence his difficulty to adjust to a life without her.

Idzia Ahmad also demonstrates in "She Was My Mother" (221-2) the bond and the merging-into-one relationship which his mother established between them from the outset. As in the Okpanachi poem, the speaker sings in remembrance of the mother who has passed on. In her desire to build confidence in her son to confront the challenges of the world boldly, the mother seems to have moulded the son into a brother. The speaker opens the poem with the information, "She was my mother / And I her brother: So she wished it to be" (221). But in spite of being his mother's brother, the son cannot introduce his mother as his sister as the mother "wished it to be." She is his mother. But he says, "I walked beside her / Planting my steps firm next to hers" (221), indicating his mother succeeded in instilling confidence in him and imbuing him with boldness to walk unafraid. He does not just walk, he firmly plants his steps, fostering an image of growth and development, "next to hers," assured of her protection.

The son's confidence tells the reader that his world and his mother's have merged into one. Metaphorically,, he draws an apt analogy of their relationship as one which exists between a tree and its climber in which the climber's existence depends on

the tree. In the same vein, the speaker's survival is looped to the mother's: she has nurtured and helped define his personality. He speaks of their connection organically: "My roots mesh with your entrails – / Tree limbs in the embrace of climbers –" (221). This is certainly the voice of a grateful son whose the memory is of a mother who made him into a man. But then the reader is told, "And time throbs in the veins of the hour / Pulling carpets of silence / Across our face" (221). Here is the first real indication that all may not be too well is conveyed by the silence that is pulled "[a]cross our face."

Then, the penultimate stanza confronts the reader with images that echo morbidity, showing how, in spite of the gaiety of the opening stanza, the persona is in pain. The speaker finds

> These trembling filaments of the algae –
> Mossy pond scum – feel for the dense jets
> Of our communion spraying the hinges of the
> Silver cord and embalming the Elysian moment
> The crass joy of the thunderbirds – in the
> Thickets of silence in which we
> Build the nests of our mute voices. (221)

Pain, anguish, and even despondence are transmitted in this reference to the Elysian. The speaker's classical allusion conveys the speaker wishes restful peace for his mother, but the marked silence depicted in the scene indicates the permanent end of communication between mother and son. The total silence is only broken by "[t]he crass joy of the thunderbirds," crassly negating the solemn situation that the speaker

decribes. However, the memory of the mother cannot fade because her son remains to preserve it. As he says, “Tell the horsemen when they come / That I am the chosen one” (222).

Here, the speaker makes what seems to be a biblical allusion. Metaphorically equating himself with Jesus Christ he identifies himself as as the chosen one selected to preserve and manifest her good deeds to the world. He further informs the reader: “I am the syndic of our symbiotic union – / The seal of our sibling communion” (222). In essence, he remains the representation, the evidence of his mother’s lived experience on earth. It is in him that her having lived is manifest.

In “Mother” (23), Odia Ofeimun tells of the effort of a mother to keep her home clean of the mess that her children make around the house. The poem begins with the speaker relating the chores the mother carry out around the house:

> It was always her place to sweep away
> the mess we made of life’s offerings
> With the menfolk gone, children out of the way
> her time comes to relieve the scene of
> paper dross, bits and pieces, mated dust. (23)

Apparently the mother does this work with love and without complaining. She is a selfless housekeeper who ensures members of her family return each day from their engagements outside to a welcoming home. Because “[h]er broom sings the latest gossips, too,” this woman does not have time for idle talk. The broom with which she sweeps, been personified to have the capacity to sing, is her companion as she engages in her daily chores.

That she has no room for idleness is evident when we are told that there are "[s]o many feet to be swept with the weed / still having a last stand ahead of her wish." This implies that the children, especially, litter her compound with dirt, and she must clean this out of the way so she can attend to more pressing issues. Cleanliness is not the only reason she sweeps her home. She also works to to prepare her wares for the market day: "And there would be space now for a mat / somewhere to dry the chips for a market day / where fates converge, mother always gold." Keeping her compound clean in order to create the proper hygiene for the chips she deals in, she is indeed the matriarch who constantly assists her partner by being usefully engaged in providing for the family's upkeep. The mother multi-tasks daily, expressing her desire to hold her family together. As the speaker observes, "mother is [indeed] always gold."

Conclusion

As Chukwuma has argued in the introduction to her *Accents in the African Novel*, the essence of African feminism "advocates a complementary relationship between the sexes where female individualism and character are given ample opportunity for life and expression" (ix). Accordingly, Nigerian male writers, especially the poets, celebrate the contributions of their mothers to their general upbringing, and in doing so, celebrate women in general. In their poems, Ben Okri, Lindsay Barret, Chinua Achebe, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Tade Ipadeola, Musa Idris Okpanachi, Idzia Ahmad, and Odia Ofeimun demonstrate the mother, who safeguards her family, determines how men admire and value women and their contributions to societal development. These poets are grateful for mothers who ensure their children received the best care they could give to develope into responsible adults. In their poems, the uncommon love and affection that mothers have for their children is held aloft in

extraordinary displays of character and individual sacrifices. Even in the face of the most debilitating of conditions, their mothers did not give up hope in their belief and conviction that their children must have the best of lives possible.

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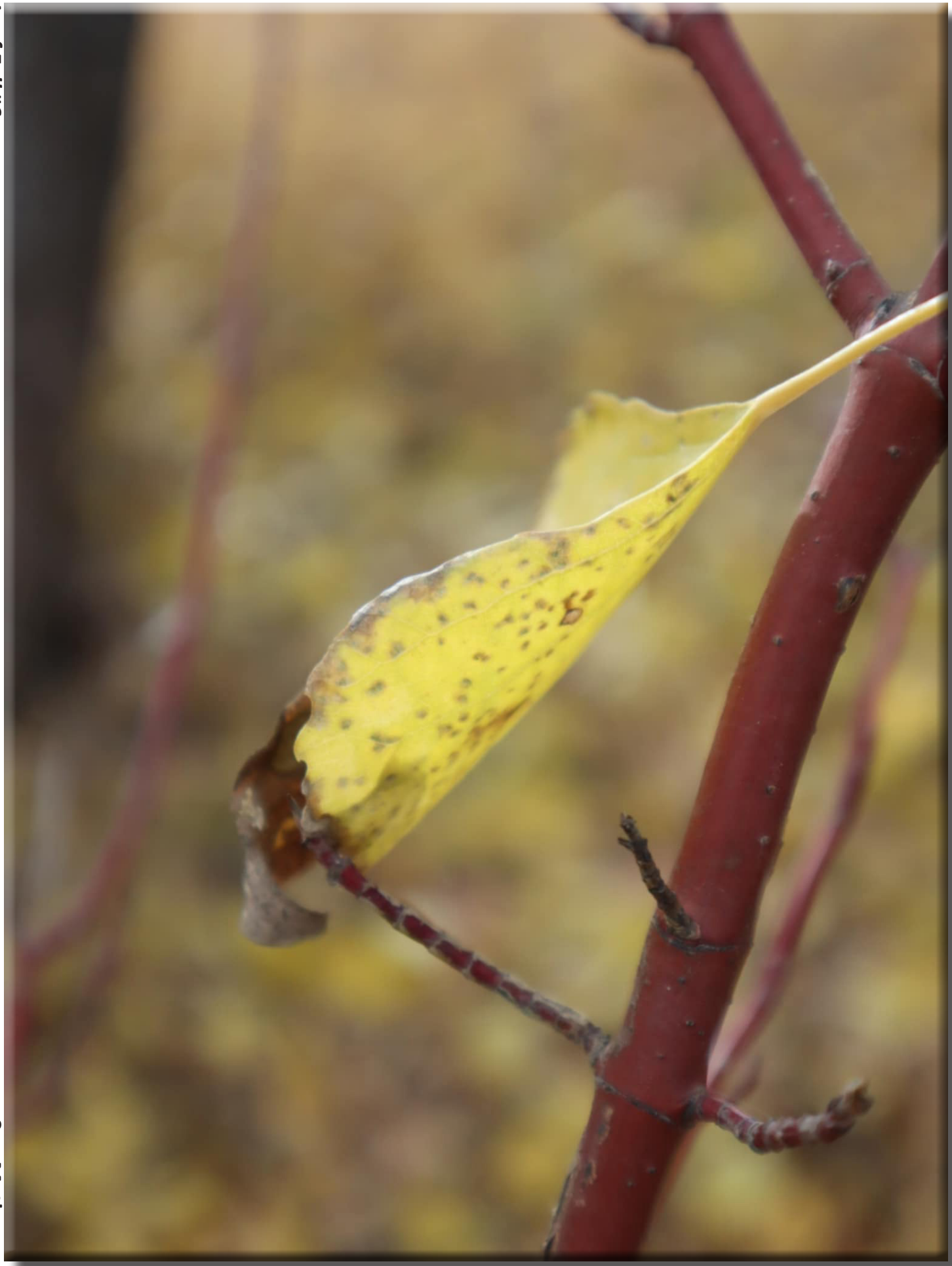

Leaf Fall #6

Sue Matheson

APPROXIMATE ANSWERS

‘There is no time, all past and all future
is contained in this moment.’
– Rabindranath Tagore, ‘Balai’

When we come home to ourselves
and feel the pain of our past inside
we will be overwhelmed by suffering,

which is why we must run away and start
to imagine our story’s possible conclusion,
create something from what already exists.

Change isn’t real, the future is forgetting
to go back to our unfolding; even though
the past is over it remains inaccessible,

contaminated and worn out by overuse.
There’s nothing special about the present,
dissection produces vast panoramas of

humans questioning ideas of free will,
joy and happiness within the context of
nature and pain and how to transform it.

If you break down the unbearable and
go back to its constituent body parts,
you may help others navigate hurt

and moral responsibility. Many people don't
understand the consequences of existence,
don't like space and time as an aesthetic

or not being sure about absolutely everything.
Meaning only supplies approximate answers
to our sceptical and enigmatic questions,

the revolution may have already occurred.
Your belief or disbelief cannot alter
the future, but try to remember the idea

of intelligent design, how all co-ordinates
in the galaxy and what's happening there
are relative. Events in Earth time constantly

change and morph, although it is not
an organic thing. The universe includes
every past present possible moment.

—Rupert M. Loydell

The Church and Technology: a Re-examination of the Use of Technology Among Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria

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Abstract

The world is a global village, and the church is a civil society found at the center of it, offering solutions to man's physical and spiritual maladies. This paper examines the impetus behind the harnessing of faith and technology among the 21st-century Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria, using historical, descriptive, and participatory observation methods to investigate the value of technology in religious practice. We discovered that the adoption of technology has reshaped the Pentecostal church

experience, the Church landscape, and 21st-century Nigerian society and recommend that the Church should not misplace its priorities while adopting technology and should also avoid undue competition in its use.

Keywords: Church, Nigeria, Pentecostal Churches, Technology

Introduction

Technology is the practical application of getting things done whether through scientific or applied methods. Technology, of course,should not be narrowed to scientific materials and or equipment. As G.B. Harrison points out, technology is not just limited to the scientific or material components by extendingits providence into the area of Information and Communication Technology.[1] Technology is an important aspect of life that forms the nucleus of daily interactions within the family and society in general. It has affected man's behaviour in the society and has also contributed to paradigm shifts in our day-to-day activities with our fellow man, and the changing relationship between man and God.

Pentecostalism is the fastest growing branch of Christianity in the world, particularly the Nigerian society. Comfort K. Gemade also finds Pentecostalism a global phenomenon with a large following in North America, Latin America, Asia, Africa and other parts of the world.[2] Pentecostalism has experienced tremendous growth, rise, and impact throughout Africa. Gideon Oshitelu has traced the origin of Nigerian Pentecostalism to the activities of Prophet Sokari Braide, a Kalabari man from the Niger Delta area. Braide was converted to the Anglican brand of the Christian

faith in 1906 and four years later was baptized. Braide claimed that he had been commissioned by the Lord to preach and in 1912 made his first public proclamation as someone with prophetic ability and the gift of vision.[4] A brand of Christianity that emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and the direct experience of the presence of God by the believer,[3] the Pentecostal experience can be traced to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit's account in Acts 2:1ff. Christian existence is an imitation of the life of Jesus of Nazareth in the power of the Spirit. The experience of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost according to the Acts 2 account showcases the emergence of *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues), as the evidence of the Holy Spirit upon the congregation of 120 people and the boldness of the frightened apostles, becoming a landmark to every believer who professed the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The explosion of Pentecostalism introduced into Nigeria a spirituality that was not fostered by the initial Western missionaries. Pentecostal spirituality was warmly welcomed among the poor, which comprised the majority of Nigerians.[5] Adeloye has affirmed that Pentecostal waves became obvious in the activities of some African Christian leaders in the western part of Nigeria who assembled together to seek divine intervention through prayer to the 1918 worldwide influenza epidemic that claimed about 250,000 lives in Nigeria alone. He also further affirmed that the praying society was led by a founding member of "Our Saviour" Anglican Church, Ijebu-Ode –Joseph Shadare.[6]

The origin of the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria depicted a period of low technological advancement and its application in human daily affairs. But as technology began to be more pervasive, it became inevitable for the church to adopt its applications into its services and programmes. Some churches, such as the Deeper

Life Bible Church in the early 1980s frowned at the use of technologically-related component, such as television. Other Pentecostal Churches, such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God during its establishment, were already adopting the use of technology. Some churches in the African Independent movements were making efforts to get technology to be used in the Church. All these early attitudes about the use of technology have been ameliorated among the 21st century Pentecostal Churches.

What brought about this change among the Pentecostal Churches? Is technology a devil's tool to bring down the Church? How has the Church been able to make effective use of technology in her services? Are there any guidelines for the use of technology among the Pentecostal Churches? Addressing these questions necessary to the rationale and impact of using technology in the Church. this paper is divided into sections that examine the church and technology in the 1900s, the factors that necessitated church adoption of technology, common technological tools used among Pentecostal churches in Nigeria, and current trends on the use of technology among Pentecostals.

The Church and Technology in the 1900s

The origin of Pentecostal churches in Nigeria can be traced to a prayer group named the Precious Stone Society which later metamorphosed to "Diamond Stone" in St. Anglican Saviour in 1918 and which later metamorphosed again into the Christ Apostolic Church. Deji Ayegboyin and Ademola Ishola have noted that the raising of a dead child at Ilesha by Joseph Ayodele Babalola in July 1930 is known asas the event that sparked the beginning of pentecostalism. It led to the outburst and reawakening of faith among people who had already lose their faith in the power of

God and coincided with the use of orthodox medicine and diabolical apparatus to further enhance faith and perform miracles.[7]

The emergence of technology has enabled the society to develop and brought about easiness in human endeavour through its proper applications. However, during the inception of Pentecostal churches, the use of technology received only a partial acceptance from Church planters and Christians generally. Kanayo Nwadialor and Peace Olomu have confirmed that in the early days of Deeper Life Bible Church, the gadget "Television" was tagged "the devil box."Television wa considered taboo, and members of the Church were strictly warned against it.[8] They also went further to affirm that some of the members who refused to put theirs away were seen as rebellious and disciplined by the Church. The use of technological gadgets like the video camera were also prohibited. Many years ago during a camp programme at a town in Delta State called Sapele, one of its leaders died, and his children wanted a befitting burial. During the burial ceremony, the children were instructed not to use the video camera to record the service.[9]

The African Indigenous Churches also showed little or no interest in the adoption of technology during its beginnings. The Christ Apostolic Church in the early 1900s propagated the gospel using the available traditional methods, such as physical meeting which involve gathering the people together and teaching and sermonizing the gospel to them. Other methods used are the traditional gongs, bands and the use of bell. Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola, preached the gospel in Odo-Owa. David Olayiwola cited Abraham Owoyemi that Babalola also organized regular prayer meetings at C.M.S Odo-Owa which many people attended because of the miracles God performed through him.[10]

Physical gathering was a common practice among the Pentecostals in the 1900s. Researching *The Biography of Moses Orimolade Tunolase* by the Cherubim and Seraphim Special Committee, Ikare, David Olayiwola found the Cherubim and Seraphim is another Pentecostal church under AICs. Orimolade carried out his evangelistic campaigns in different towns such as Ilorin, Irun, Akoko-Edo and Ikiran.[11] Here, it is pertinent to say that the use of water was common to both Christ Apostolic Church and Cherubim and Seraphim. Ayegboyin and Ishola opine that after a heavy throng of people met at the revival ground at Ilesa, the River Oye, a few metres from the revival ground, was consecrated and used to cure the infirm and the sick.[12] Omoyajowo has affirmed that Orimolade purified a pool at Ogidi village at which the natives have worshipped from time immemorial to ensure that they remained in a harmonious relationship with the evil power it was supposed to possess.[13]

Of course, there is no generation of worship without its level of technology. The use of gong, drum, fire, printed materials, physical meetings, and the sending of a representative/messenger were commonly employed during the 1900s. It is pertinent to say that various instruments used such as bell, drum, and gong amongst others were products of technology and show the level of technological knowledge and application in society and particularly, the Church at that time. Over the years, there has been "technological advancement" expressed in the emergence of television, telephone, sound systems, and musical instruments. Technology in the 20th and 21st century has helped reposition society, particularly the Church.

Factors that Necessitated Church Adoption of Technology

The following are factors that prompted a change in attitudes and adoption of technology among the Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria:

1. Education

One of the turning points in a human life, education encompasses learning and getting new information that transform our thoughts and actions. D during the early 1900s, the Church was limited in its knowledge about the benefits that came with the use of technology. Technology was called a "devil's box", the "devil's instrument", and "worldly possession". However, the Church now believes that technology (ICT) can be used for evangelistic purposex. Simon Mungai observes that

> [c]ontemporary Pentecostals in particular are guided by a dominion religious orientation in which the media are expected to be reclaimed for the purpose of religion. Viewers and listeners are invited to visit websites where they can listen to or follow live services, download motivational messages, read church newsletters, request for special prayers, or fulfill tithing obligations.[14]

Clearly, re-education of the Church has made it possible to utilize technology to suit the Pentecostal purpose of transforming and liberating the world from spiritual obfuscations.

2. Reduction in the Exodus of Youth

Contemporary society is a global village where the power of technology cannot be resisted but rinstead utilized to expand the Church. Indeed, the vast increase in knowledge and the exposure of the youth in the contemporary society to technology has paved way for the exodus of

the youth from one church to the other. This is demonstrated in the way African Indigenous Churches and neo-Pentecostals are adopting technology in order to reduce the youth's mass exodus from the Church.

3. Accessibility

As society continues to expand, spreading the gospel has begun to be difficult for preachers, churches, and missionaries. During the early 1900s, Orimolade, Babalola, and Oshitelu were wandering preachers. In the 21st century Nigerian society, the Nigerian population is over 230 million,[15] making it difficult for the Church to operate as it did in the 1900s. Advancements in communication, transportation, and recordings have paved the way for easy access to the Church.

4. Pandemic Experience

The use of technology in Information and Communication Technology received a warm reception from the Church prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. Akiti Alamu has noted that during the pandemic, Christians were were living totally indoors, as the law enforcement agencies were monitoring Churches and other Christian gatherings.[16] Felix Akintude has opined that during the lockdown, the Redeemed Christian Church of God made use of social media platforms and Television stations (Dove & RTM) to transmit church services to sustain the fellowship ofits brethren.[17] Many Churches have intensified their use of technology because of the pandemic.

5. The Pulchrification of Church services

One of the fascinating things about technology is that the Church services have been restructured to entice worshippers and motivate them to dance and sing rigorously. Because of their sound systems and musical instruments, Church services receive new means to persuade its congregation to keep maintaining their contact with the Church.

Common Technological Tools Used Among Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria

Various technologies have been adopted among Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria. These tools, commonly used to enhance church services, further contributes to the Pentecostal Church experience in 21st century Nigerian society. Table 1, for example demonstrates the technological tools used among Pentecostal Churches in Ilorin on the following page:

Table 1: Types of Technology and Their Applications in Pentecostal Churches

		APPLICATIONS
1.	Sound Systems and Microphone	They are used to make voice audible. Pentecostal Churches strive to get quality sound systems and microphones to enhance sermon and songs during worship sessions.

2.	Social Media	It is often used to connect to large people. Pentecostals use Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and other social media handles to propagate the gospel.
3.	Websites	Links to many web pages contain Church information, such as sermons, Church names, and addresses and contacts for guidance.
4.	Musical instruments	Instruments like drums, keyboards, guitars, and trumpets, amongst others are used by the Pentecostals to make services livelier.
5.	Live Streaming and record	Pentecostals live stream and record services for record purpose and accessibility by members who cannot be physically present for the service.

Other common technologies used by Pentecostals today include, but not limited to, electronic gadgets such as computers, fan, air conditioner, tablets, and flat screen televisions. Chairs, tables, pulpits, doors (among them, wooden, steel, and sliding), and windows of different kinds are used to for building churches in Nigeria.

Current Trends on the Use of Technology among Pentecostals

The Church has been immersed in the use of technology in its every activity and programmes by providing its members with the opportunity to watch and listen to sermons from a long distance. Lisa Allen-McLaurin has asserted that the use of digital technology has become standard in worship services. For decades now, Churches have played CDs and MP3 recordings in worship, to enhance music, dance, and

drama ministries, and to fill in when musicians are not available.[18] Video clips and PowerPoint presentations are used to help ministers drive home their sermonic *foci*, especially for those who may be visual learners.

Online worship session is no longer alien to the Church, as most Pentecostals hold both physical and online services for their members. The advent of technology has reshaped the ideology of in-gathering which was predominantly used in the 1900s. Physical gathering is still currently in use, but it has acquired a new dimension in its operation and nature. For instance, during every first Sunday in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, there is usually a general service at all the Redeemed Churches where the Churches are connected directly (online) to the Headquarters where Pastor E.A. Adeboye preaches and prays for every member and viewer as the new month commences. This online worship is not peculiar to the RCCG alone; it is a common phenomenon in most Pentecostals, among them, Christ Apostolic Church, Deeper Life Bible Church, and Cherubim and Seraphim.

The Internet banking system also is a trend among the Pentecostals in Nigeria. Churches now operate the collection of tithes, offerings, and other donations through online banking. During services, Church bank accounts are displayed on projectors. Iin some Churches, like the Christ Apostolic Church, Church account details are printed on banners and/or papers and pasted for easy access of the members.

The use of modern musical instruments, such as drum sets and keyboards, are common in Pentecostal Churches. The Pentecostal churches continue to expand, and most of the new branches are empowered with at least a drum set and keyboard to further enhance worship in the Church. It is common for Pentecostal Churches to include a full musical orchestra or band that musically motivates the entire

congregation to worship God.

Pursuit for position and possession, demonstrated by owning exotic cars, a large church edifice, expensive dresses, and phones, is a common use of technology among Pentecostals in Nigeria. Technology has finally become a means for undue competition among Pentecostals since individual churches want to meet with the latest technological tools in Nigeria and abroad. The use of technology in building and beautifying the church also become a common trend. Youths are now enticed to Churches by a large edifice, the pastor's reputation, and modern technologies. Virtually, all activities in Pentecostal Churches have been restructured to suit the online mode. Some of these activities include sermons, prayer meetings, bible studies, and online evangelism. Most Pentecostal churches now go on air (via radio broadcasta and TV stations) on particular days to call listeners to prayer, teach the gospel, and make announcements about church programmes. Danfulani asserted that churches possess active Web-sites and use text messages, podcasts, Wi-fi, Bluetooth, WhatsApp, Google, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Icloud, Face time, and Safari.[19] Alamu has observed that these applications continue to be used by church leaders and their organizations to reach out to their members and others.[20]

Conclusion

The use of technology in contemporary Pentecostal Churches has changed greatly since the early 1900s when technological advancements were welcomed with mixed reactions. Then, the Church was cautious about allowing the world to dominate it through worldly things packaged as technology. This has changed, as the Church now views technology not only as a blessing from God to humanity but also as a means by which man can relate to God. Psalms mentions musical instruments, such as timbrels,

strings, pipes, and cymbals (150:4-5), being used to praise God. The Pentecostal Churches in Nigeria, likewise, use instruments, such as keyboards, drum sets, guitars, and trumpet, to praise God. The inclusion of technology into the Church has led to increases in knowledge, taming the youth, easy access to worship, and means to manage the pandemic experience. Some common technologies used in Churches today, sound systems, microphones, musical instruments, social media, and websites, have refurbished the Church and helped it to fit into our contemporary society.

Recommendations

1. The Church should not misplace its priorities while adopting new technologies.
2. The Church should also avoid undue competition over the use of technology with other Churches.
3. Instead of getting more technological tools, the Church should engage in more physical evangelism in rural areas where the wave of advancing technologies is not felt.
4. It is also recommended that further studies should consider the reasons for the exclusion of drums in Deeper Life Bible Church and how it has affected the Church service.

Endnotes

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14. The World Factbook, https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nigeria/, accessed November 8, 2023.

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Leaf Fall #7

Sue Matheson

The Philosophy of Tribute Payment in the Benin Kingdom

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Abstract

Using data obtained from oral tradition and written documents, this study examines the indigenous tribute system that evolved among the people of Benin before the advent of colonial rule in 1897. It discusses the origin, development, and philosophy behind tribute and tax exaction in pre-colonial Benin. It also investigates the contribution of tribute payment to the sustenance of the Benin kingdom, foregrounding the political, economic, and religious foundations of tribute payment in Benin Kingdom, to show that the philosophy behind the payment of tribute was couched in political (recognition of the superior authority of the king), economic (pecuniary benefit of the *Oba*), and religious terms (providing spiritual protection to the kingdom). The *Oba* (ruler) was regarded as a divine king with authority from the gods and ancestors. The

very existence and prosperity of the people was thought to be tied to the elaborate state rituals performed by the *Oba* and his chiefs. This promoted quasi-voluntary compliance to tribute payment. The importance of legitimizing tax collection in order to improve the efficiency of the system is also considered.

Keywords: tribute system, tax philosophy, political economy, and spiritual sanctification

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Introduction

Before the advent of colonialism in the nineteenth century, the people of Benin developed a well-organized system of tax and tribute exaction. This system was built around the power and authority of the *Oba* (king) and ensured mutual obligations between the rulers and the ruled. The term tribute is commonly described as wealth, often in kind, that one party gives to another as a sign of respect, submission, or allegiance.[1] It is usually associated with an unequal relationship, such as that between an overlord and his subjects. Payment of tribute has a politico-economic dimension of reinforcing superior authority as well as providing for the well-being of the ruler.

The payment of tribute was a practice well entrenched in Benin tradition, as it was generally accepted that the rulers had to be supported by the people. Yet, not much attention has been given to the subject by scholars. The few available works are somewhat fragmented and lack detailed explanation of the philosophy underlying the tribute system. This has resulted in several misconceptions about the tribute system of Benin. For instance, writers such as Egharevba, Igbafe and Ryder discuss the importance

of the tribute system from political and economic perspectives thereby undervaluing its religious significance.[2] Despite the politico-economic nature of tribute payment, the exaction of tribute was inherently religious. The Benin kingdom was a theocratic state with the *Oba* perceived as a god with authority from the ancestors. The payment of tribute was pivotal to the spiritual sanctification of the kingdom and welfare of the people. This study, therefore, examines the various considerations that shaped the payment of tribute in pre-colonial Benin. It discusses the political, economic, and religious dimensions that shaped the tribute system of the Benin kingdom.

There were two main forms of tribute payment in the Benin kingdom. The first was made of taxes paid by the indigenes to their rulers, while the other constituted payments made by the vassal states to the *Oba*. This study focuses on the taxes paid by the former (Benin-speaking communities) and argues that the tribute system was intricately linked with the political, economic, and religious orientation of the society which resulted in quasi-voluntary compliance as there was reciprocal benefit for both the rulers and the ruled. This paper begins with a discussion of the origin of tribute payment in Benin. It then proceeds to consider the development of tribute payment under the second dynasty and finally concludes with a summary that outlines its major findings.

Introduction of Tribute Exaction in Benin

The introduction of tribute payment in Benin can be traced to the extended family system, which was the first major socio-political and economic organization in the area. This was inevitable given the dominance of the extended family system during the early settlement of the Benin people. The extended family (egbee) consisted of a man, his wives, children, and other relatives. It can also be described as an

individual family connected together with a circle of related persons, bound together by mutual loyalty. The emergence of the extended family system is largely connected with the (dense forest) vegetation of the area which made initial habitation and the cultivation of food crops difficult. This necessitated the practice of polygamy in order to maximize resources and increase the manpower strength of the early Benin community which led, in turn, to the emergence of the extended family system as the primordial substratum socio-political, social-economic and socio-cultural institution of the Benin people in which rights and responsibilities were assigned to members according to their positions within the system.[3]

The family head (the oldest male member of the family) known as the Okaegbee was responsible for ensuring the peace and progress of members of the family. He mediated over disputes within the family, and his judgment was final. He also applied sanctions against members of the family who conducted themselves inappropriately in the community. The family head equally mobilized and organized members of the family to carry out agricultural activities. In doing this, the roles of both sexes were clearly defined and acknowledged by all. Usually the men and boys choose the sites, cleared and burnt the bushes, and did most of the planting while women and girls were mostly involved in weddings as well as other less strenuous task in the farmland.[4] The dominance of the male community in agriculture, hunting, and securing the environment may have been the main factors that stimulated the practice of patrilineality whereby Benin's family lineage is traced.

As a religious unit, the family was bound together by kinship ties and a common ancestor cult, recognizing the family head as the priest and believing in the sanction which he wields by virtue of that position.[5] This authority is derived from the belief

that the family head was closest to the ancestor and in the best position to play the role of a mediator between them and their living descendants. When a man dies, his senior son sets up an altar at which to communicate with him or if his father was himself, a senior son takes over the altar at which the latter worshipped his ancestors.[6] The welfare of members of the extended family is believed to depend upon the goodwill of the deceased father and his lineal ancestors. The ancestral spirits were regarded as the most intimate gods of the family which had to be consulted on a daily basis. The ancestors were also believed to have survived death and to be living in the spiritual world (erinmwin) where they still take an active interest in the affairs of their families.[7] Thus, the family head exercised the spiritual authority of interceding between his living dependants and deceased ancestors in order to promote the general well-being of every member of the family.

As a result of the intermediary position of the family head, rights and obligations within the extended family unit was conceived of in terms of a master-servant relationship.[8] This legitimized the extraction of tribute (in the form of services) by the family head from his family members. Thus, the practice of tribute payment in Benin emerged at the extended family level through the voluntary submission of the family members to the authority of the family head. This was mainly expressed through the offering of services to the family head in exchange for spiritual blessings from the ancestors. The offering of this form of tribute provided economic support for the family head. As well, it reinforced his political and spiritual authority within the extended family circle. This philosophy laid the foundation for which the people of Benin paid tribute to their rulers, equally introducinged an anti-democratic element and hierarchical structure into the political life of the people.

The next phase in the evolution of tribute exaction in Benin occurred in the first half of the 1st millennium AD with the integration of the extended families forming independent village communities. This period witnessed the emergence of a three-tier system of age-grade (*otu*) which served as a source of cooperation and recruitment of manpower for undertaking various tasks for the community. This system of Age-grade also served as an avenue through which the male members of the villages paid tribute or offered obligatory services to their communities. In fact, the system of age-grade constituted a form of corvee labour, because their responsibilities were backed by tradition and made compulsory for the teenage and adult male members of the Benin community. This form of taxation was best suited to a non-cash economy where the use of unpaid labour was dominant. The members of the age grade were categorized based on the Edo stereotypes of the three natural stages in the life of an adolescent and adult man. These three stages include the *iroghae*, the *ighele,* and the *edion*.

The *iroghae* consisted of boys usually between about fifteen years and thirty years in age. This age grade basically performed the more menial tasks, among them taking, the annual tribute to Benin City, sweeping the village streets and open spaces, caring for community shrines, and clearing paths leading to farms and other villages. The *ighele* consisted of young adult males aged between thirty to forty-five years whose physical vigour, mental capacity, and technical skills were at their peak.[9] They were responsible for the more difficult communal duties, such as tree felling, house building, and working in the farmlands of the village heads. They also assisted the *iroghae* in any task that proved too onerous for them or otherwise supervised them in whatever they were doing.[10] The *Edion* were the most senior among the age-grades in

the village. It was comprised of the heads of the extended family in the community. They were exempted from the communal manual tasks incumbent upon the other age-grades because of their advanced ages and positions in the community. The members of this group assisted the *Edionwere* in the management of affairs in the Benin communities.

The *Edionwere* were acknowledged as the political and spiritual heads of the Benin communities. They were also considered stewards of the communal landholding, judges on the communal level, and chief priests of the ancestral shrine as well as intermediaries between the communalists and the ancestors. In fact, the prosperity of the communities, the fertility of crops, animals, and men, were thought to be linked with the performance of important rituals as well as the general well-being of the *Edionwere*.[11] One of the most important ceremonies that originated during the period was the festival of the first fruits during which the communalists offered a portion of their newly harvested crops to the *Edionwere* for spiritual sanctification.[12] This offering metamorphosed into the payment of tribute to the *Edionwere* through the offering of food products, such as yam, cocoyam, and palm oil.

It must be emphasized that this form of tribute payment was not based on land grants as the idea of communal land ownership was already well entrenched in Benin during this period. This tribute was paid in acknowledgment of the political and spiritual authority of the *Edionwere*. In a society where the traditional rulers were believed to possess temporal and spiritual powers, the payment of this type of tribute was understandable. As a result, the people voluntarily complied with their obligations to the Benin community. Beyond this, the spirit of communalism was equally vital in promoting the submission of the people, as it prevented civil disobedience and

internal strife which could instigate resistance against the village authority.

However, with the emergence of a kinship system in Benin by the middle of the first millennium AD, the Benin villages came under the authority of a supra-communal political organization. This resulted in the payment of tribute to a supreme ruler whose authority superseded that of the village heads. According to Benin tradition, this system emerged because of the imperialistic ambition of Igodo, the first king of Benin who persuaded about thirty Benin villages to form a kingdom known as 'Igodomigodo' (the historical first name of Benin kingdom). The king legitimized his authority with the claim of a divine commission from the (sky) gods to rule over the sprawling collection of Benin communities. Hence, he adopted the title of *Ogiso*, meaning "king with authority from the sky." This helped to ensure his ideological dominance and control over the Benin society.

Under the rule of the Ogisos, Benin extended its political influence over many communities in the Iyekovia (in the west) and the Iyekorhionmwon area in the east. Some of these include Egor, Erua, Idumwowina, Avbiama, Oka, Idogbo, Utesi, Ughoton, and Ohovbe.[13] The *Ogiso* rulers developed different mechanisms for consolidating their authority in these villages. One of these was effected by sending out their sons to rule over dependent communities. According to Jacob Egharevba,

> [t]he Ogisos used to send their sons out to rule over villages (as enigie) and they continued to owe homage and allegiance to each succeeding Ogiso as their father and overlord. This example was followed by the Obas descending from Oranmiyan in the second period. Osanego, the Onogie of Ego and maternal grandfather of Oba Eweka 1, was the ninth Onogie of Ego and he was ruling at the time of the arrival of Oranmiyan

from Ife.[14]

Through this means, the *Ogisos* increased the amount of wealth generated from tribute payment as more communities were drawn into the orbit of the new authority. It must be realized that the philosophy behind the payment of tribute continued to be couched in political terms (recognition of the superior authority of the king), economic terms (pecuniary benefit of the *Ogiso*) and religious terms (providing spiritual protection for the kingdom). As already mentioned, the *Ogisos* were perceived as divine kings whose priesthood was greater than the *Edionwere*. For instance, Osemwengie Ebohon has identified about nine shrines at Ugbekun (the first capital of the kingdom), which were devoted to the worship of various deities (*Juju*).[15] The people therefore demonstrated their allegiance to the Ogisos through the payment of customary tribute at fixed times of the year. Some of the items provided include yam, palm oil and livestock (such as goats, cattle and fowls). In most cases, the quality of tribute paid to the *Ogiso* was predicated on the population of the subject villages.

The inhabitants of the capital in Benin City were exempted from paying customary tribute to the *Ogiso* due to the limited agricultural activities which took place within its borders. In fact, it was normal for the residents of Benin City to carry out their agricultural activities in the outlying districts where farmland was in abundance. The people of the capital however offered professional services to the *Ogiso* through the guild system. This system was established by Ere, (the successor of Igodo) with the mandate of administering the Benin craftsmen who were scattered all around the kingdom. Through this means, the monarchy became the first point of supply for all the products manufactured by this group. Indeed, the craftsmen became

very vital in providing the needs of the monarch and the palace in general. Oral tradition records that the Benin kings did not pay for goods and services rendered to them because the guild activities were taken to be the people's contribution towards their monarchs' welfare.[16]

The first groups of craft guild were the *Owina* (traditional carpenters), *Igbesamwan* (wood and ivory carvers) and *Igunematon* (ironsmiths). This was followed by the setting up of other numerous guilds that served various purposes to the Benin monarch. These associations of craftsmen ensured that some of the specific needs of the monarch were met in exchange for monopoly rights in their respective trades.[17] The *Iheku* festival introduced during the *Ogiso* period also served as a means by which the monarch encouraged competition and excellence among the craftsmen. The best craftsmen were retained by the ruling aristocracy, and these privileged few were later the nucleus of the famed Benin craft guilds that put their talents and skills into the service of the state.[18]

It is important to point out that the power of the Benin monarch witnessed a slight decline under the rule of the *Odionwere Ogiso*. This group of rulers was installed after the collapse of the first *Ogiso* dynasty but due to their senility proved unable to maintain the internal cohesion in the kingdom. It was under these circumstances that Udo, a community situated about 24 km north-west of Benin City stopped paying tribute to the *Ogisos* and declared its independence. This state of affairs forced the twenty-fourth *Ogiso* ruler, Odoligie to adopt military means as an instrument of state policy to reintegrate the breakaway community. The military defeat meant that Udo and her allied villages in the Iyekovia area recommenced the payment of tribute to Benin City. It would appear that Benin faced a series of internal insurrections under

the *Odionwere Ogisos*, because they lacked the aura of mysticism associated with the kings under the first (*Ogiso*) dynasty. The fact that the rulers were selected from amongst the heads of the different Benin communities meant that they were considered in the same light as *Edionwere* not as semi-divine kings with authority from the sky gods. Thus, under the rule of Odoligie, military action was required as a means of sustaining the territorial integrity of the kingdom.

However, the rule of the *Ogiso* collapsed around the thirteenth century due partly to internal feuds and the tyranny of *Ogiso* Owodo.[19] This created a state of political instability in Benin as some subordinate communities in the Iyekorhionmwon and Iyekovia area reasserted their independence. This meant that the territorial boundary of Benin was reduced to only a few communities in and around the capital city.[20] Many of the rebel chieftains argued that they owed allegiance not to the elders or administrators in the city but to the *Ogiso*.[21] This was obviously a period of political exigency in Benin as the administrators lacked the political clout or the military strength to effectively coerce the rebel communities. This phase is popularly described as the period of interregnum in Benin history. It marked the period of transition between the rule of the *Ogiso* and the emergence of a new dynasty in Benin.

Tribute Extraction under the Second Dynasty (The Rule of the *Oba*)

The historical process that gave rise to the emergence of the new dynasty has remained a subject of debate among historians. The main point of disagreement has revolved around the source of authority of the new dynasty. One group of writers ascribes Ile-Ife origin to the emergence of the dynasty. This group mainly comprises Yoruba historians who contend that the new dynasty emerged as an offshoot of the royal house of Ife. However, another group of writers (Benin historians) countered that the

Benin dynasty emerged through a process of internal historical evolution. This group attempts to draw an unbroken link between the rule of the *Ogiso* and the new dynasty (Oranmiyan/Eweka ancestral line). They also demonstrate that the Ife monarchy derives its legitimacy from Benin. While it may be difficult to truly ascertain the place of Ife in the emergence of the second Benin dynasty, the accounts of the early European explorers who visited Benin in the 16th century clearly indicate that the kingdom was under the spiritual authority of an overlord who played a major role during the coronation of the *Oba* (king of Benin). Alan Ryder articulates this position in this way:

> Agents of the king of Portugal found there not only slaves, pepper and a powerful state, but a divine kingship and reports of a spiritual potentate known to the Binis as Ogane. His realm lay the east of Benin over which he exercised some kind of suzerainty through his power of investing the Oba with the indispensable insignia of royalty. At the end of the fifteenth century, it was already an ancient custom that when an Oba died his successor sent messengers with valuable gifts to this Ogane: they announced the death of their ruler and asked for the insignia in the name of the new Oba. By these same messengers the Ogane sent back the emblems of royalty consisting of a staff, a head piece shaped like a Spanish helmet and a cross which the Oba wore on a chain round his neck: all were made of brass. Enquiry also produced the information that the land of the Ogane laid twenty month's journey from Benin, bordering that of another powerful ruler known as Licosago one hundred leagues to the east.[22]

Although, it remains unclear the level of influence which the overlord wielded in Benin but the balance of evidence suggests that his authority was restricted to the coronation ritual of the monarch. This means that Benin was not reduced to a vassal or tributary state of the Ogane but merely sought his blessings during the coronation of the *Oba*. This may have been necessary in order to legitimize and enhance the mystical powers of the *Oba*. As explained by Adiele Afigbo, "in the kind of environment that engendered the belief in the 'brotherhood' of neighbouring monarchs, it would be nothing usual for one crowned head to go to an elder or more powerful brother for the settlement of a dispute…Nor would it be anything unusual to obtain the 'brothers' blessing during his accession and coronation."[23] This means that the investiture of the *Oba* of Benin by the Ogane need not be seen as evidence of a sovereign-vassal relationship.

Here it is important to note that despite the spiritual authority of the Ogane, the first three *Oba* (kings) of the new dynasty were faced with competing claims for power which limited their authority in the polity. Oral tradition records that the power of these rulers were restrained by the Uzama chiefs (kingmakers) who treated them on the basis of near equality (*primus inter pares*). This group of hereditary chiefs possessed some of the attributes of kingship which enabled them assume the position of territorial lords over the villages in which they resided and exact tribute from their subjects without recourse to the *Oba*.[24] These group of rulers also faced considerable resistance from a rival dynasty (the Ogiamien faction) who exercised *de facto* authority over Benin City and held tenaciously to the royal stool of the *Ogiso* (the emblem of traditional authority). This development meant that the different contenders for power received tribute from their subjects, thereby limiting the capacity of anyone of

them to establish effective control over the vast majority of Benin people. It would ultimately require military action as well as financial inducement from Ewedo, the fourth ruler of the Oranmiyan/Eweka dynasty to overcome the forces of Ogiamien at the battle of Ekiokpagha in c 1255AD.

With this victory, *Oba* Ewedo brought Benin City under his sole authority. He further strengthened his position by instituting a number of reforms which made him the dominant power in the Benin region. First, he capacitated the Uzama chiefs and subordinated them to his authority as mere chiefs who presided over the crowning ceremony of the king.[25] Second, he took possession of the royal stool, and erected his royal palace on the territory which had hitherto been the public cemetery of the *Ogiso*.[26] This gave him and his successors control over the ancestral cult and the shrine of the *Ogiso*. Furthermore, he created an association of palace officials who were dedicated to the service of the *Oba*. The senior association (*Iwebo*) was generally responsible for the maintenance of the *Oba's* wardrobe and regalia. Within the course of time, this association progressively acquired oversight responsibilities in matters of finance and trade. The second association, *Iweguae*, functioned as the *Oba's* domestic servants and personal assistants. They also acted as palace spies for the king in the event of any impending danger.[27] The third and finally palace association, the *Ibiwe* society catered for the *Oba's* wives and children; the title of its senior chief, Osodin, has equally been traced to Ewedo.[28]

All these reforms strengthened the political and religious authority of the Oba of Benin. It also improved the *Oba's* capacity to extract (labour) tribute from his subjects. Under Ewedo, the awe and prestige associated with the Benin monarchy was restored. This encouraged the influx of migrants into Benin City and the submission

of neighbouring communities to the authority of the *Oba*. This trend was sustained by the successors of *Oba* Ewedo such as Oguola and Ewuare who mobilized their subjects in the task of constructing huge ramparts and trenches. Calculations have suggested that it could have taken about 5000 men working continuously for ten hours in one dry season to have completed the innermost wall.[29] The fact that the earthwork of Benin City constitutes the largest man-made structure in the world reflects not only the organizational capacity of the rulers but the level of submission of the people to the authority of these kings. Comments made by Fred Pearce in the *New Scientist* reinforce this position. According to Pearce,

> [t]he earth work extends for some 16,000 kilometers in all, in a mosaic of more than 500 interconnected settlement boundaries. They cover 6,500 square kilometers and were all dug by the Edo people. In all, they are four times longer than the Great Wall of China, and consumed a hundred times more material than the Great Pyramid of Cheops (in Giza, Egypt). They took an estimated 150million hour of digging to construct, and are perhaps the largest single archaeological phenomenon on the planet.[30]

Although details about the method of conscription are not well known, it would appear that the various community heads (under the authority of the *Oba*) obtained man-power from the *Ighele* age-grade association. Through the performance of this activity, these members paid tribute or demonstrated their allegiance to the *Oba*. The idea that the people's welfare rested on their absolute devolution to the *Oba* (semi-divine king) served as a major stimulus against civil disobedience or resistance against the central authority.

Indeed, the religious authority of the Benin monarchy was reinforced by the other powerful kings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries such as *Oba* Ewuare, Ozolua, and Esigie. During this period, the annual cycle of royal ceremonies was introduced. The most important of these ceremonies were *Ugie Erha Oba*, in which the royal ancestors were honoured, and *Igue*, which strengthen the mystical powers of the Oba.[31] These ceremonies reinforced the spiritual authority of the *Oba* as the chief priest and living representative of God in the kingdom who mediated between the people and the royal ancestors. The elegant and elaborate ceremonial costumes worn by the king and chiefs of Benin (especially the coral bead regalia) were also introduced during this period.[32] This symbolic dressing gave a god-like appearance to the *Oba*. As expressed by Chief Ihaza, "when the king is wearing this heavy beaded costume, he does not shake or blink but stays still and unmoving. As soon as he sits down on the throne he is not a human being but a god."[33]

All these created a sense of pride and security for the people of Benin who began to regard themselves as Ovien-*Oba*, meaning "slave of the *Oba"* or "free subjects of the throne". They wore the same body markings and considered themselves superior to all their neigbours.[34] The Benin communities were therefore bound together by the belief that their well-being depended on the proper deployment of the *Oba's* own divine energy, and of ritual authority as the intermediary with his predecessors; and upon their acceptance of the need for the king, chiefs, and people to cooperate in ensuring that these functions were fruitfully deployed.[35] For instance in 1918, when the *Oba* failed to perform the annual *Ugie-erha-Oba* festival due to the refusal of some titleholders to participate, there was restiveness among the Benin people, as this was believed to be the cause of deaths and disasters resulting from an influenza

epidemic. [36] All these indicate that the Benin people looked forward to the *Oba* for protection, prosperity and good fortune. This stimulated the payment of tribute to the *Oba* as a mark of recognition of their political and religious role in the society.

During the reign of these kings, Benin was transformed from a relatively small kingdom into a vast empire incorporating many Benin and non-Benin groups. These warrior kings conquered neighbouring Ekiti and Owo Yoruba groups, some of the Igbo groups west of the Niger, Idah in the Middle belt and majority of the Benin communities. The main thrust of these wars was not only political but economic. The need to extend their influence beyond the Benin region as well as the desire for wealth through taxes, tribute and control of trade routes largely informed the expansionist agenda of these rulers. The success of this objective can be attributed to the judicious utilization of mystical and military strength. As pointed out by Alan Ryder, "the royal house of Benin did not rely solely upon the armed force to extend its influence. It also turned to advantage its prestige in the mysteries of government and the associated magic arts of kingship."[37]

Indeed, it can be argued that the warrior kings depended less on military means to extend their authority over the entire Benin region. This was not only due to strong cultural bond between the people but the mystical abilities and charismatic leadership of these rulers. This gave the people a spiritual coverage or sense of security which promoted near-voluntary submission to the authority of the Benin monarchy. The most notable war of subjugation fought during this period was the conflict between *Oba* Esigie and his brother Arhuaran of Udo. This crisis appears to have been inevitable given the long term Benin-Udo rivalry and the dynastic feud between the two rulers. According to oral tradition, Arhuaran was born just before his brother Esigie but

did not cry immediately after his birth; because this was the way in which birth was announced, Esigie was declared the first born and official heir to Ozolua.[38] In order to avert a succession crisis, Ozolua sent Arhuaran to Udo and installed him as the *Onogie* (duke). However, after the death of their father (Ozolua), Arhuaran of Udo resisted the authority of *Oba* Esigie which led to a war between the two brothers. Arhuaran was eventually defeated and Udo became a subordinate part of the Benin kingdom. After a few months, the Iyase of Udo declared a new war against Benin to avenge Arhuaran's death, whereupon Esigie sent troops to Udo and finally subjugated the entire town.[39] With this victory, the *Oba* re-established his sway over the entire Benin region.

In this region, the Benin kings sustained the age long practice of appointing sons and relatives as heads of dukedoms or, in some cases, as villages heads (*Enogie*). This measure was instrumental in consolidating the authority of the monarchy as well as ensuring the regular payment of tribute to the monarch. The *Oba* also had a firm authority over offshoot dynasties (kingdoms) established outside the Benin region. For instance, the Itsekiri kingdom paid regular tribute to the *Oba* of Benin until the collapse of the monarchy in 1849, while Lagos also demonstrated its allegiance to Benin until the imposition of British rule in 1861. Even after this period, P.A. Talbot mentions that Lagos continued to send gifts to the *Oba* of Benin.[40] This reinforces the point that the Benin monarchy did not rely heavily on military means to extract tribute from the Benin communities and its offshoot kingdoms. Most of the tribute received from these communities was paid voluntarily in line with the laid down customs and traditions of the people.

It is important to point out that the payment of tribute was organized on two

major levels in line with the administrative structure of the kingdom. At the village level (in the Benin region), levies of yam tubers and palm oil were demanded by the village heads on every production unit or at times on the production units of only the members of the *Edion* age-grade, for the worship of the village or clan's ancestors (*Erinmwin-Edion*), and deity (*Ebo*), when the need arose.[41] The village heads also demanded the forelimbs of some rare animals (categorized as *Ahanmwen-Okhuen*), like antelopes and warthogs, which when hunted down were equally given as tribute to the village heads.[42] These items were considered to be ritual gifts or vessels for the spiritual sanctification of the communities. Beyond this, all non-Benin settlers were equally required to pay a tribute of four tubers of yam. This type of tribute was called *Akorhore* and was paid as a token of gratitude for the land they received from the Benin community.

At the kingdom level, the village headmen were required to demonstrate their allegiance to the Benin monarchy through the payment of customary tribute. This form of tribute was referred to as *Imuohan* (state of fear tribute) or in some cases *Izohen* (gift).[43] It was levied bi-annually and usually consisted of yam tubers, livestock, antelope, kegs of palm oil, and mats. For the conquered areas outside the kingdom, the local rulers were made to pay a fixed part of their appropriation from their subjects to the Benin ruling aristocracy.[44] This tribute was called *Ugamwen* (which literally means service), and it was paid in the form of slaves, livestock and local manufacturers. During periods of need or emergencies, the *Oba* also imposed a special tribute (incident tax) on the subordinate communities. This tribute was very common during the period of the Trans-Atlantic commerce with Europeans owing to the huge product demand that was associated with the trade.

It is worthy of note that in order to ensure efficiency in tribute collection, the *Oba* constituted all the subordinate communities into tribute units and placed them under the control of sponsors referred to as *Enotueyevbo* (singular- *Onotueyevbo*). These officials acted as intermediaries through whom the villagers and dependent communities approached the *Oba* for a variety of reasons such as payment of tribute, presentation of petitions, and appeals to the *Oba*. They were also the channel through which the *Oba* recruited soldiers for the state army and obtained manpower for the execution of public works such as the rebuilding of the *Oba's* palace. They, therefore, served as the major link between their communities and the *Oba*.

In return for their services, these chiefs were usually allowed to retain part of the tribute paid by villages under them during some of the numerous festivals of pre-colonial Benin.[45] They could also demand labour tribute and gifts from those who sought their protection. Hence, it was possible for these officials to amass wealth and gain popularity in a manner that could constitute a threat to the *Oba*. This made it necessary for the Benin monarchy to institute certain measures to prevent any ambitious chief (sponsor) from acquiring too much power. First, they were made to reside in Benin City and appoint delegates who carried out their instructions in the villages under them. Second, their unit was dispersed through the territory in order to prevent any chief from gaining too much influence in a particular geographical area. Third, most of their titles were non-hereditary which prevented any permanent association of the villages with their sponsors. Fourth, the *Oba* had the authority to redistribute tribute units at his will. Finally, the king himself had messengers whom he sent out to report to him directly, and in some cases, he stationed his own agents permanently in tributary towns and villages.[46]

It is interesting to point out that the right of these agents to receive tribute was founded on political and economic grounds (like the *Oba* and the village heads). In most cases, these officials were appointed based on the political designation (status) of the communities. In a "royal domain" that is a community directly under the *Oba*, the local representation was entrusted to one of the household officials (*Eghaivo N'Ogbe*), who was entitled to only a small fraction of the tribute.[47] However, in "fiefs" granted to members of the town chiefs (*Eghaevbo n'Ore*) for their war exploits, these individuals were entitled to retain the larger part of the tribute which ensured wealth for the holders.

Apart from the customary tribute received from his subjects,the *Oba* was also entitled to rents, tolls and levies from foreigners. For instance, the Ijo and Itsekiri fishermen who exploited the rivers and streams of Benin paid rents to the *Oba*. The *Oba* also received tolls collected from traders at the entrance to the capital city. For this purpose, there were nine entrance gates into the city corresponding to the nine access routes to the *Oba's* palace. The amount paid by the traders was proportional to the value of goods carried. Beyond this, the *Oba* collected a market levy from traders (usually women) who operated in the kingdom. This was either paid in the form of indigenous currencies such as cowries, manilas, copper rods or in kind (food stuffs). This levy was collected and enforced (on behalf of the *Oba*) by a group referred to as *Ikpate* or *Isienmwenro*.[48] The revenue collected from all these sources were stored in a special section of the palace referred to *Owigho* (house of money). In addition to this, European traders were made to pay homage to the *Oba* with gifts. Captain John Adams observed,

> it is the practice here for masters of vassals to pay the king a visit

> soon after their arrival; and such a ceremony is seldom allowed to be dispensed with, as on these occasions the black monarch receives a handsome present, consisting of a piece of silk damask, a few yards of scarlet cloth, and some strings of coral.[49]

The *Oba* equally reserved the right to demand labour tribute for his subjects for the upkeep of the royal buildings, and to recruit soldiers for the state army. Olfert Dapper pointed out in his account of 1668 that

> [t]he kings of Benin can in a single day make 20,000 men ready for war, and if need be, 180,000 and because of this he has great influence among all the surrounding peoples… His authority stretches over many cities, towns, and villages. There is no king thereabouts who is in the possession of so many beautiful cities and towns, or is his equal.[50]

The variety of tributes received by the *Oba* is an illustration of the power wielded by the Benin monarchy in the pre-colonial period especially during the reign of the warrior kings. As noted in the records of D.V. Nyendael who visited Benin between 1699 and 1702,

> the king has very good income for his territories are very large and full of governors and each one knows how many bags of boesjes (cowries) the money of this country he must raise annually for the king, which amount to a vast sum, which it is impossible for me to estimate. Others of a lower rank than the former, instead of money, deliver cattle, sheep, fowls, yams, and cloths, in short, whatever he wants for his housekeeping; so that he

> is not put to one farthing expense on that account and consequently he lays up his whole pecuniary revenue untouched…every place where he lives for the liberty of trading, he sends a part of it to the king hence the king can estimate what he has to expect annually[51]

Beyond this, all leopards hunted down and one tusk of every elephant killed in the empire had to be given to the *Oba*. The *Oba* also had the prerogative of buying the second tusk of every elephant killed everywhere in the empire. The payment of different forms of tribute by the subordinate communities enabled the ruling aristocracy to accumulate surplus products. This not only gave them access to wealth but also enhanced their social status in society. However, it is important to emphasize that the payment of tribute in the Benin kingdom was not conceived of only in economic terms. As already mentioned, the concept of tribute payment (especially among the Benin communities) as a religious and political obligation took precedence over any other considerations. Hence, one would not totally agree with Uyilawa Usanlele that the accumulation of surplus products (tribute) enabled the ruling class to "further perpetuate the exploitation and domination of the rest of the people of the kingdom."[52] This was because the Benin communities felt necessary obligated to demonstrate their loyalty to the monarchy due to the general perception that the *Oba* was a supreme ruler (semi-divine king) who granted spiritual protection to his people. The elaborate court rituals performed by the *Oba* and his chiefs were believed to promote the welfare of the people. Thus, the *Oba* was not only the supreme priest but also an object of worship himself (and the tribute paid to him was to some extent regarded as a kind of sacrifice).[53]

There is therefore no basis to the argument of Macrae Simpson (a British

Colonial Officer in Benin) that the peasants were battered by the aristocrats.[54] In the first place, Simpson based his judgment on the physical appearance of the two classes, not on any real investigation. In his exact words, "there is a marked difference, both mentally and physically, between the aristocratic leisured class and the peasantry. The former are generally well-built, of light complexion, and intelligent of face, while the latter are squat, darker, and unprepossessing in appearance".[55] In addition, Simpson does not discuss the ways in which the peasants were exploited by the ruling class. It is important to point out that the ruling class comprised members of the royal family, the chiefs and elders of the communities. Although these personalities demanded service from the people, they also performed important sacrifices and rituals which ensured the general well-being of the kingdom.

Furthermore, the *Oba* also carried out some secular functions which promoted peace and security in the kingdom. Some of these duties included the preservation of Benin culture and traditions, the judicature, and the appointment of village heads. The *Oba* also catered for the destitute, orphans, disabled, and, in some cases, banished sorcerers. Apart from this, the fact that tribute payment (per household) usually took on a token character meant that the tax regime was not geared towards the exploitation of the people. Even among the vassal states (non-Benin-speaking groups), the method of assessment was not very harsh so as not to force the local rulers into rebellion. Many of these states were equally granted a large measure of internal autonomy as long as they complied with their obligations to the kingdom. It is also pertinent to add that the act of tribute payment (gift-giving) permeated other aspects of the social fabric of the Benin kingdom. For instance, it was common for the younger members of the society to give gifts to the elders during weddings, funerals,

and manhood initiation ceremonies. All these demonstrate the pervasiveness of the tribute culture within the Benin society.

Conclusion

As this study has shown, pre-colonial Benin was a traditional society where the *Oba* were regarded as divine kings with authority from the gods and ancestors. The very existence and prosperity of the people was thought to be tied to the elaborate state rituals performed by the *Oba* and his chiefs. These rituals created a "sense of security" or "psychological reassurance" that the people's interest was protected by the *Oba*. In fact, the people considered themselves as slaves (subjects) of the *Oba*. Consequently, the payment of tribute was one of the people's obligations to the kingdom. It marked the people's allegiance to the political and religious authority of the king. Thus, the politico-religious authority of the *Oba* legitimized the payment of tribute which, in turn, provided the economic resources to sustain the political structure. This interconnection between politics, religion, and economy created quasi-voluntary compliance to tribute payment. The political economy of tribute collection in pre-colonial Benin invariably demonstrates the importance of an ideological connection between the government and its taxable people. This is particularly important given the level of resistance that characterized the colonial tax systems in Africa.

Endnotes

1. See https:en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribute.
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Sue Matheson

THE DYNAMICS OF BELIEF

A hall of mirrors, with multiple reflections of the same details, is as pertinent to the thinking of today's world as saturation mind bombing. Belief in the invisible is part of who we are, helped engineer a system where miracles were nothing if not a foretaste of today.

Whose interests were vested in these ideas? Whose purposes were served? So often, they caused large redistributions of power, disrupted the effects of sociopolitical elites, generated belief in ecstatic trances, levitation, teleportation, stigmatization and endless rapture.

To comprehend irradiance is to vivify, a kind of supernatural footnote to the finest minds. Modern life isn't a prophesied future so much as the spiritual turmoil that came soon after. Hierarchy rejects any kind of inclusion, prefers the rational to foolishness and all superstition.

Devils take over, radio and television become the bedrock upon which our religions are built: deep and unshakable faith in wonder-working and risky liminal fields of unpredictable study. Virtually everything we worship has been exalted around the world at the most unexpected moments.

Music and the beauty of nature are common triggers for new constructions of reality. Many told us what they thought about the possibility of the impossible. Fix your eyes heavenward, listen to the sounds of angels gyrating, singing, dancing, champion irrationality and enjoy the seductive dynamics of belief.

—Rupert M. Loydell

Interrogating Women's Representation and Participation in Nigeria's Electoral Processes from 1999-2023

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Abstract

Despite efforts made by government and non-governmental organizations to increase the level of women's representation and participation in governance, Nigeria has continued to record low participation and representation of women in her electoral process. Feminist scholars attribute these low turnouts of women to the country's political space and structures being controlled by men. This paper interrogates this widely-held view, arguing that women are the architects of their electoral plight and concludes they need to engineer mass mobilizations and their own support during election contests.

Keywords: Architect, Elections and Men, Participation, Politics and Women.

Introduction

Since the return to democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999, there has been growing concern from academics, policy makers, international organizations, and Nigerians in general about the low representation and participation of women in the country's elections. Concerted affirmative action efforts by government and non-governmental organizations have failed to meet the National Gender Policy's (NGP) affirmative action recommendation to raise women's representation and participation to 35 per cent. While Nigeria's women comprise about 49 per cent of the country's total population, available statistics that the national average of their political participation and representation has remained at 6.7 per cent in elective and appointive positions, far below the Global Average of 22.5 per cent, Africa's Regional Average of 23.4 per cent, and the West African Sub Regional Average of 15 per cent (Adeleke, 2015, p. 34). In the 1999 to 2023 election cycles, the percentage of women elected in the country's legislative system has also remained low. The percentage of women in the country's Federal Executive Council is infinitesimal, and no woman has been elected as a state governor in any of the 36 states of the Federation.

In other countries, the percentage of women in governance is steadily increasing. European Union (EU) countries, like Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Germany, Austria and Belgium, have achieved the 30 per cent of women in governance, the affirmative action prescribed by the Beijing Conference (Akinyemi, 2022, p. 324). In Africa, Burundi, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda have achieved the affirmative action target of having 30 per cent women in their respective

parliaments (Akinyemi, 2022, p. 325). Women in some countries have served as their countries' Heads of Government and Presidents. In Latin America, Michelle Bachelet became the first female President in Chile; Dilma Rousseff, the first female President of Brazil; and Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, the first female President of Argentina. In Asia, Yingluck Shinawatra was elected the first female Prime Minister of Thailand; Khaleda Zia, first female Prime Minister of Bangladesh; Benazir Bhutto, the first female Prime Minister of Pakistan; and Megawati Sukarnoputri, the first female President of Indonesia. In Europe, Tansu Ciller was elected the first female Prime Minister of Turkey; Edith Cresson, the first female Premier of France; and Angele Merkel, first female German Chancellor (Hogeback, 2012, p. 1). Currently, women are serving in 13 of the 193 member states of the United Nations as Heads of Government (Clancy & Austine, 2023, p. 3).

Inadequate representation and participation of women in Nigeria's electoral space has been often explained or linked to patriarchal practices—a socio-cultural system that privileges maleness over femaleness and enthrones masculine domination of women (Uchendu, 2022). The extant literature on women's inadequate representation and particiapation of women in Nigerian governance is replete with discussions about men's marginalization of women. Momodu, 2003; Agbalajobi, 2009; Quadri, 2013; Allanana, 2013; Adeleke, 2015; Oluyemi, 2013; Ngara & Ayabam, 2013; and Quadri, 2018 all examine how the country's political space and structures are being controlled by men to the neglect of women and argue that women have long faced sexism and other challenges while actively participating in governance controlled and dominated by men. Some also point out how women in Nigeria are besieged with discriminatory laws, policies and traditional practices that have long existed and remained endemic

in the 21st century. Accordingly, women do not have access to the financial resources needed to effectively participate on an equal basis with their male counterparts while electioneering. Little interrogation, however, has taken place regarding the lack of support that women enjoy from their fellow women during elections in Nigeria.

Gender and Nigeria's Electoral Process: Towards a Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

Since calls for democratization heralded the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, calls for gender equality have also grown in importance. The active participation of women in the electoral process and political developments, in particular, has become a serious global effort. Many international organizations, among them, the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU). and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) insist on the involvement of women in the developmental and electoral processes of states as conditions for aid (Quadri, 2018, p. 3). On the heels of claims of women's subjugation, subordination, oppression and alienation in Nigeria's election process, this insistence has become imperative.

Conservative theorists who believe women are inferior to men support traditional gender roles, gender-based stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes and norms against women in Nigeria by returning to the historical origins of men's domination (Adereti, 2005, p. 512). They argue that the spheres of politics and public life belong to men, because men are, on average, heavier, taller, and physically stronger than women. As Schumpeter points out, individuals (men) acquire political power via a competitive struggle for the people's vote (Adhiambo-Ochuol, 2002, 215). In Nigeria, this struggle is dominated by men—hence their authority and control in the country's electoral

process.

A complex and comprehensive arrangement of activities that transcends voting (ERC, 2008, p. 6), Nigeria's electoral process embraces the creation and maintenance of the legal and political frameworks for the system it serves, and, more generally, for the regulation, management, and administration of elections. Significant components of the electoral process are the electoral system and election administration and management, which include constituency delimitation, size of the legislature, voter eligibility rules, voter registration, and the party system. Election administration and management also include party funding, party access to the mass media, party nomination processes, electioneering, the balloting system, distribution of polling centers, the vote counting process, announcement of results, adjudication of election disputes, and voter education (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006, p. 8). The electoral process accommodates within its orbit all the institutional procedures, arrangements, and actions involved in elections. It includes election observation and verification activities carried out by local or international bodies or both. It also includes the establishment of institutions and structures that mobilize the populace towards involvement in political activities, and provides the rules and regulations that govern the process (Chukwu, 2005, p. 538). It embraces a wide range of political activities that cut across the three stages of election which are: pre-, during, and post-election periods. The dynamics of the electoral process requires matters such as the registration of voters, method of voting, election time table, voting, collation of results, announcement of results, and resolution of electoral disputes. It involves competition, mobilization and canvassing of votes, and support amongst groups. As an encompassing concept that allows for political mobilization and support in a

world of scare resources and the scramble for such resources by groups, it is logical for women, rather than blame men for their electoral misfortunes, to mobilize other women to support the electoral process. Such mobilization must span pre-election activities to the day of election. This will prepare women to be a group ready to compete with men in the country's elections. .

Women's Representation and Participation in Nigeria's Electoral Process: Historical Perspective

Before 1914, there was nothing like Nigeria. The territory that is today called Nigeria was occupied by ethnic nationalities, amon them, the Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Fulani, Tiv, Kanuri, Jukun, Bini, and Idoma. These ethnic nationalities had their respective socio-political settings. Among the Hausa, Fulani, and Yoruba, the political system was centralized with Obas and Emirs as political leaders. The Igbo and Tiv had decentralized political systems. Fundamentally, women were an integral part of the political constituency of their communities. In pre-colonial Bornu, women played active roles in the administration of the state, complementing those played by their male counterparts (Oluyemi, 2013, p. 5). Women also played very important roles in the ancient political history of Zaria. The modern city of Zaria, for example, was founded by Queen Amina Bakwa in the 16th century (Oluyemi, 2013, p. 5). Queen Amina was a great and powerful warrior who restructured Zaria and made the city a commercial centre. In ancient Yorubaland, where the Oba ruled with the assistance of a number of women referred to as female traditional chiefs. This group consisted of eight titled ladies of the highest rank (Oluyemi, 2016, pp. 5-8). To the East of Nigeria, the Igbo were not a patrilineal people (Kies, 2013, p. 5). Men, elders, and chiefs were important; so too were women—daughters, wives and mothers were an essential and

important part of everyday family life and politics. Women were known to be good mobilizers, and all women were embraced by or benefitted from the solidarity of women, which provided a matriarchal umbrella (Amadiume, 2002, p. 65). Similarly, among the Igbo, men knew that to take on one Igbo woman was to take on Igbo women as a whole as even power was not defined as socially deviant (Kies, 2013, p. 6). Elsewhere, the significant role played by prominent women such as Moremi of lfe, Emotan of Benin and Omu Okwei of Ossomari, cannot be ignored. Moremi and Emotan were great amazons who displayed wonderful bravery and strength in the politics of lfe and Benin respectively, while Omu Okwei dominated the commercial scene of Ossomari in what is now the present day Delta State (Oluyemi, 2013, p. 8).

British colonialism, however, affected the rights of Nigerians. The role of women in Nigeria's socio-economic and political space became restricted. Even then, Nigerian women mobilized and rallied around their fellow women to challenge unwelcome British policies, for example, in the Aba women revolt of 1929 and Akpanya women resistance movement of 1940 (Kies, 2013, p. 7; Vaaseh and Danladi, 2015, p. 29). Apart from these revolts, women, like Margaret Ekpo, challenged the British and mobilized others who demanded for women franchise. This led to the granting of suffrage to women in southern Nigeria by the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 and the appointment of three women, viz Chief (Mrs) Olufunmilayo Ransome Kuti (appointed into the Western Nigeria House of Chiefs) and Chiefs (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo and Janet Mokelu (both appointed into the Eastern Nigeria House of Chiefs) (Olurode, 2013, p. 9). The 1959 general elections that ushered in Nigeria's independence, however, did not witness the election of women. With Nigeria's independence in 1960, Mrs. Wuraola Esan from Western Nigeria became the first female member of the Federal

Parliament. In 1961, Chief (Mrs) Margaret Ekpo contested and won her seat in that election, becoming a member of the Eastern Nigeria House of Assembly. Mrs. Janet N. Mokelu and Miss Ekpo A. Young also contested elections and won. They became members of the Eastern House of Assembly. In northern Nigeria, however, women were still denied franchise which was finally granted under the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The 1979 general election that ushered in the Second Republic (1979-1983), also saw little participation of women in the country's electoral politics. In the five political parties that contested elections during this period, all the Presidential and Vice-President candidates were men. At the state level, out of all the Governors and Deputy Governors in the then 19 states structure of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, only two female Deputy Governors were presented by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) out of five parties. The executive arms of government in both the federal and state levels housed only 2 (1.0%) women while men made up the balance (99.0%) (Oluyemi, 2013, 10). No woman won a seat out of the 95 Senate seats, and only two women won membership seats out of the 449 in the House of Representatives in the 1979 general elections. The same poor showing was repeated in the 1983 general elections when less than 100 women ran for the 12,000 political offices in all the tiers of government. Four (4) women ran for the Senatorial seats and gained only one—Ms Franca Afegbua won and became the first female senator in Nigeria. Two (2) women ran for vice gubernatorial positions; seventy-one (71) seats in State House of Assemblies were contested by women (Momodu, 2003, p. 213). The near absence of women in the country's electoral process continued until the early hours of 31st December 1983, when the military coup of Major General Muhammadu Buhari

ousted the civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari.

The military administration of Major General Buhari was silent on te subject of elections. However, the military administration of General Ibrahim Babangida made democratic efforts that heralded the comin of the Third Republic (1990-1993). Then, in the 1990, transition elections saw the emergence of a handful of women in the country's electoral process. At the local government level, a few women became councillors, and only one (1) woman emerged as the Chairperson of a Local Government Council. During the 2nd of January 1992 gubernatorial elections, no female governor emerged in any of the then thirty (30) states. Interestingly, only two female Deputy Governors were elected: Alhajia Sinatu Ojikutu of Lagos State and Mrs. Cecilia Ekpenyong of Cross River State. Also, in the 4th July 1992 National Assembly elections, Mrs. Kofo Bucknor-Akerele was the only woman who won a seat in the Senate, and Chief (Mrs) Florence Ita Giwa was one of the few women who won election in the House of Representatives (Akinyemi, 2022, p. 410). During the June 12, 1993 presidential election, there were only two presidential candidates—Chief MKO Abiola and Alhaji Bashir Tofa and their running mates—Baba Kingibe and Dr. Sylvester Ugoh were men. During party primary elections, Mrs. Sarah Jubril did become the first female presidential aspirant, she, however, finished in the fourth position (Samuel, 2021, p. 8). The annulment of the election by General Ibrahim Babangida, and the subsequent inauguration of an Interim National Government that was toppled by General Sani Abacha via the 17th November 1993 military coup, marked the collapse of the Third Republic. As a result, General Sani Abacha's democratic transition efforts that led to the 1998 National Assembly elections saw poor representation and participation of women in the country's electoral process: out of the one hundred and nine (109)

Senatorial seats in the country, only eight (8) women were elected into the Senate and sixteen (16) women won seats out of the three hundred and sixty-nine (369) in the Federal House of Representatives (Oluyemi, 2013, p. 11). The death of General Abacha in June 1998 truncated this democratic effort as General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who emerged as the country's Head of State, disbanded all the political parties and began a transition programme that culminated when the 1999 general election returned democratic governance.

Democratic Governance and Women Representation and Participation in the Country's Electoral Process, 1999-2023

Many Nigerians heaved a sigh of relief with the return of democratic government in 1999. With democratic governance, it was hoped the myriads of nation-building challenges confronting the post-colonial Nigeria would be addressed. It was also hoped that liberal democracy through constitutional arrangements would address the lack of equilibrium in men/women representation in governance and participation in the country's electoral politics. Sadly, after seven (7) election cycles, women's representation and participation in the country's electoral process was and still is worrisome, as Nigeria is yet to record te affrimative action of 30 and 35 per cent women in governance as recommended by the 1995 Beijing Women Conference and the National Gender Policy. In the country's legislative elections, beginning from 1999 when democracy was returned to the conduct of the 2023 general election, women were grossly underrepresented in the National Assembly, as seen in Table 1 on the following page.

Table 1: Number of Women Elected to the country's National Assembly, 1999-2003

S/N	Electoral Year	Senate	House of Representatives
1	1999	3	12
2	2003	4	21
3	2007	9	26
4	2011	7	25
5	2015	7	19
6	2019	8	13
7	2023	3	17

Source: Compiled by the Author from various National Dailies.

A systematic analysis of the above table reveals that in the country's legislative politics, women have continued to trail behind men. Durinng the 1999 general election, three (3) women (2.8%) were elected as Senators out of the one hundred and nine (109) Senatorial seats and thirteen (13) women (3.3%) in House of Representatives out of the three hundred and sixty (360) Federal Houses of Representatives seats. During the 2003 general election, that number increased slightly as four (4) women (3.7%) were elected to the Senate and twenty-one (21) women (5.8%)were elected to the Federal House of Representatives. In the 2007 electioneering year, the number increased as the National Assembly had nine (9) female Senators (8.3%) and twenty-six (26) female members (7.2%) of the Federal House of Representatives—the highest number of women since the return of democracy. In 2011, female representation decreased as the National Assembly had seven (7) women (6.4%) in the Red Chambers and twenty-five (25) women (6.9%)in the Green Chambers. The number continued to decrease as during the 2015 National legislative elections, the National Assembly had seven

(7) women (6.4%) that were elected to the Senate and nineteen (19) women (5.2%) in the House of Representatives. It is worrisome to note the continuous decline in the number of women representatives in the National Assembly as the 2019 parliamentary election had only eight (8) women in the Senate and thirteen (13) women in the Green Chambers of the National Assembly. Finally, during the 2023 National Assembly elections, three (3) per cent women (2.8) were elected to the Senate and seventeen (17) women were elected to the Federal House of Representatives.

In the states' Houses of Assembly, the number of women representatives was also abysmally low. During the 1999 general elections, out of the nine hundred and seventy-eight (978) contestable seats in all the states' Houses of Assembly, men won nine hundred and sixty-six 966 positions (98.8%), while women won only twelve (12) positions (1.2%) (Adeleke, 2015, p. 35). In the 2003 general elections, out of the available seats in all the states' Houses of Assembly, women won 39 seats (4.0%), and men occupied 912 seats (96.0%) (Salau et al, 2021, p. 21). Similarly, in the 2007 general election, out of the nine hundred and ninety seats in the states' Houses of Assembly, women won fifty-four (54) seats (5.5%), and men won nine hundred and thirty-six (936) seats (94.5%) (Adeleke, 2015, p. 26). During the 2011 general election, sixty-eight (68) women were elected as state legislators (Olurode, 2013, pp. 12-14), while in the 2015 general election, women won forty-four (44) seats in the states' Houses of Assembly election (Salau et al, 2021, p. 8). The poor representation continued in the 2019 general election as women won only forty (40) seats in state parliaments (Onyeyi, 2019, p. 2). Finally, during the just-concluded 2023 general election, out of the nine hundred and eighty-eight (988) seats across the thirty-six (36) states of the federation, only forty-eight (48) women won their races, totaling

4.85 per cent of the seats in twenty-one (21) states (Daily Trust, 2023, pp. 1-3). Some states like Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Imo, Jigawa, Rivers Osun, Zamfara, Yobe, Kebbi, Niger, Abia had no female state lawmaker.

In the executive politics at both the state and federal levels, women have remained in the back seat. From 1999 to 2023, women were unable to produce an elected governor in any of the states in the six-geopolitics zones in Nigeria as seen below in Table 2.

Table 2: Number of Gubernatorial seats won by each sex across the six (6) Geopolitical Zones in the Country from 1999-2023.

	Year	Geopolitical Zones	Women	Men
1	1999 - 2003	North West: Sokoto, Katsina, Zamfara, Kebbi, Jigawa, Kano & Kaduna	Nil	30
2	2003 - 2007	North East: Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa & Taraba	Nil	24
3	2007 - 2011	North Central: Benue, Plateau, Niger, Nasarawa, Kogi & Kwara	Nil	24
4	2011 - 2015	South/South: Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Akwa-Ibom & Cross River	Nil	25
5	2015 - 2019	South West: Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo & Ekiti	Nil	27
6	2019 - 2023	South East: Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Imo & Ebonyi	Nil	22
			Zero	152

Source: Compiled by the Author

As the above table demonstrates, men have dominated women in the gubernatorial politics of the country. From 1999 to 2023, women were only elected as Deputy governors in states like Ogun, Lagos, Akwa-Ibom, Adamawa, Imo, and Plateau. Since

1999, the only woman who as served as a governor was when Dame Virginia Ngozi Etiaba who was sworn-in as the governor of Anambra State following the fraudulent impeachment of Mr. Peter Obi. Her stay in tis position was short-lived (2 November 2006 to 9 February 2007) because of the nullification of the impeachment process of Mr. Obi by the Appeal Court.

In the country's presidential politics, the representation and participation of women is, again, worrisome. During the 1999 election, women had no presidential candidate. Mrs. Sarah Jubril was the only female presidential aspirant under the platform of the PDP. She lost the primaries to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. The two presidential candidates in 1999 were men as seen below in Table 3.

Table 3: 1999 Presidential Candidates and votes scored.

Party	**Candidate**	**Votes**
PDP	Olusegun Obasanjo	18,738,411
AD/ANPP	Olu Falae	11,110,287

Source: INEC, 1999

In short, the election was an all-men show. The reasons advanced for this ender disparity were rooted in the long presence of the military in the socio-economic and political corridors of the country and the massive and active mobilization of men for the return of democratic government (Focus Group Discussion with PDP Women Support Group, Benue State Chapter).

The 2003 general election that followed also saw men's dominance in the country's presidential politics as women had only two (2) presidential candidates. See Table 4 on the following page.

Table 4: 2003 Presential Candidates and their votes

Party	Candidate	Votes
PDP	Olusegun Obasanjo	24,109,157
ANPP	Muhammadu Buhari	12,495,326
APGA	Chukwuemeka Ojukwu	1,295,633
UNPP	Jim Nwobodo	166,735
PAC	Mrs Sarah Jubril	156,286
NCP	Gani Fawehinmi	145,716
NDP	Ike Sanda Omar Nwachukwu	120,806
APLP	Osita Emmanuel Okereke	126,212
JP	Chris Okotie	119,220
PRP	Musa Balarabe	100,662
PMP	Agwucha Arthur Nwankwo	56,532
NNPP	Kalu Idika Kalu	23,646
BNPP	Ifeanyichukwu Goodwill Nnaji	22,524
MDJ	Muhammadu Dikko Yusuf	21,235
ARP	Ezemue Ndu Yahaya	13,316
DA	Anthonia Abayomi Ferreira	8,368
NAP	Tunji Braithwaite	6,834
NAC	Olapade Roland Aremu Agoro	5,735
LDPN	Christopher Pere Ajuwa	4,408
MMN	Mrs. Mojisola Adekunle Obasanjo	3,699

Source: Olusegun Obasanjo, *My Watch*, Vol. III. Lagos: Prestige, 2014, 6-7

In the preceding table, Mrs. Sarah Jubril and Mrs. Mojisola Adekunle Obasanjo were the first two female presidential candidates in the annals of the country's electoral history under the platform of Progressive Action Congress (PAC) and Masses Movement of Nigeria (MMN), respectively. They, however, lost the election to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP. In 2007, despite the political waiver by PDP and other political parties to exempt female aspirants from buying party nomination forms and efforts to improve the numbers of women participating in politics by non-governmental organizations, women had only one (1) presidential candidate as seen

below in Table 5.

Table 5: 2007 Presidential Candidates and their votes.

Party	Candidate	Number of Votes	
PDP	Umaru Musa Yar'adua	24,638,063	69.60
ANPP	Muhammadu Buhari	6,605,299	18.66
AC	Atiku Abubakar	2,637,848	7.45
PPA	Orji Uzor Kalu	608,803	1.72
DPP	Attahiru Bafarawa	289,224	0.82
APGA	Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu	155,947	0.44
AD	Pere Ajuwa	89,241	0.25
FDP	Christopher Okotie	74,049	0.21
ADC	Patrick Utomi	50,849	0.14
NPC	Asakarawon Olapere	33,771	0.10
HDP	Ambrose Owuru	28,519	0.08
PMP	Arthur Nwankwo	24,164	0.07
ALP	Emmanuel Okereke	22,677	0.06
APS	Lawrance Adedoyin	22,409	0.06
NDP	Aliyu Habu Fari	21,974	0.06
NNPP	Galtima Liman	21,665	0.06
CPP	Maxi Okwu	14,027	0.04
PRN	Sunny Okogwu	13,566	0.04
BNPP	Iheanyichukwu Nnaji	11,705	0.03
NCP	Osagie Obayuwana	8,229	0.02
NAC	Olapade Agoro	5,752	0.02
NMDP	Akpone Solomon	5,664	0.02
ND	Isa Odidi	5,408	0.02
NUP	Aminu Abubakar	4,355	0.01
MMN	Mrs Mojisola Adekunle Obasanjo	4,309	0.01

Source: Olusegun Obasanjo, *My Watch*, Vol. III. Lagos: Prestige, 2014, 6-7

The presence of one (1) woman in the 2007 presidential election result became a source of worry to Nigerians. Thus, when preparation for the 2011 general election commenced, affirmative action calls for the thirty-five (35) per cent women in

governance became a campaign slogan of the PDP. The Women for Change Initiative became a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that vigorously campaigned for women's inclusion in politics in Nigeria. Sadly, during the 2011 general election, Mrs. Sarah Jubril—the only female presidential aspirant under the platform of the PDP—secured just one (1) vote, presumably her own. Women had no presidential candidate as all the political parties that contested had men candidates, as seen below in Table 6.

Table 6: 2011 Presidential Candidates and their votes

Party	**Candidate**	**Number of Votes**	
PDP	Goodluck Jonathan	22,495,187	58.89
CPC	Muhammadu Buhari	12,214,853	31.98
CAN	Nuhu Ribadu	2,079,151	5.41
ANPP	Ibrahim Shekarau	917,012	2.40
PDC	Mahmud Waziri	82,243	0.21
PMP	Nwadike Chikeze	56,248	0.15
PPP	Lawson Oroh	54,203	0.14
ADC	Peter Nwangwu	51,682	0.14
BNPP	Iheanyichukwu Nnaji	47,272	0.12
FP	Christopher Okotie	34,331	0.09
NCP	Dele Momodu	26,376	0.07
NMDP	Solomon Akpona	25,938	0.07
APS	Lawrence Adedoyin	23,740	0.06
UNPD	Ebiti Ndok	21,203	0.06
NTP	John Dara	19,744	0.05
MPPP	Rasheed Shitta-Bey	16,492	0.04
APR	Yahaya Ndu	12,264	0.03
HDP	Ambrose Owuru	12,023	0.03
SDMP	Patrick Utomi	11,544	0.03
LDPN	Christopher Nwaokobia	8,472	0.02

Source: INEC, 2011

In the table above, women were not on the presidential ballot. The 2015 general election saw an improvement as Professor Comfort Oluremi Sonaiya became the presidential candidate of KOWA party. She eventually lost the election to General Muhammadu Buhari, as seen below in Table 7.

Table 7: 2015 Presidential Candidates and their votes

Party	**Candidate**	**Number of Votes**	
APC	Muhammadu Buhari	15,424,921	53.96
PDP	Goodluck Jonathan	12,853,162	44.96
APA	Adebayo Ayeni	53,537	0.19
ACPN	Ganiyu Galadima	40,311	0.14
CPP	Sam Eke	36,300	0.13
AD	Rufus Salau	30,673	0.11
ADC	Mani Ahmad	29,666	0.10
PPN	Allagoa Chinedu	24,475	0.09
NCP	Martin Onovo	24,455	0.09
AA	Tunde Anifowose-Kelani	22,125	0.08
UPP	Chekwas Okorie	18,220	0.06
KOWA	Mrs. Comfort Sonaiya	13,076	0.05
UDP	Godson Okoye	9,208	0.03
HP	Ambrose Albert Owuru	7,435	0.03
Total		29,432,083	100

Source: INEC, 2019

In the table above, the only female presidential candidate failed. Preparations for the 2019 general election saw the entry of five (5) women in the presidential race: Dr. Elishama Ideh, of the Alliance for New Nigeria; Barrister Eunice Atuejide; Funmilayo Adesanya Davis; Princess Oyenike Roberts; and Dr. Oby Ezekwesili (Ekpu, 2019, p. 4). While the first four aspirants lost their respective party primary elections, Dr. Ezekwesili became the presidential candidate of the Allied Congress Party of Nigeria.

She, however, lost the election to former President Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress (APC). Similarly, during the 2023 presidential election, there was marginal improvement as women had only one (1) presidential candidate—Ms Chichi Ojei of the Allied People's Movement (APM) (Agency Report, 2023, p. 2). She eventually lost the election to the current Nigeria's President, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the APC.

Women's Electoral Quagmire: Findings and Discussion

Despite the clamour for improvement in women's representation and participation in governance, the percentage of women participating in elections in Nigeria since 1999 has been poor. Nigeria holds the 184th position in women's representation among the 192 countries in National Parliaments (Okafor and Ileyemi, 2023, p. 2). Feminist scholars find patriarchy has impeded women's political rights, arguing that women find it difficult to break into politics because they are disadvantaged by gender ideology, cultural patterns, and predetermined social roles assigned to them by men. Patriarchy favours amd sexually segregated roles militate against the participation of women in the electoral process as women are restricted to being mothers and housewives. In societies with traditional attitudes towards gender roles, many women are reluctant to contest, and some who have run for elective positions have failed to attract sufficient support to succeed. A study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) reveals that female politicians in many countries cite hostile attitudes towards political participation by women as one of the most important obstacles to their running for parliament (IPU, 2015, pp. 1-10). In Nigeria, a survey conducted in 2010 unearthed Nigeria as one of the few countries of the world in which 55 per cent of the respondents did not agree to the statement that "women should have equal rights with men" (Olurode, 2013: 3).

Women have long faced political sexism that is rooted in men-oriented politics. Many factors are responsible for this among which was the dominance of the all-men military in Nigeria's governance in which for over thirty (30) years, women were not represented. During this period of military rule (1966-1979 and 1983-1999), women were underrepresented in the decision-making body and structures of the country and unable to make or support polices that would have representeds their interests. Unfortunately, the civilian government to which it this military government that handed over power also continued to exclude women from political positions and governance (Ako-Nai, 2005, pp. 492-495). This has affected women rights and interest as men cannot adequately represent women's interests, needs and concerns on issues such as reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and human trafficking, issues that require women's perspectives and orientation when being addressed (Quadri, 2018, p. 9).

Party activities and decision-making meetings favour men. For instance, the times scheduled for caucus meetings to strategize and map out political plans for the pre- or post-election periods are often those in which women are expected to take care of their children and families. This is viewed as an attempt to discourage women from engaging in the electoral process. Also, inadequate party interest in women's issues is another contributing factor to women's underrepresentation in the country's electoral process. Scholars have argued that women being poorly represented in political parties negatively impacts their parties' ability to champion issues important to women (Adereti, 2005, p. 514; Nkereuwem, 2023, p. 5). The under-representation of women in political parties also affects their nomination to contest elective positions and prevented women from being nominated as governorship or presidential candidates

of the major political parties in the country, and by extension, their election into these leadership positions.

Another factor is the high cost of financing elections in Nigeria. Nigeria's politics are money-structured. The cost of party nomination forms, for example, is exorbitantly high. During the last general election (2023), the cost of presidential forms of the two big political parties (APC and PDP) was N50 million and N100 million respectively. Although, high party registration fees and nomination fees are waived for female candidates, apart from official financial requirements for contesting party primaries there are unofficial expenses, such as campaign prosecution, mobilization and the canvassing of voters for electoral success. The costs of these have been setbacks for many female contestants. In Nigeria, voters are enticed with cash and goods everywhere and cajoled into voting. Mercenaries are paid to disturb the electoral process. In part, electoral exercises in Nigeria from 1999 to 2023 have been shows of financial strength.

All these factors highlight the central role men have played in the underrepresentation and participation of women in Nigeria's electoral process. As pertinent as these factors are in interrogating the issue under consideration, it is instructive to note that women have rejected as male dominance is a reigning ideology in virtually all societies of the world. In the United States, for example, women were actively involved in the anti-slavery movement and mobilized their fellow women to campaign for their rights in America's political space. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucreatia Mott called a Convention on women rights that defined the political history of women in the US (Adereti, 2005, p. 513). In England, Emineline Parkhurst formed the first women's suffrage committee in 1865

that defined the political history of women in England (Adereti, 2005, p. 514). In Nigeria, before independence in 1960, women mobilized and rallied around women in support and protested against exiting British policies and their implications for the rights of women. Women like Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, Janet Nwokedi led protest movements that questioned the arbitrary manner of colonial governance and socio-economic policies that neglected Nigerian women's welfare and interests (Agunbiade, 2020, p. 235). It was this kind of mobilization that led to the granting of women suffrage and the subsequent election of women in elective positions in Nigeria in the first republic. Surprisingly, this kind of mobilization has been missing since the return of democratic governance in 1999.

Alagh points out between 1998 and 1999, women's groups in Nigeria mobilized to support fellow women during electoral contest, but the outcome of such support was not commensurate with the number of female registered voters (2016, p. 3). In 1999, women who contested elective positions did not enjoy support of fellow women. Available statistics reveal that out of the 20 percent of the women who contested elections, less than 6 percent won seats across all the elective positions contested (Jimoh, 2015, p. 2). The entire voting population of women was above the number secured by the female candidates who won election. Similarly, in 2003, available data reveals 861 women aspired to and contested various political posts. A breakdown of this number indicates that the North East, North West, and North Central zones housed 156, 110, and 233 women aspirants, respectively. The other three zones, South South, South West, and South East had 20, 232, and 110 women, respectively. Lagos had the highest with 102 aspirants, followed by Anambra with 66 (Bruce, 2005, p. 506). But during the elections, the number of women who won

elective positions was small. A juxtaposition of the number of votes women scored and that of the total number of registered women voters clearly shows there was an apparent lack of support for women candidates by their fellow women support during the 2003 general election. In fact, the only two women presidential candidates scored less than 200,000 votes as earlier shown in Table 4.

During the 2007 general election, women who emerged as party candidates also did not enjoy the support of their fellow women. The only female presidential candidate secured merely 4,306 votes. These elections came after the 2006 National Population Census that pegged the percentage of women in Nigeria at 49 percent. Similarly, in 2011, during the PDP primary election, Mrs. Sarah Jubril, the only female aspirant, scored one vote, presumably her vote. The same scenario played out during the 2011, 2019 and 2023 elections with female candidates scoring small numbers of votes despite the near parity of voter registration between men and women in these election cycles, as seen in Table 8 on the following page.

Table 8: Number of Female Registered voters as presented in percentage from 2011-2023

S/N	Electoral Year	Men	Female
1.	2011	51.9	43.1
2.	2015	-	-
3.	2019	52.9	47.4
4.	2023	52.5	47.5

Source: Compiled by the Author from various National Dailies

During the 2019 and 2023 general election, the only female presidential candidates, Oby Ezekwesili and Ms Chichi withdrew from the presidential race because of

pressure from their respective political parties (Iruke, 2023, p. 2). Of the 1,019 females who contested the 2023 general election, only 48 were elected despite the increased number of registered female voters.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident that women's representation and participation in Nigeria's electoral process has been on a downward slide since the return of democratic governance in 1999. Men's marginalization of women in all the spheres of the country's socio-economic and political spaces has featured predominately as the contributing factor to women's underrepresentation and participation in politics. However, such theories are not enough to explain the poor showing of women during electoral contests in the country. Election results always show the low number of votes women secure despite the parity in the number of male and female registered voters, and the increase in the numerical strength of women. Sadly, Nigerian women who have contested various elective positions in the country's electoral process since the return of democratic governance in 1999 have not enjoyed their needed female support. Rather than blame men for the electoral woes of women, women at this point in the country's electoral process should first understand the importance of "women to women" votes and come to terms with the fact that democracy is a competition and a game of numbers. Second, women must see themselves as competitors rather than agitators for elective positions in the country's electoral process. Third, Nigerian women must accept the fact that men are not likely to surrender important political positions, elective or appointive, without a fight. They must be ready to play important parts in the formation and nurturing of political parties as stakeholders and drive the country's political process on equal basis with men. Fourth, successful businesswomen must be ready to sponsor

campaigns of women during electoral contests. Finally, women who are politicians must support themselves to create a democratic space for womenfolk.

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Leaf Fall #9

Sue Matheson

Theatre and Health Education through *Kwagh-hir* Theatre

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Abstract

Theatre in Health Education (THE) has become a potent tool for educating audiences about health issues. Dramatic performances in this context are used to engage various health issues and generate change among its audiences because 'community conversations' are generated in Theatre-based interventions, and people critically and collectively examine the issues on stage and agree on actions that should be taken. This paper discusses *Kwagh-hir* theatre performances as an excellent model for health education. It shows how *Kwagh-hir* plays raise consciousness regarding health issues and submits that *Kwagh-hir* theatre is an alternative communication approach that engages health issues with its audiences.

Keywords: Theatre, Health Education, *Kwagh-hir* Theatre

Introduction

> One of the most provocative and exciting developments in Theatre in Education and Community Theatre in recent years has been the emergence of Theatre in Health Education (THE). (Steve Ball 227)

Engaging audiences regarding issues of health, safety and well-being is no longer the exclusive reserve of health workers. Across the globe, THE is a potent means of educating people about health issues. There are also instances of mainstream theatre addressing health issues by performing for community members and groups and acting as stimuli for discussion. According to Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton, "Theatre in Health Education (THE) is a fairly recent initiative that combines the principles and practices of theatre in education and health education to address issues of health" (87). In short, THE is an alternative approach to raising awareness of health issues.

Health promotion interventions strongly contribute to the overall improvement of human health. Within the purview of primary Health Care, health promotion is crucial, because it enhances the prevention and control of both chronic and communicable diseases among poor or marginalized groups. Participatory Drama is a powerful and innovative tool in the hands of practitioners and health promoters, because it shows the ability of drama to talk back to society. This ability as been a historic role of participatory theatre—creating the aesthetic site through which theatre tackles society. In the words of Prendergast and Saxton, Participatory Drama's "aesthetic and emotional outlet allows for potential catharsis, a safe way for citizens to express their concerns, criticisms and frustration to each other and to society at large" (7), giving

THE its power to engage social vices and generate change among its audience.

In theatre-based interventions 'community conversations' are generated before people collectively and critically examine the issues at hand and agree on the actions that should be taken. For example, a group of actors present a play on drug abuse watched by a group of secondary school pupils on safer sex practices with a focus on HIV and AIDS prevention; a group of older people use Forum Theatre techniques to explore diabetic and heart problems; and a cast of elderly people perform a play about exercise and healthy living. These staged experiences use theatre to enhance learning about health and accentuate the invaluable place of Theatre in Health Education. Elizabeth Mbivo writing on this submits that

> [m]any types of media are used around the world for health promotion. In Africa, in both rural and urban settings, theatre has proven to be an effective and entertaining strategy for dissemination of health information and reinforcement of positive health messages. Theatre can overcome literacy barriers through use of local experience and vernacular to provoke emotional and analytical responses in the audience. (530)

Using theatre to disseminate health information in this way places the focus on creating content that helps the audience analyze hindrances to their accepting health messages. These performances create room for active participation of the audiences in debating, and critically analyzing situations as they ask questions, and as 'spec–actors' who take active roles in the dramatization, they are able to show how certain behaviour can be changed.

The power of theatre lies in its ability to capture the attention of its audiences and

present to them realities from their personal experiences or social experiences they can relate to which confronts them day to day. This is what gives theatre the ability to engage audiences in a participatory way where their emotions and curiosity are stimulated to accept messages and take steps to change their situations. An important aspect of the theatre experience in this context is the potential of theatre to create an avenue where acceptable behaviours in the communities or among participants are explored and strengthened in a bid to push the frontiers of health promotion. The participatory nature of theatre aids in dismantling barriers and fostering acceptance of the issues presented to audiences who do not readily accept traditional approaches used in health promotion. Its dramatic techniques involve creating situations with short skits that use a facilitator who moderates the interface between the performance and the audience members who are recipients of the message. The process aims at aiding the audience's comprehension of the issues presented.

Why Health Education?

In recent times, promoting health as well as preventing ill health is no longer the sole concern of medical practitioners. Focus on health prevention that includes care among groups and within 'communities' has evolved so that a collaborative approach between health providers and other disciplines has emerged. In this relatively new environment, it is less surprising that theatre workers and health educators have started to work together to develop THE.

The above is predicated on the assumption that the well-being of individuals and the prevention of diseases does not lie in building large hospitals but in self-awareness and understanding of what makes us healthy and how to maintain same. This means adequate, relevant and up-to-date information for behavioral change

and/or recognising when the prevention of certain conditions becomes necessary. Preventing disease occurrence is paramount in health promotion and includes altering the susceptibility to or reducing exposure to diseases, slowing the progression of diseases, and enhancing curative alternatives or controlling the progress of disease and rehabilitating the patient.

Health Promotion through Drama, therefore, evolved because of the need to enhance awareness among the populace of health issues in order to promote good health rather than simply trying to cure an ailment and healthy functions. As the saying goes, a "stitch in time saves nine". Preventing diseases from occurring goes a long way in helping the livelihood of an individual. Donald Reid and Margaret Whitehead writing about the need for health promotion submit that

> [s]uddenly, health authorities all over the country are looking at schools in a new light: urgently considering ways of boosting health education in this setting. The impetus for this upsurge in interest stems from the health of the Nation's developments. Specific targets have been set as part of the national strategy which clearly requires concerted action focused on children and young people to stand any chance of success (125).

Certain health authorities are pushing for campaigns in schools, streets, churches, markets, and even tertiary institutions. Here it is sufficient to mention that a school's curriculum and stringent timelines often conflict with the schedules of health campaigns. Planning campaigns require taking into consideration classroom timetables and students' examinations as well as the release of staff for training and other pressing agendas of the schools.

As a tool used in health communication, participatory drama helps its participants to collectively dialogue and make decisions about situations presented in the skits on stage that raise their awareness of the need to take steps to change certain behaviours or practices. Drama achieves this awareness by creating room for participatory discussions and encouraging reflections targeted at behavioural change.

Kwagh-hir Theatre: An Overview

Kwagh-hir, the form of theatre discussed here, uses puppets, masquerades, and marionettes. It began in Tivland around 1960 (Hagher 39, 40, 41). Bohannan and Keil consider its stories to be tales. Visiting Tivland in the 1960s, they witnessed the transformation of *kwagh-alôm* folktales into *Kwagh-hir* puppet theatre where, according to Bohannan's eyewitness account,

> as stories were told in the evenings, individuals started dramatizing them by acting out certain parts with mime and dance steps. In order to outshine others, people started introducing animal masquerades as well as other carved figures of spirits and other fearful characters that are neither human nor animal. Others simply improvised props and costumes to colour their narrative performance (9).

These stories had many occasions for performance. First, it was a past-time exercise in a household for the reason of entertainment. Second, it was performed at compound level when in-laws or other outsiders were invited for group farming. With limited huts in a homestead to accommodate many visitors, folktale competitions were organized to keep people busy and entertained throughout the night. Third, the

tales were organized at community level by the champions of the art form. It is during such competitions that props are improvised during the oral performance. Bohannan further describes a folktale evening she witnessed that turned into a dramatized performance in this manner: there was "[a] pot tied snout like, over the face made a hippopotamus. Sheepskins, leaves and cloth-covered stools created strong monsters and spirits" (9; quoted in Hagher 45).

As Bohannan discovered, *Kwagh-hir* is a product of concerted dramatization of simple oral tales called *Kwagh-alôm*, literarily translated as 'Tales of Hare or Rabbit' (folktales). *Kwagh-alôm* is therefore so popularly called, even when such stories are not based on the protagonist, *Alôm* (Rabbit or Hare), or even when *Alôm* is not even the lead character in the story. Thus, the interchangeable terms between *kwagh-alôm* and *kwagh-hir* in everyday speech still persist, even among practitioners of the performances and in their songs.

This humble acting out of stories that was common among storytellers marked the beginnings of the dramatization of stories in Tivland as Keil, quoted by Hagher, also witnessed. No date has been agreed on as to when *Kwagh-alôm*, *Kwagh-hir's* predecessor started. It is thought that *Kwagh-alôm* started when Tiv culture saw the need for a recreation-oriented entertainment that could be utilized to teach lessons to both children and adults.

Hagher terms *Kwagh-hir* narrative or story-telling theatre (5). Each tale was dramatized; the narrator, at the very least, seemed obligated to suggest the movements of an animal character that was dancing to his song or to highlight the narrative with actions of some kind. A few days before the event, the eldest son of the head of the compound fashioned a clay penis possibly as a prop. Performers were recruited in

advance and even hurriedly costumed. More often, a narrator would enlist participants from the crowd to enact a particular episode, or more precisely, to demonstrate it, for the narrator always keeps control of the story (Hagher 47).

With dramatization and employment of props for tales that were orally told at their beginning there evolved the full dramatization of tales through puppets, marionettes and masquerades as we have come to know them today in *Kwagh-hir* Theatre. It is sufficent to say that the puppets and marionettes in *Kwagh-hir* "performed on mobile wooden stages – *Katon* about the size of a table. Hidden from view by the decorated sides of these stages, young men manipulate the figures from underneath to articulate in imagery, sound and narrative" (Harding 9, emphasis mine).

These performances are part of a larger cultural product that compresses knowledge and presents the same in the form of animated carved images operated by puppeteers through strings, actions and movements in performance to depict symbolic actions. *Kwagh-hir* characters are human and spirit beings carved in wooden frames and are accompanied by songs and by the *Or-isuwa*-Narrator. These performances are deliberately embellished with metaphors to illustrate issues that are connected to the everyday realities of their audiencess.

After thorough research, Hagher theorizes that since *Kwagh-hir* is comprised of many art forms (story-telling, poetry, puppetry, music, dance and dramatization), its origin cannot be tied to a particular person or author. Because of the number of arts that are involved on stage, he submits that "to look at the origin of the *Kwagh-hir* in isolation from the development of each of the art forms listed above is to lead oneself to a blind alley. In fact, as far as *Kwagh-hir* could be remembered in its primeval form, it had included all the four arts perhaps in their humbler modes but, definitely

manifest" (44).

Health Issues in Recent *Kwagh-hir* Theatre Performances

Composite art forms that are visually stimulating, *Kwagh-hir* performances have been used extensively to enhance health education. One good example is the puppet performance which shows a cesarean section being performed on a woman. The *katon*–wooden platform and skillful operation show puppet animation with a focus on safe delivery care for women. The insert picture of the puppet stage on the next page shows a pregnant woman on the wooden stage. The performance and accompanying songs, speak to women and their husbands to seek prompt medical help if and when child delivery becomes difficult. As total theatre and social performance, the piece articulates the reality of childbirth, powerfully promotes Tiv women's health, and seeks to break existing beliefs about child delivery and maternal health issues.

Fig. 1 The Nurse being prepped backstage (Source: the author)

Fig. 2. *Kwase u Iya* - the pregnant woman (Source: the author)

The photos above show the nurse during the puppet performance. This character

conducts the C-section on the pregnant woman in Photo 2. The puppet is controlled using strings on a table which is called *Katon* or *Dagbera* with a doctor in attendance who oversees the operation. During this performance, the audience is shown the need to seek early assistance from a professional nurse in a standard hospital or Health Centre, especially in situations where complications arise. The images presented in this *Kwagh-hir* performance strongly illustrate and reinforce messages about Cesarean section surgery and how modern medical practices help women to deliver healthy babies.

Promoting Safer Sex Education and Fight against HIV/AIDs

Kwagh- hir Performances also capture the scourge of HIV/AIDs by showing its effects on the lives of the audience. This particular puppet performance displays HIV as a deadly virus and promotes the need to practice safe sex, especially emphasizing the use of condoms as protection against sexually transmitted Infections (STIs). The puppet character is a young man who has a big head and his exposed bones show as if he is a skeleton. His physical appearance points to the term for HIV in Tiv the local dialect – *anakande*, literally means emaciated or skinny, a term which stems from the understanding that HIV/AIDs quickly make the patients emaciated and become skeletal. His loose trousers around his waist with his penis protruding in front show the reason for his predicament, emphasizing that the HIV virus is sexually transmitted.

Fig. 3. *Anakande* – Hiv/Aids Graphically Portrayed during a Kwaghir Performance (Source: the author)

Fig. 4. Performers Pose beside a Caton Displaying Use of Condoms (Source: the author)

This puppet embodies the skit's message regarding the destructive impact of the virus to humans. The use of a skinny wooden carved puppet that is visibly emaciated with ribs exposed explicitly registers in the minds of the audience the image of someone with HIV/AIDS in its full-blown stage. Hagher writing about this particular puppet submits that "the *Anakande* puppet performance is part of the Kwagh-hir show to advocate and campaign against the HIV/AIDS pandemic" (181).

The visual/physical communication accomplished by this skeletal being shows how deadly the virus is and reinforces the existing knowledge of the audience about HIV aiming at behavioural change. This *Kwagh-hir* performance, in no small measure, pushes for safer sex practices and fights against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Promoting Exclusive Breast Feeding

Initiating and sustaining exclusive breastfeeding of children within the first hour of birth and children being exclusively breastfed for the first 6 months of their lives has been promoted by health providers all over the world. *Kwagh-hir* performers

and song composers explicitly capture this message and promote same through the *Madam Ngunan* puppet shown below.

Fig. 5 Madam Ngunan, a *Kwagh-hir* puppet that showcases breastfeeding (Source: the author)

This wooden carving of a larger-than-life frame of a human figure in performance presents a message that encourages mothers to breastfeed their babies. A careful study of the puppet shows her smiling gleefully as she breastfeeds the baby. Because young, modern Tiv women think breastfeeding brings about the sagging of their breasts, making them loose their youthful shape and look old, the campaign to promote this practiceis considered to be imperative.

Conclusion

Kwagh-hir puppet theatre is utilized to present health messages to urban and rural communities. This *Kwagh-hir* approach gives theatre the ability to engage audiences

in a participatory way that ensures their emotions and their curiosity are stimulated to accept the messages dramatized and take steps to protect their health. *Kwagh- hir* theatre with its rich content is a potent tool for Health Education and well-suited to Health Promotion techniques in Nigeria. Its history is highly instructive for those interested in how Theatre and Health Education (THE) has evolved. Responding to the need to enhance awareness among the populace about pressing health issues, Theatre in Health Education (THE) relies on the power of theatre to capture the attention of its audiences and present realities drawn from their experiences.

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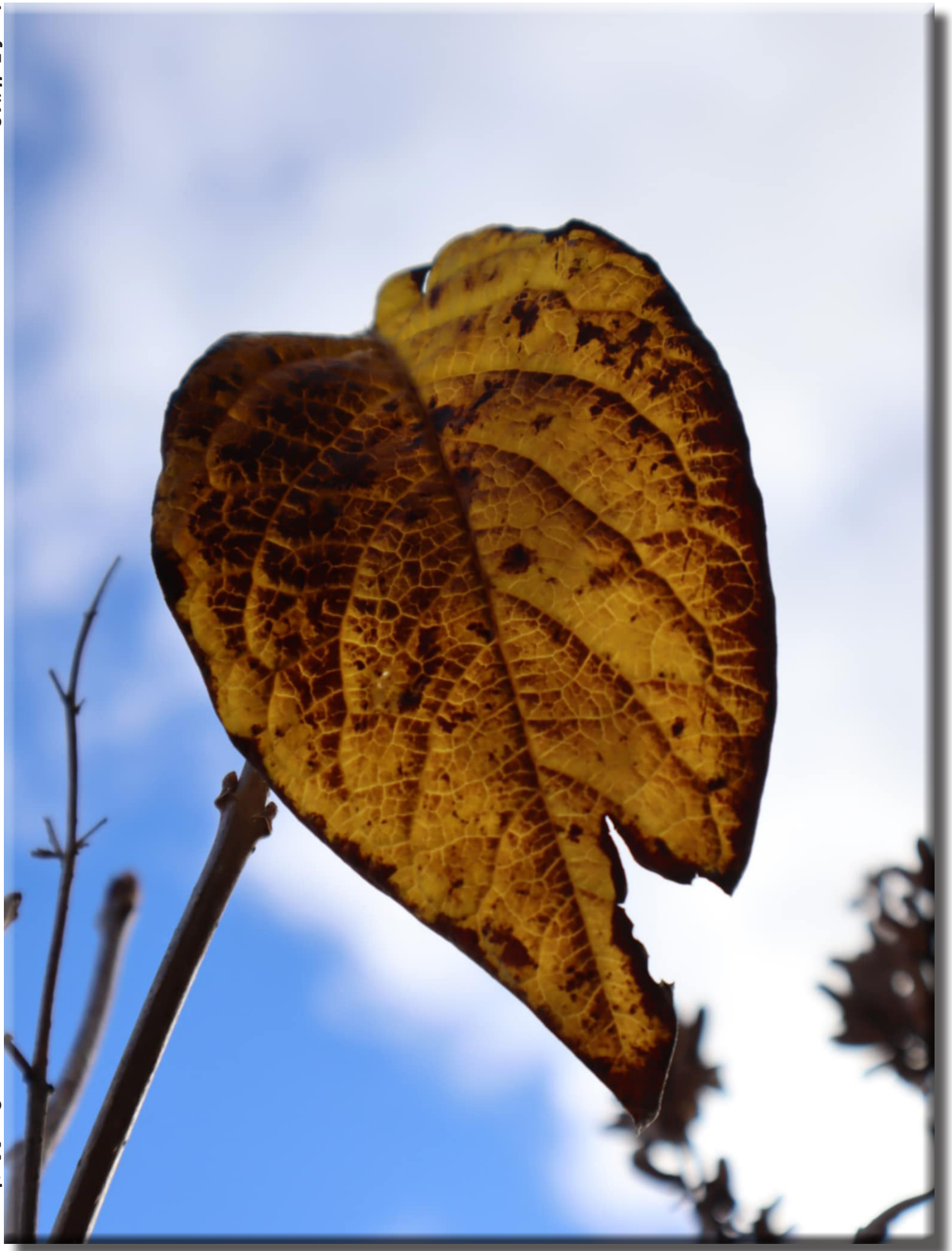

Leaf Fall #10

Sue Matheson

THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

‘A cosmic loneliness was my shadow’
– Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*

Instruments like astrolabes, quadrants and sextants
create illusions of stability although vanishing points
are still evident. Multiple perspectives overlap with
distorted flight lines and divergent image planes.

Time can become just as homogenous and empty
as the politics of delusion. Terrains of occupation,
cinematic space, tyrannies of surveillance; there
is no safe ground to speak of, no need for talk

of implausible freedoms now new and different
sorts of spatial vision can be created. The place
we were heading towards is no longer standing,
promises no community, only shifting ruins

produced as the result of fear and distant war.
Displacement of visual normality in favour of
disembodied gaze carries the seeds of our own
demise, disruption and disorientation, divides

us and produces sites of conflict and violence.
We calculate the risk of mathematical prediction
and artificial boundaries but there is no linear
ground or parallel convergence left to speak of.

—Rupert M. Loydell

Historicizing the Theory and Practice of Cosmopolitan Conflict Resolution Approach in Mali and Côte d'Ivoire, 2000-2015

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Abstract

External interventions in Africa`s civil wars has often been framed as matters of Cosmopolitan Conflict Resolution (CCR) by underscoring the humanitarian benefits to the conflict states. External interventions in Mali and Cote d'Ivoire championed by France displayed elements of CCR. These interventions were supported by the leaderships of both states, involved the United Nations, African Union, and the Economic Community of West African States, and led to the restoration of public security and the constitutional order, particularly in Cote d`Ivoire. CCR, however, did not produce long-term security for the affected populations as both conflicts lingered

on, involved more actors from neighboring states, and led to political instability in both states. This paper considers the extent to which third party intervention in both states reflected Cosmopolitan Conflict Resolution's ideals, demonstrates the difficulties involved in Mali's and Cote d'Ivoire's transitions from theory to practice, and recommends comprehensive peacebuilding to address the sources of conflicts like these with the aim of increasing local capacities for peace.

Keywords: Mali, Côte d'Ivoire, Cosmopolitanism, Cosmopolitan Conflict Resolution, Third Party Intervention

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Introduction

"In the present moment in history we not only have a good reason to seek a cosmopolitan world and global civil society, but we also have means to do it"

(Perisker, 2011)

A cosmopolitan approach to conflict resolution has recently become expedient given the interconnectedness of the world's population and our shared concerns regarding the high incidence of civil wars, endemic poverty, infectious diseases such as Ebola and Corona Virus, terrorist acts by local and transnational actors, climate change, and human rights violation. As an idea, cosmopolitanism can be traced to early Greek and Stoic thinkers who saw themselves as citizens of the world rather than as individuals belonging strictly to their own states. Over the centuries, cosmopolitanism became

a subject of academic introspection with more comprehensive definitions borrowed from various disciplines, making for a nuanced understanding of the concept. Immanuel Kant writing at the end of the 19th century contributed to our understanding of cosmopolitanism when he made references to the notion of 'universal hospitality,' asserting that human beings have the right to be protected from war (Kant cited in Gregor, 1999: 329). Emile Durkheim wrote about "the cult of the individual" and stated that rather than religion, the basis for solidarity should be the individual (Durkheim,translated in Traugott, 1999: 330). In various ways, cosmopolitans point out that being prepared to act as global citizens requires thinking beyond local affiliations, Cosmopolitans assert that the security of the individual is inextricably linked to the security of the global population. As Kwame Anthony Appiah puts it, realizing that our well-being is inextricably linked to that of others (Appiah, 2007:144). At the core of cosmopolitan thinking is the belief that every human being is worthy of respect and belongs to a single moral realm.

Cosmopolitans focus on the ethical and moral dimension in international relations. From a CCR perspective, human beings are the ultimate unit of concern, not the state and our willingness to intervene in conflicts should be motivated by humanitarian concerns than those of the realist school which center on power and national interest. (Björkdahl, 2005: 219). CCR is about solidarity among states and across various organisations in dealing with conflicts. Cosmopolitans think in terms of our common humanity and the relevance of human agency in tackling conflicts.

Closely related to international liberalism, cosmopolitan conflict resolution's is hinged on forging solidarity among states, international organisations, and non-

governmental organisations when dealing with threats to international peace. Key features which international liberalism and cosmopolitanism share include the promotion of interdependence, multilateralism, cooperation, and order in the international system. Liberals argue that states working together augers well for world peace and prosperity and, like cosmopolitans, stress the need for solidarity to address challenges to human security. Cosmopolitans advance their argument further, arguing institutions and factors, such as the economy, technology, culture, and the military, also shape inter-state relations and propose there should be no distinction made between the domestic and the international.

CCR, which should flourish within the context of an interconnected world population, raises the question whether globalization can promote the moral and social unity that underpins cosmopolitan thinking. Badger argues that globalization will promote cosmopolitanism, because human interaction and the exchange of ideas at various levels will enable human plurality to be valued across national and religious identities (Badger, 2014: 6). This assertion ffirms cosmopolitanism is more likely to find expression in a globalized world. Giddens concurs with Badger, noting that cosmopolitanism is a normative response to globalization. In his view, globalization can be pro-cosmopolitan, especially if one imagines that information technology has made it possible for billions of human beings to interact closely though separated by great distance and time differences (Giddens, 1999).

More interconnected, the world population should promote cosmopolitan conflict resolution, but interconnectivity is not enough to compel states and organisations to take actions that promote human security. Reactions to globalisation as Fukuyi

points out, may resist the development of a cosmopolitan culture. Reassertions of religious fundamentalism, ethnic nationalism, and threats posed by economic liberalism on indigenous people, women, and migrants all translate to contract the cosmopolitan ideal. As a remedy, he suggests cosmopolitan-oriented individuals, social movements, communities, and global institutions counter-balance the negative effects of globalization (Kusarawa cited in Badger, 2014: 7).

The Formalisation and Promotion of Cosmopolitan Conflict Resolution Since 1945

To avert the devastation of the Second World War happening again, statesmen created institutions to improve human security. In 1945, the establishment of the United Nations demonstrated the inclination of states, organisations and individuals to take action to resolve conflicts jointly. However, the conflict management approach as configured by the UN was initially state-centric; primarily based on the doctrine of sovereignty of states and the principle of non-intervention. Such provisions addressed and reduced inter-state conflicts considerably but posed constraints on the scope of the actions that states could take to respond to intra-state conflicts. This resulted in a rise in the number of civil wars and the casualty figures among the civilian population in conflict states (Barnett, 1995:31). In response, the UN began to increase the possibilities for intervention in internal conflicts with the aim of reducing humanitarian crises.

The UN began this process by acknowledging that there were lapses in its conflict management provisions outlined in the *Boutros Ghali Agenda for Peace in 1992* and

the 1995 *Brahimi Report* on Peace Operations. In addition, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1296 which served as a framework by which to address civil war. This resolution states that 'the deliberate targeting of civilians in armed conflict and the denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations in war zones constitute[s] a threat to international peace and security', implying a more cosmopolitan approach to resolving conflict by providing conditions that legitimize intervention by external actors.

The CCR approach to resolving conflicts was further boosted when the concept of *Responsibility to Protect (R2P)* which can be traced to a number of individuals ,including Francis Deng, the UN's Secretary General Special Representative on Internally Displaced Persons, in 1993, was adopted. This clause gave additional meaning to the principle of sovereignty by vesting sovereignty in the people while not undermining the state. According to Deng, sovereignty was not limited to the protection of the state. It should be extended to protect a country's population from war crimes, genocide, and ethnic cleansing. He also added that external protection becomes expedient when the state is incapable or unwilling to act because the state itself is a perpetrator of genocide and can also be evoked when grave human rights abuses have been committed. In these cases, the responsibility to protect becomes the property of the broader community of states. Such protection could take the form of the diplomatic and humanitarian means of the UN (Regan, 2016:75). Another contribution to R2P lay in the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), an initiative of the Canadian government. In its 2001 report, the Commission articulated its vision of the principle of Responsibility to Protect

and stressed the need for conflict prevention and for militarized intervention when non-violent measures have failed (Regan, 2016:75). In 2005, the UN adopted the Responsibility to Protect (R2P or RtoP) clause.

In Africa, efforts towards increasing intervention in civil wars spurred African leaders to remodel the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) to African Union (AU) (Coning, 2017). The AU Constitutive Act, for example, rejects any unconstitutional change in government. The Peace and Security Council (PSC) also has provisions for the heads of states in the Union to recommend intervention when crimes against humanity occur. The adoption of the Protocol on Mechanism, Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution Peace and Security and the Supplementary Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also raised supported efforts in intervention in intra-state conflicts (Williams, 2011: 156). This slow but definite progress towards adopting a CCR approach to managing conflicts strengthened the means of and legality for collective action to contain internal wars. External intervention in the resolution of conflicts in Mali and Cote d'Ivoire illustrates the intervening states' cosmopolitan ideal and demonstrates the difficulty of applying theory to practice—explaining why cosmopolitan conflict resolution is considered unrealistic and rather idealistic.

External Intervention in the Touareg Rebellion, 1962 to 2013.

A land-locked country in West Africa, Mali is located at the intersection between the forest states in the south and the Sahelian states in the north. It has a population of about 15 million citizens who inhabit a landmass measuring 1,240,192 square

kilometers. The Tuareg inhabit the northern region of the country which they share with the Fula, the Arabs and the Songhai. The southern region is inhabited by the Sarakole, the Malinke and the Bambara, all of whom who are sub-groups of the Mande. The Bambara have dominated the government and the economy of Mali since the colonial period (Ecoa Population, 2016: 1).

Like many resistance wars that took part during the colonial era in Africa, the Tuareg rebellion started in 1916 as a protest against French colonial rule. After 1960 the Tuareg began to demand for the creation of Azawad state which would take in other Tuareg in Niger. The first rebellion in the post-independence period occurred in 1964, the second in 1996, and the third in 2006. Throughout, several efforts were made to address the grievances of the Tuareg by the Malian government with the support of Algeria, France, and to a lesser degree, Libya. These efforts led to cease-fires and a series of peace agreements, with the prominent ones being the Tamanrasset Accord in 1991, the 1992 National Pact, and the Algiers Accord in 2006 (Chauzal and Van Damme, 2015: 68). These agreements, however, were never fully implemented owing to lack of funding and political will. The Malian government generally relied on a militarist approach to tackle the problem. In particular, antagonism against the Bamako government intensified under the Ahmadou Toumani Toure (ATT) administration, as many military camps and garrisons were erected in the northern part of the country while military personnel were appointed to serve in the northern administration.

The Tuareg rebellion became more complex between 2006 and 2009 when rebel Islamist groups joined the armed actors perpetrating violence in the northern

part of the country. Notable among them were Ansar Dine, Al Qaeda in the Land of the Maghrib (AQIM), and the Movement of Oneness and Jihad in West Africa (MOJWA). The Islamists were able to bring many parts of the north under their control and began to impose sharia law in ways that were at variance with the traditions of the Muslim population in that region. Violence erupted in 2011 following the collapse of Ghadafi's army with the emergence of the Movement for Liberation of the Azawad (MNLA) comprised of returnees from Libya (Chauzal and Van Damme, 2015: 68). The crisis began when a handful of rebels began to attack government forces and force them out of the northern region. Then the situation degenerated when Islamists seized the opportunity of political instability to launch an offensive against the Bamako government in 2012 (Hussein, 2013). This was followed by a coup plot against the Ahmadou Toumani Toure (ATT) government led by Ahmadou Sanogo. By April of 2012, the northern region was under the control of rebels with the MNLA declaring the independence of the state of Azawad. The Islamists and rebels established effective control over the northern region and made it difficult for government to maintain presence, creating a situation that could be likened to para-sovereignty. Having the power to control its own government, the northern region existed like a composite state within the sovereign state of Mali (Chauzal and Van Damme, 2015: 32). Thrown into a civil war , the Malian government tried to confront Islamists but lacked the military capacity to do so.

This situation prompted external intervention from a number of actors. France played a major role in the efforts to resolve the conflict in Mali following requests for assistance by the Malian government under the leadership of ATT. Apart from

her long-standing relations with Malian government, France was also well-placed to intervene in the conflict by being a member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Her membership of the apex body was instrumental to facilitating the UN's approval for ECOWAS to deploy peace keeping forces to Mali. With the Malian conflict placed at the top of the UN's political international agenda, the UNSC issued three resolutions that allowed the AU and ECOWAS to actively embark on a joint peace-keeping operation. The ECOWAS Mission in Mali was followed by an African-led International Mission in Mali, (AFIMSA) with a one-year mandate. The ECOWAS Standby Force, numbered at about 3,300 troops, was replaced by ECOWAS UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) in 2013. Apart from collaboration between AU, UN and ECOWAS, the EU supported the resolution's efforts by providing logistics and training through the EUTM-Mali to provide funding and improve the capacity of security institutions in Mali (Goita, 2014: 2).

External Intervention in Côte d'Ivoire Civil Crisis, 2000 -2011

With its southern border on the Atlantic Ocean, Côte d'Ivoire is one of West Africa's littoral states. It covers a land area of 322,463 square kilometers and houses an estimated population of about 21 million. The country is comprised of 60 ethnic groups classified into five major sub-groups. There are the Akan who make up about 42 percent of the Ivorian population. The Voltaic people, the Kru, the Bete, and the Mandespeaking people in the northern region make up the rest of the Ivorian population (Geir, 2006). Cote d'Ivoire gained independence in 1960 with Felix Houphet Biogny as its first president. Unlike Mali, the country was politically stable

with a thriving economy based mainly on cocoa. But in spite of its prosperity, seeds of conflict were sown under the successive administrations of Boigny, Konan Bedi, and Robert Guei, during which the concept of the Ivorite was nurtured and became an ideology for socio-political exclusion. The Ivorite is a concept used to ascribe citizenship status to persons with Ivorian parentage that excludes more recent settlers ,particularly migrants from the northern parts of the country and the Burkina Faso, who are regarded as foreigners (Bovcon, 2008:14).

The first phase of the Ivorian conflict started with the presidential election in 2000 when Al Hassan Quattara, a northern politician of the RDR, was disqualified ,because it was alleged that his parents were from Burkina Faso (Burkinabe) and therefore were not Ivorian. While this became a source of tension among northerners, the announcement of the election results by the Commission Electorale Indépendante (CEI) further compounded the situation. Guei disputed the result which declared Laurent Gbagbo the winner (Zoumenou and Lamine, 2011:8). The, violence broke out after Gbagbo won again in the run-off election. Supporters and loyalists of each of the contestants resorted to violence. Demanding a free and fair election, many felt the election process was flawed and regarded its outcome illegitimate (Kode, 2016: 11). The situation worsened in 2002 when elements in the military attempted a coup against the Gbagbo-led government. Like the Malian crisis, the Côte d'Ivoire's attracted a hybrid peace-keeping operation that involved ECOWAS, African Union, and the United Nations spearheaded by France.

The first major effort by France to resolve the Cote d'Ivoire crisis was Operation Licorne (Unicorn), comprised of 600 French soldiers. The deployment of the French

troops was also made to honour a 1961 agreement between the Ivorian government and France. French troops were stationed between the eastern and western parts of the country to separate government forces from forces loyal to the opposition parties. Their peacekeeping operations allowed for mediation efforts made by ECOWAS. But despite the efforts and the presence of the peacekeeping forces, the country remained unstable. After 2002, other parties joined the conflict, and it appeared the country was heading towards a state of anarchy. There was an infiltration of rebel groups from neighbouring countries; the Ivorian Popular Movement for the Far West (MPIGO), sponsored by Liberia's Charles Taylor and others from Burkina Faso who carried out attacks in the northern border of the country; the Young Patriots who were loyal to Gbagbo; and emerged the Forces Nouvel (FN) who represented northern interest and were loyal to Quattara.

The ECOWAS heads of states' attempts to broker peace resulted in a series of agreements, beginning with the Lome Peace Accord in 2002 (Kode,2016: 12). In 2003, the Linas Marcoussis Accord was brokered by the French government. In it was the proposal for a Government of National Reconciliation (GNR) to be made up of the representatives who took part in the negotiations. The GNR was intended to superintend the country until elections could held in the future. The agreement also addressed the question of citizenship by outlining a process of naturalization and the issuance of identity documents. Violence, however, was not completely halted even with the Linas Marcoussis Accord, especially because Gbagbo's authority as president was increasingly curtailed by that of the prime minister (Kode, 2016: 16).

Relations between the French government and Gbagbo worsened when the

French military base in Abidjan was attacked by the national army in a strike tagged 'Operation Dignity'. Nine French soldiers lost their lives during the incident, and the French responded by destroying the Ivorian Airforce fleet. Relations between the French and the Gbagbo government deteriorated, and more violence errupted in the country, necessitating further mediation and peace keeping efforts. Under the auspices of African Union, the South African president, Thabo Mbeki, mediated between the conflict parties. This led to the Pretoria Agreement in 2005 with Mbeki stressing the need for all sides to abide by the Linas Marcuossis Accord. He also suggested that there be a power-sharing arrangement between Gbagbo and the opposition party leaders (Mbeki, 2011:1).

It was the mediation effort by the former Burkina Faso president Blaise Compaore that proved to be the turning point in the peace process with the signing of the Ouagadougou Accord in 2007. In the Ouagadougou Accord, a schedule was drawn up for elections to be held in 2010 and agreed upon by the opposing parties. In what appeared to be a repeat of the 2000 election violence, the result was again disputed but this time by both contestants who claimed victory. For a short while, Cote d'Ivoire had two presidents at the same time. Creating more tension, this led to violence as the supporters of each attacked their opponents, killing, injuring and looting. (Human Rights Watch, 2015: 2). As a last resort, the UN, ECOWAS and French supported Forces Nouvel's arrest of Gbagbo who was later indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court (ICC) at the Hague (Kode, 2016: 16).

From Theory to Practice: Assessing the Cosmopolitan Conflict Resolution Approach in Mali and Cote D'Ivoire

Third party intervention can be described as actions taken by governments or intergovernmental actors to affect the duration and outcome of a conflict. Thus, third party intervention should be a political action taken by intervening parties but often a reflection of certain key considerations and interests of the intervening parties. As Richard Bets points out, a third party is likely to intervene when there are economic and strategic interests to protect and when this provides the opportunity to uphold existing ties. A third party is also more committed to intervene in a conflict if it has military capacity to challenge the enemy or opponent (Betts, 1994: 21). In many ways, French intervention in the Ivorian and Malian conflicts met these outlined conditions for third party intervention. One major condition that propelled French military intervention was her superior capacity compared to the Ivorian and Malian national armies. The Ivorian and Malian military lacked the logistics, military hardware and intelligence needed to combat the rebels on their own. French intervention was also validated by ECOWAS and the AU which provided troops and, in a way, conferred legitimacy on France's actions.

In the case of Cote d'Ivoire, the French troops numbered over 4000, and were well-equipped with gazelle helicopters and four Mirage 2 D jets. They were also supported by Germany, Canada, and Britain who provided aircrafts and carriers (Bovcon, 2009: 11). In the heat of the fighting between rebels and the Ivorian government forces, the French created a buffer zone by stationing its forces to separate the contestants. In doing so, French forces limited the scale of destruction and helped

to secure Abidjan, the country's commercial city, from being overrun. In addition, The French government evacuated her nationals and other European nationals by airlifting many of them to safer areas in Nouvel (Gberie and Addo, 2006: 6). But despite the presence of peacekeeping forces in Cote d'Ivoire, the conflict escalated after 2003 and was marked by intermittent fighting between opposing armed groups. This spate of violence gradually subsided between 2004 and 2010, making room for mediation efforts to commence in earnest. These mediation efforts by the French government, ECOWAS and UN were important, because they served as guarantors encourgaing the conflict parties to overcome the mistrust and insincerity associated with treaty implementation, thereby facilitating the peace process.(Human Rights Watch, 2015: 3).

However, from 2010 the conflict escalated following the declaration of Quattara as winner of the presidential election with Gbagbo refusing to vacate office as president. (UN News, 2011). Unlike the 2002 conflict which lingered for almost a decade, the French were able to secure a prompt resolution in 2011.

External intervention in the resolution of the Touareg conflict was similar to that of Cote d'Ivoire in many ways. Within a month of French intervention, the southern region of Mali was stabilized, more so in that the French were supported by regional organisations and other countries. In particular, French intervention was decisive with Operation Seval launched by president Francois Hollande. This French-led military action was critical as it was targeted at Islamist groups who were advancing towards Bamako, the seat of government. (Ba and Boas, 2017: 24). As a result, the Malian conflict entered a de-escalation phase. This military action was

complimented by mediation efforts at the instistence of the former Burkinabe president, Blaise Compaore and led to the signing of the 2013 Preliminary Agreement. A major outcome of 2013 Preliminary Agreement was the decision to conduct presidential elections in 2013 with Ibrahim Boubacr Keita emerging as president. Multilateral peace-keeping in Mali spearheaded by the French fulfilled a major objective of third party intervention—that conflict parties survive a crisis until a new government is formed (Walter, 1997: 336).

Throughout the Malian and the Cote d'Ivoire's conflicts, human rights abuses were committed. There were cases of abductions, women were raped, and child soldiers were recruited to fight. During the wars in these countries, there were summary executions and attacks on schools and hospitals as well as illegal detainments. The Malian conflict alone claimed about 1,500 lives and generated over 2000 refugees and internally displaced persons (Mathieu, 2017: 71). Peace-keeping operations in both conflicts were life-saving , demonstrating the central idea of cosmopolitan conflict resolution that populations affected by armed conflicts have the right to be protected from violence. Non-intervention would have amounted to abandoning the civilian population to the national armies of both states (Bjordkhal, 2005: 220).

Championing intervention in both conflicts, France maintained her strong economic and political ties with Mali and Cote d'Ivoire—as she does with her other former colonial African territories. She also established close military ties with her African colonies, and these include with Mali and Cote d'Ivoire. She still maintains military contingents in many parts of Africa since their independence, making it easy to draft French forces to conflict states in Africa. her interventions in Mali and Cote

d'Ivoire therefore can be considered as continuations of her long-standing diplomatic relations with both states. (Wyss, 2013: 82). In comparison with other countries, France has carried out the highest number of military interventions in sub-Saharan Africa, earning her the name, 'Gendarme of Africa'.

France's interventions in Mali and Cote d'Ivoire from her privileged position as one of the five members of the UN Security Council (a position she earned in the immediate years after World War II and continually maintain) can also be considered part of her efforts to maintain her sphere of influence and boost her international image, which has been dwindling in the face of the growing influence of Asian and Latin American states in Africa. Projecting the country in positive light as a 'friendly gendarme', France's intervention gave her a sense of relevance in international relations and helped her maintain her prestige among the comity of nations. However, there are counter claims that it has been the custom of France to foment wars in Africa in order to provide legitimate reasons to meddle in the affairs of the conflict states and predispose such states to her economic control (Barrios, 2010: 4). In part, these claims may be justified when France's vast investments in critical sectors of the Ivorian and, to a lesser degree, Malian economies are considered. In a continent-wide rating, France accounts for 18% of Africa's imports, while Africa accounts for 13% of France's imports. Cote d'Ivoire, in particular, occupies a special place in France's West African economy (Barrios, 2010: 3), being a significant commercial partner when compared to other former French colonies like Senegal and Mali. It is the most prosperous, having been referred to as the 'Ivorian miracle' during the 1960s through the 1980s when her economy blossomed on cocoa exports. French nationals

who own major commercial concerns in cities like Abidjan and Grand Bassam also control the service sector in the country. French companies such as Bougyes and later Eranne with its subsidiaries, Compaigne Ivorienne d'electricite (CIE) and Societe de distribution d'eau de la Cote d'Ivoire (SODECI), control the country's electricity and water supply (Pickett, 2010: 59).

France also considers Mali important, because she lies within the axis of the wider West African region where she has various investments in commerce and mining. Mali is rich in gold and offers a potential of about 5,2000 tons of uranium. The country also has oil and gas opportunities spread around its borderland region which traverses Algeria, Niger and Mauritania. Mali's Gao region alone has prospects for about 200 tons of uranium (Zounmenou, 2017). More important, Mali shares a border with Niger which is already France's source of uranium in West Africa. France sources 80 percent of its energy from nuclear reactors and has built over 59 nuclear reactors from which she earns about 3 billion dollars yearly (Zounmenou, 2017).

While French intervention is a part of her efforts to protect her economic interests in the affected states, it also stymies growing interest and competition from Asian and North American countries in the West African region. The degree of China's involvement in Africa has stimulated commitment from France to resolve the conflicts in Mali and Cote d'Ivoire (Mark, 2011: 2). Since 2000, the China-Africa Forum has brought China closer to about 44 African states. Among these, are some of France's former colonies, the Central Africa Republic (CAF), Chad, and Niger (Mudida, 2007:101). French intervention in the Malian and Ivorian conflicts may also be explained as a response to the United States' adoption of a more interventionist

policy in Africa. to diversify her sources of energy and secure maritime transit of its energy supply by offering security and aid to African countries (Policy Analysis Unit). In short, the increase in the activities of China and the United States has meant an increase in France's commitment in Africa.

Here it is important to note that external intervention in the resolution of the conflicts in Mali and Cote d'Ivoire suggests that conflict resolution continues to be state-centric, driven more by the national interests of intervening states than the notions of morality and empathy central to CCR. A CCR-centric approach by France and other willing parties would have designed and implemented peacebuilding initiatives aimed to increase the human security profile of both states. In Cote d'Ivoire, the citizenship question was compounded by the enthroning of Al Hassane Quattara viewed as a Burkinabe, which intensified southerners' animosity against northern Ivorians and heightened the problems attending Ivorite identity. The settlement that was finally achieved between these opposing parties was borne from war weariness, not acceptable terms. Southerners, for example, still feel that the process of obtaining identity cards introduced by the Quattara government has provided an easier avenue for foreigners to acquire Ivorian citizenship status. A prime example of the polarization of Ivorians is the boycott of the 2015 elections by about half the population, especially the members of the popular PDCI (Zoumenou and Lamine, 2011: 9).

Conclusion

External interventions in Mali's and Cote d'Ivoire's crises demonstrated some cosmopolitan elements and CCR's expected outcomes. The quick military victories

achieved at the escalation phases of both conflicts limited the scale of violence and reduced the casualty figures. These, however, proved to be short-lived, because they were mainly concerned with halting violence instead of achieving acceptable terms of peace to prevent resurgences. As demonstrated in the cases of Mali and Cote d'Ivoire, a CCR approach to conflict resolution belongs to the realm of theory. While the means to take joint actions towards solving problems globally are at hand, external intervention in conflict states will depend largely on the prevailing interests of the intervening states.

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Leaf Fall #11

Sue Matheson

INFORMATION DISLOCATION

‘Tomorrow is a new past’
– Sheila E. Murphy

Quiet your mind. You are *so* wound up
by all the things you need to *do*
and all the things you want to *do*.

Do not make an enemy of time,
combine digital experience and energy
to construct productive environments.

Start early and don’t quit; find out
about the way words crash and burn,
how the ghosts of language rub up

against each other, unable to move
or take care of themselves. Absence
is a ploy invented by the future,

a precarious strategy which depends
on what no longer works, our inability
to value the now or resist what we’re

being sold. Time informs the present,
time controls today, we must all ask
questions of each other and ourselves,

move from wherever we might be now
to where we want or would like to be.
‘You may be entitled to compensation.’

—Rupert M. Loydell

FILM REVIEW

"When the truth beckons!"
Or
"On the trail of truth"

Sudeep Gosh

University of Hyderabad

Hyderabad, India

Solitude, as I mean it, signifies not a miserable state but rather a secret royalty, profound incommunicability but a more or less obscure knowledge of unassailable singularity. (Jean Genet)

Flying like a bird and flying on the wings of *lived* reality! Is this a comment on today's dysfunctional life where values like freedom and love are fragile and fragmented, where the beauty of creative awareness bears the brunt of oppressive reality, and where independence of spirit is sacrificed on the altar of the banality of the public

perception of living? Rajat Kapoor's Hindi film *Ankhon Dekhi* (*Through My Own Eyes*, 2013*)*, streaming on Netflix, brilliantly captures the serendipity of truth that emboldens a travel agent in this late fifties, Bauji (Sanjay Mishra) to take a plunge, which is physical and metaphorical. Bauji's mundane existence sets off a new journey in which he nurtures with passion that is a self-conscious affirmation to seek his dreams. The latter betrays his idiosyncratic indulgence in his craving for the truth by 'seeing' the tangible and seeking his ideology of 'seeing is believing' with blind conviction. What propels him are his self-conscious discrepancies by which he is distinguished from his friends who follow (and adore) him when augmenting his real world to collapse and his surreal world to gain deeper roots. Written and directed by Rajat Kapoor,[1] *Ankhon Dekhi* is a philosophical *tour de force* offering a host of existential questions for viewers to mull over.

An epiphanic moment of realization that 'seeing is believing' dawns on Bauji when he realizes that, contrary to the assumption of the community, the boy allegedly of ill repute turns out to be a docile lover. Bauji, feeling repentant and guilt-stricken, vows not to validate what is not 'seen' and experienced firsthand. He clings to this fastidiously, and in his search for the validation of truth, truth reducible to the intensity of personal experience takes precedence over social assumptions. Paradoxically, he fails to foresee how such a conviction can lead to a condition of closure. Ironically, his stand is also a comment on the human condition that reeks of herd instinct. What

1. Rajat Kapoor (born 1961) is a well-known actor and director, renowned for *Raghu Romeo* (2003), *Ankhon Dekhi* (2013) and *Kapoor & Sons* (2016). He is acclaimed for his radical ideas about film's dramaturgy; he loves to experiment with what is 'unreal' or 'unnoticed' in the palpable reality. His films contest the undislodgeable reality of present times.

permeates Bauji's life is ambivalence: recognizing the rigid conditioning of society while seeing though the façade of herd instinct (to which the middleclass existence is doomed *ad nauseam)*. He constantly confronts this dichotomy and negotiates his adventures in the wilderness of human emotions where individual desires lie morbid, spiritless, and crushed.

Kapoor's use of poetry in the film creates an interiorized drama that prompts Bauji to seek a private world. Such a search is not only an escape from corrosive materialism but also an attempt to unravel its therapeutic effect by forging an organic bond with the 'idea' of 'lived' reality. In short, Bauji is bent on discovering the unredeemed beauty of freedom. Kapoor's bird metaphor, for example, marks an existential alternative to the relentless banality of a moribund human condition and ineffectual value systems. What shines forth in the humdrum of a middle class family—where there is constant bickering —is a defiant man seeking to redeem his metaphysical anguish. This image of freedom is starkly eccentric, one might claim, but it affirms Bauji refuses to be sucked into a world where moments of happiness are intermittent and a non-conformist like him, who is drunk with Kapoor's exuberant images of freedom, may also feel paradoxically not at home with the soul-crushing numbness of a middle class life.

Throughout, the banality of an 'unimaginative' middle-class life impedes the flow of Bauji's selfhood, and the notion of truth veiled by public perception, and triggers his desire to seek a way to transcend its constrictions. When Bauji takes the final plunge, the retreat into his romantic preoccupations with the 'idea' of 'lived' reality, his self reaches the point of self-actualization. The final scene, where he is

seen flying through the air like a bird, shows the consummation of his desire to unveil the unknown and unseen truth and to lead a 'free' life away from the tyranny of social dogmatism. He paints the sky with a buoyant gesture of happiness, his clothes flutter in the breezy wind, and he lowers his eyes, not in trepidation of the wilderness of the deep gorge, but with the pitch-perfect fulfilment of his dream, into the sprawling skyline of his dream. The causality of his desires and the assertion of his individuality poses questions that privilege the fulfillment of an individual's inner subjectivity over society's collective norms. Does Bauji deplore today's moral world (?) at the expense of his own life? Or does he celebrate the triumph of his subjectivity?

Arguably, on the flipside, the film is an elegy for a world gone awry raising questions of angst, existence and well-being. Bauji flies in full bloom, his epiphany culminating in a plentitude of radiant fulfilment. He morphs into the magnificence of nature, breathes the euphony of the new-found joy drained of all earthly miseries when he jumps off the cliff. What a grand sight of freedom and equanimity, what a death-defying leap, what a climax evoking a way of knowing! What a whimsical certainty to empty out the pent-up angst as his spirit blends into eternity! Has Bauji abandoned the ineluctable constrains of truth and falsehood and the misgivings of the human condition to become the wandering ascetic free to float unanchored? Is his end (or should we call it his ideological self-martyrdom) a false promise of salvation? His absurd formula invokes Beckettian strangeness. His deliverance discloses a fortuitous imagination that and strikes against the imposing boundaries of a stagnant and sterile human existence. Bauji's action of flying like a bird is achieved by a delicate balance of mise-en-scene, voiceover, setting, and music. His monologue moves in lofty spirals

as he transforms into a bird, flying with his arms stretched in eudemonia: "I am flying like a bird. /But this is not a dream / This is real / The wind that is kissing my face / The hissing sound I my ears / This is real./ I'm actually gliding through the clouds / Like a hot knife through butter. / I am flying."[2]

Before his final descent into the valley of the unknown, when Bauji sings the classic song "Do Naina Matware," one of K.L. Saigal's glorious romantic songs,[3] the center of love shifts from the individual to his uncompromising, addictive notion that he must discover his being. Here, Bauji seems to be cracking a good existential joke, a joke that prompts one to delve into one's own inward journey. He seems to advocate the need to be one's inner teacher in one's quest for self-actualization. As an existential conundrum to satirize an individual's servitude to common, social assumptions, this film is philosophical in its structure, implying how a deep, interpersonal dialogue begins when one ventures to ask unnerving questions about one's 'meaningful' (?) life and the inspirational flight of one's soul. In the final scene, where Bauji flings himself into the deep gorge, the director employs the style of a 'free indirect subjective' to blend the real and the surreal, exploring a thrilling way out of an impasse, both metaphorical and philosophical. Its ending, a cleansing for Bauji, intrigues discerning viewers. His search for selfhood and truth, whether it is self-effacing or self-elevating, is a matter of debate. Bauji's warm-pulsed curiosity about life, its ineffable beauty, and his wishfulfilling fantasy recall the ideological doctrines of existentialism and empiricism. In sum, Rajat Kapoor's *Ankhon Dekhi*

2. Translated from the Hindi by the author.
3. K. L. Saigal (1904-1947) was a well-known Indian singer and actor. "Do Naina Matware" is a Hindi song from the 1944 movie *Meri Bahen*.

depicts a deeper bond of existence tied to what is primitive in nature and seeks a new, tantalizing territory in its enigmatic salvation.

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Leaf Fall #12

Sue Matheson

FILM REVIEW

The Count of Monte Cristo: Can Right Be Done?

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Alexandre Dumas' classic novel or righteous revenge *The Count of Monte Cristo* was initially published serially in the *Journal de Débat* from 1844 to 1866. The 2024 adaptation is one of its most exciting treatments in film history—no easy task, considering that this is one of the most often produced novels of all time, alongside that other Dumas classic, *The Three Musketeers* (1844). The writing/directing team of Alexandre de La Patellière and Matthieu Delaporte,[1] has brought us this version of the former in an adaptation that is striking in its imagery and its production values, which rival the best that Hollywood can put out. Viewers may even wonder if there

1. The two started as a writing team and wrote the stage hit *Le Prénom*, directed by Bernard Murat in 2010. They successfully adapted the play for film in 2012, which they also directed, and continued to worked together as a writing team for both stage and film. Their second directorial effort was *Le Meilleur Reste à Venir* in 2019. They wrote the screenplay for the two-part adaptation of the *The Three Musketeers,* directed by Martin Bourboulon in 2023, which lead to *The Count of Monte Cristo* in 2024,

is not a gentle mocking of such Hollywood blockbusters: the count's (Pierre Niney) house is a disorienting maze of stairways; his makeup room is thoroughly Gothic (even architecturally); the prison cells at the Chateau d'If are a little too clean and brightly lit: there are no rats scurrying in the filth (as there is no filth to scurry in). Edmond Dantes, who later becomes the titular count, is locked away in a certain amount of comfort! The Abbé Ferria (Pierfrancesco Favino), the prison mate who crosses his path as he digs his way to freedom, has a cell graced with a table and a cot and seems to have an endless supply of candles to light his path as he digs his tunnels (first alone and then aided by Edmond Dantes) through the walls of the castle. In short, the entire prison sequence stumbles into the Hollywood pitfall of being a bit too lush to be believable.

The film is also finely observant of the aesthetic evolutions over the decades of the narrative: clothing styles change, and architecture reflects the various characters' sensibilities. The lawyer Gerard de Villefort (Laurent Laffitte) lives in neo-classical sobriety, whereas the count's mansion is a synthesis of the new architectural styles of the mid-nineteenth century which would eventually become eclectic: an orientalist boudoir, a classical staircase romantic domes in the exterior and of course the Gothic basement for his make-up changes. This is a vital part of the filmmakers' strategy, as one of the advertising stills (which is not taken from the film itself) is a direct quote from Kaspar David Friederich's iconic 1818 painting *The Wanderer Contemplating a Sea of Mist*.

What makes the film come alive is how those values are embodied by the actors. Pierre Niney lives the role of Edmond Dantes, pulling all the stops in the various

disguises which become a veritable game of hide-and-seek even with the audience: it takes a few seconds at time to realize that it is the count disguised as an old Italian priest or portly English businessman (in a scene which is a great lampoon of Gérard Depardieu in all of his excesses). Niney adds to that a core personality which grows as he shifts as effortlessly from one aspect of his character to the next as from a disguise to the next one, creating a subtle richly layered performance. He goes from the young star-eyed first-mate to a despondent prisoner and the Count in all his glory, with a natural progression in such a characterization.

Niney's performance makes it sometimes difficult for the other actors to keep up, but they do. The best example is Laurent Laffitte, who has already established a film persona of the manipulative, self-centered intellectual, oozing with sophistication—the ultimate villain. He has no personal dislike for Edmond Dantes, but sees him as political threat to his career. This mix of personal detachment and callous inhumanity places him at the head of the group who plotted to destroy Dantes. Niney's overwhelming performance also plays into the very meaning of the film, and it is the most striking aspect of the relationship this production maintains with its source material. There are complexities about that source material that cannot be explored here. Suffice it to say that, alongside the reappraisal of the novel, the number of adaptations made in the past generated a film tradition about the story of the Count of Monte Cristo that is to a certain degree independent of the original book. Each film has indeed taken into account the previous adaptations while considering a new version of the story. Some of the newer versions are more remakes of earlier film versions rather than new readings of the original novel: thus, only a part of that tradition is directly related to

the source novel. Dumas' influence in this adaptation is instead strong, as the writers do seem to infuse in their film aspects of the original which at times disappeared in other film adaptations. The film tradition has however had its say and influenced the filmmakers' narrative choices.

The original novel was a contemporary narrative. Dumas used an over-the-top revenge adventure as a mask to analyze and criticize his era's social, economic and political corruption. There is nevertheless an eerie similarity between the woes of that world and our own, which are summed up by Anne-Marie Callet-Bianco when she notes how

> Dumas takes a dry-eyed look at his times and through the prism of Morcef, Danglars and Villefort [the triad who framed Dantes] exposes the failings of the army, finance and justice, the three pillars of a corrupt world. Monte-Cristo the Avenger, who exposes them and triggers a landslide in this microcosm, plays the undeniable role of a recording Angel. (15)

Similarly, Gérard Gengembre explores the super-hero aspects of Dantes' characterization, noting how Dumas' novel influenced Nietzsche in his invention of the concept of the *Übermensch*, or Superman (160).[2] The real comparison would however be with Batman. Like the Caped Crusader, Dantes draws his power from his infinite wealth, and equally draws his strength from his idealism, one that has

2 Gengembre quotes at length Antonio Gramaschi for the original idea.

a melancholy view of human nature, but also an unfailing sense that right must be done. While Dantes is the primary victim, he is not the only victim.

Dantes' role in the film is to overpower his tormentors, by using their own abuses and personality faults against them. The ship Captain-turned-businessman Danglars (Patrick Mille) is tricked into playing the market against the loss of his commercial fleet, and falls into the Count's hands—who literally ends up owning him. Villefort's story provides the main thrust of the film's narrative. Just after having buried his illegitimate infant son alive, the child is saved from the grave. Dantes eventually finds the adolescent and raises him to become his father's downfall. The film stumbles somewhat on the third story, which is that of Fernand de Morcef (Bastien Bouillon), who is in love with Dantes' original fiancée Mercedes (Anaïs Desmoustier), as his plot to use his son against him falls through and even the final duel ends in something of a stalemate.

It is by focusing too closely on Dantes' revenge that the film falls into the trap of the filmic tradition. The great fun of adaptation studies is to quibble about the changes from one medium to the other: simplifications, deletions, expansions: all alter the story. Despite the apparent levity of the attitude and the practice, these variations have their importance in understanding both each work independently as well as the transition from the original to the adaptation. Each viewer is in fact confronted with the tensions between what the author felt was important, what the filmmaker(s) may find important, and what is remembered as important in reading the original novel.

This is why endings are so terribly fragile, as well as terribly problematic, for in changing the ending the filmmaker inevitably changes the original's intentions

and meanings. And it is with the ending that this film tends to conform more to the previous adaptations—which tend to balk when faced with the novel's end—rather than with Dumas' novel. In the latter, Dantes turns his back to the world, including Mercedes, who, for all her love of Edmond, prefers her comforts and social position and intervenes to save her son. She does so, but at the cost of realizing her feelings, the novel's revenge thus being complete. Yet Dumas justifies Dantes' actions by giving him a "happy" albeit unexpected end. While of course (again like Batman) he will continue to live on the edges of society, he is given a companion worth his salt. The film tradition always feels the need to give Edmond Dantes a comeuppance, as if being imprisoned for fifteen years by three people who have profited from that and continued to exploit and destroy anyone who gets in their way was not enough to allow him to seek revenge personally when society patently fails to do so.

When will right ever be done for Edmond Dantes?

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Sue Matheson

FILM REVIEW

Bulbbul and the Play of Contrasts

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Horror is perhaps one of the least explored genres within the Indian film industry, but on the rare occasions in which it is realized, it is often used to portray the darker side of humanity itself. An example of such a film is the 2020 Netflix release *Bulbbul*. Written and directed by Anvita Dutt Guptan in her directorial debut. Its story, set in the 1800s Bengal Presidency, revolves around the titular character, played by Tripti Dimri. The film is reminiscent of fairy tales in its imagery—as the image of a witch flying over the forest while a full moon fills the sky suggests—and in its portrayal of the theme of evil versus good, and often leans into the elements of the Gothic for its use of shadows and the presence of a *haveli* (mansion).

Bulbbul (played as a child by Ruchi Mahajan), a girl barely six years old, is

married off, her aunt making her wear the toe ring that will keep her in control. The ten-year-old boy Satya (Varun Buddhadev), whom she believes is her husband, tells her the story of the witch or *chudail*, with her feet bent backwards, who is renowned for her waiting for the princess to return to her room, and then gobbling her up. The one who waits for Bulbbul is however not a witch but Indranil Thakur (Rahul Bose), a man in his thirties who claims to be her husband. The girl is therefore not in danger from a witch, but rather from the people living within the mansion—Indranil Thakur and his mentally disabled twin brother Mahendra (also played by Rahul Bose) and Binodhini (played by Paoli Dam), Mahendra's wife. Satya becomes Bulbbul's sole companion, but he then leaves the mansion to go to London. The film is thus a collection of oppositions—between the past and the present, judgements and truth—and the contrasts within its characters. All of this is revealed through a non-linear mode of storytelling that stacks the past against present, the latter revealing the judgements whereas the former represents the truth.

The present is what forms the main narrative of the story. Twenty years have passed since Bulbbul has married and Satya, now played by Avinash Tiwary, returns to the village. The mansion no longer holds any of its past inhabitants—Indranil has left for unknown reasons, Mahendra is one of the men who has died under mysterious circumstances, Binodhini has moved out and lives the life of a widow, with her head shaved and clothed in a white saree. Only Bulbbul remains and she has become confident and self-assured, but also audacious in a way that is unsettling as she is now the "lonely mansion's imposing matriarch" (Mukherjee). Satya, along with the audience, knows nothing of what has happened within the household, and his opinions

are based on his own patriarchal way of thinking.

It is through Binodhini that the series of oppositions between the characters are revealed in their typically-Gothic excesses. Binodhini seems to be frightened of Bulbbul, and she meekly mourns the death of her husband. Indeed, at one point she tells Bulbbul she would never wish bad to someone, but then the scene cuts to the past when she is represented as alluring and sensual, cunning and sly, someone who reminds in a way of the present Bulbbul. Binodhini is the voice that sows the seed of doubt in Indranil's mind and the one who lays the foundation for the idea of Bulbbul as am incarnation of the 'witch'. By contrasting Binodhini's character in the present against her past, the film thus lays the foundation for her to be judged as a villainess, but, as the story progresses, spectators realize that, like Bulbbul, Binodhini too is a victim of the patriarchal trap.

Satya (perhaps the weakest of all characters) represents this distinction between present opinions and judgements and past truths well. Unhappy about how Bulbbul leads the household, he slowly starts taking the reins and investigating the murders that have been committed, finally dismissing the idea that it could be the work of a witch. Satya believes the murderer is a man, as no woman could kill someone in such a brutal way. This biased perspective further causes him to suspect the character of Dr. Sudip (Parambrata Chatterjee), a suspicion that cements itself when Satya wrongly comes to the conclusion that it was the affair between Bulbbul and the doctor that led his brother to leave home. The respect for his brothers makes it impossible for him to conceive of the violence the two of them were capable of, and his jealousy for the closeness between Dr. Sudip and Bulbbul keeps him from seeking out the truth. In

spite of his name meaning ‘truth’, Satya remains the most detached from it.

But, then the movie dips into the past, and we see Indranil breaking Bulbbul’s feet, which are then bent backward, and she is raped by Mahendra in such a defenceless state. Indranil did not leave because of the affair, but because he could not face the extent of his own cruelty. Satya does not know the events that happened, and by the time he learns about them it is too late. It is the discomfort induced by these events that generates the horror the film is based on. Initially, when the incidents of the past remain unknown, Bulbbul is identified with the witch behind the murder of men and who mockingly laughs at the death of her brother-in-law. However, the narrative slowly reveals her also as the goddess who has been saving and avenging the women who have been wronged.

The film’s narrative is strengthened through the lighting and art design. The contrast between blue and warm tones is evident when Satya tells the story of the witch, the exteriors of the palanquin being presented through a blue filter whereas warm tones are used for the interiors. Similarly, in the scene between Indranil and Bulbbul set five years in the past, when he informs her he is taking Satya to Kolkata, Indranil blends into the blue light of the whole scene, whereas Bulbbul alone is bathed in warm. The play of shadows is especially predominant in the scene when Satya rests in his room after his return from London. The use of red lighting, which generally takes over most of the film, is especially evident when Satya’s horse-driven carriage passes through the forest. The latter is drenched in red light, which seems to be emanating from the blood red moon. Red is also associated to the figure of the witch, both when the driver warns Satya about her while they are in the forest

and when the witch kills the men. Initially red seems to represents the blood of the victims, but, after Bulbbul has been raped, viewers see the moon slowly turning red, which therefore represents instead her own spilled blood and her thirst for revenge.

Bulbbul is essentially a story of revenge, in which the woman who is wronged sets out to take vengeance. From this perspective, the film is not original in its storytelling within the context of the Bollywood industry. However, the symbolic elements, the inspiration from Raja Ravi Varma's paintings (Sachdeva), Amit Trivedi's score, and Siddharth Diwan's cinematography enable the film to transcend its cliched plot, producing an experience that is haunting and memorable in spite of being predictable.

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SHADOW LINES

So space might be shaped like a doughnut,
we might be the icing on top. Or maybe it's
a taurus, a diamond, could even be a sphere.

We don't know, can't make it out, although
spaceships armed with probes and cameras
have been sent as far away as possible.

Still drifting slowly, they take photos that
will arrive in the distant future, detailing
what was happening now, back then, not

what we see today arriving from the past.
Time may not exist, might just be how
we understand duration and experience,

a way to stop our brains exploding
from too much instantaneous thought.
Just as colour shifts with distance,

memories change when we file and order
everything at once. What shape is space?
It's mostly just a blur of movement

expanding from a single point. But what is
the point? Emerging evidence of spacetime
in an apparently flat and infinite universe

contradicts the fuzziness of probability and
exceeds the speed of light. We shut down
our thinking and ignore the multiverse;

from our point of view we are more than
animated stardust from a big bang. We will
never know true reason or fully understand.

—Rupert M. Loydell

Leaf Fall #15

Sue Matheson

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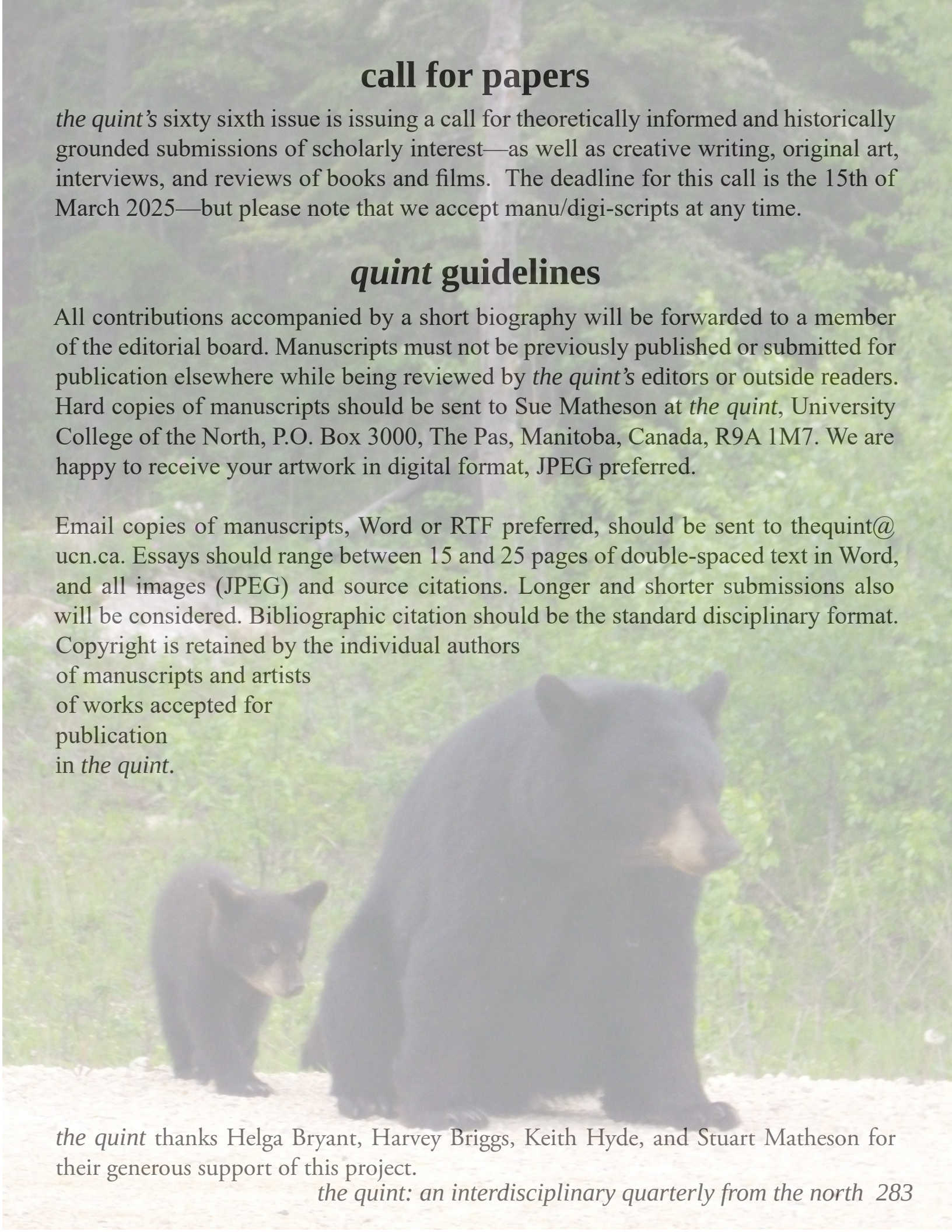

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