

Subversion or Subservience? The Remains of the Empire in Nigeria

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Abstract

Postcolonial literature is supposed to be a battleground on which an active pursuit of decolonization should continue in every possible way. African literature written in the language of the Empire does not appear to be completely anticolonial. Ngugi wa Thiong'o feels a need for linguistic decolonization of African literature. According to him, African literature manifests the domination of the Empire by using their language. He classifies the works of Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka as Afro-European literature. But is taking up the language the same as accepting the standards of the colonizer? The language question has many implications, especially when it comes to African literature. We see that Achebe attempts to decentralize control over language by extensively modifying it. My paper examines how the Nigerian authors Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka have developed their own written English vernacular codes and the way they Nigerianize their texts using pidgin English in their dialogue—the English that is actually used by some Nigerians. My paper also shows that there are other manifestations of imperial domination apart from the linguistic hegemony in African literature. The English of the Empire has been domesticated by Achebe and it has effectively become the language of literary expression, but a preference for the White Man's codes and customs is seen in sociocultural settings. There was cultural domination in the country, which is still at work in present day Nigeria. My paper shows that the domestication of the English language is able to carry the weight of the African culture, but these authors point out that internal indigenous structures are flawed and these deficiencies allow the apparently dead seeds of hegemony to germinate all over again in native soil. So, in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's words, the decolonization of the mind has not yet taken place. In this paper I include my personal experiences of and interactions with the westernized Nigerian and their apparent Afro-European lifestyle. The years I have spent in Nigeria have brought me in contact with the westernized educated Igbos and Yorubas of the South, and my description of their day-to-day tendencies explicitly show that there is a serious imperial effect deeply rooted in the Nigerians.

The question here is very simple: Does African literature written in the English language qualify as authentic African literature? Or can the African experience be accurately sustained by the language of the empire? This is crucial to the understanding of how imperialism still has its claws penetrated through the linguistic compromise reached by the writers. Language was an instrument of culture control in the colonial period and that is why some critics feel

that a decentralization of language control is necessary. They think that the first step to free oneself from the colonial hangover is to forsake their language. The west was the center of the world exerting political, economic, and cultural power. Now this is when they used their language to dominate the locality in every possible way. Ngugi wa Thiong'o in his book *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* is concerned with shifting the center. Unless a major shift takes place, it will not be possible to remove the colonial stain from the nation. He thinks the nation needs to detach itself from imperial ties. Thiong'o also sees the significance of the culture-power nexus. His title "Writers in Politics" captures the essence of this cultural/imperial domination. Of course we know that the pen is mightier than the sword and somehow the English-language Empire grows stronger than anything else. My question here is, how exactly are they engaged in the act of decolonization? How are they planning to resist imperial domination? Are they writing back to try and beat the white man at his own game? Some writers reject the language of the Empire while others like Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka borrow and subvert the English language. They subscribe to the notion that we have to defeat the White man in his own game. But, by using English, these writers fall into the trap of defining African culture inappropriately. The defining moment is distorted in the sense that the African experience, adorned with the language of the Empire, seems to be at a hyper-sophisticated level. In Ngugi wa Thiong'o's words, it becomes Afro-European. He writes in his preface to *Decolonising the Mind*:

I am lamenting a neo-colonial situation ... In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Europe stole art treasures from Africa to decorate their houses; in the twentieth century Europe is stealing the treasures of the mind to enrich their languages and culture. Africa needs back its economy, its politics, its culture, its languages and all its patriotic writers (Thiong'o Preface XII).

If we attend to the nexus between language and power, we see that the writers in power—armed with their pens—shape Africa in an English style. These works are accessible to only a section of the people, that is, the bourgeois, the educated upper class and middle class readers. African literature tends to be in the possession of the westernized educated class. A question springs up again: so what happens in the end? Writers have politicized the act of decolonization. Their works, no matter how much they have modified or Africanized them, are kept on the bookshelves of the petty westernized educated class. Achebe, for example, writes his *Things Fall Apart* in the western mode. He Nigerianizes his narrative by inserting Igbo proverbs and keeping to the orality of the storytelling styles, but it definitely belongs to the educated speaking standard Nigerian English. As Thiong'o notes,

Its greatest weakness still lay where it has always been, in the audience—the petty-bourgeoisie readership automatically assumed by the very choice of language. Because of its indeterminate economic position between the many contending classes, the petty-bourgeoisie develops a vacillating psychological make-up. Like a chameleon it takes on the color of the main class with which it is in the closest touch and sympathy (22).

It is true that the English language cannot be denied as the language of wider communication. The worldwide domination of English does not allow its abandonment. But the questions of

the African sentiments remain. It is not also wholly certain that, if these writers opted for African languages, the problem of cultural invasion would be eradicated. Since language is closely tied to culture, it is a dangerous pursuit to use the Empire's language. In a way it feeds on the native and slowly transforms them to serve colonial interests.

Another problem is the African situation. The language question has many implications, especially when it comes to African literature. The popularity of the English language in Africa can in part be traced to the fact that due to colonial imposition, it was the language of social mobility in the new order and therefore the language most studied and used formally. The African languages were neglected in terms of formal study and use. In Nigeria, for example, there are many ethnic/tribal languages, where English is more than simply a means of communicating ideas and information. It also serves as a very important means of establishing and maintaining a unifying relationship among people of diverse cultures and mother tongues (westafricareview.com). Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka believe that the rigid hegemony of the language can be unmasked through this process of adaptation. As Thiong'o further notes, in *Decolonising the Mind*, "language was the most important vehicle through which that power fascinated and held the soul prisoner. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (9).

Nigeria is a large nation with hundreds of languages. The second edition of an index of Nigerian languages lists over four hundred languages. All the languages except pidgin and English are associated with specific indigenous people and are thus not pan-Nigerian. Only English and Nigerian pidgin can be called pan-Nigerian in the sense that no ethnic group can claim native rights to them. Since in Nigeria ethnic particularism poses a serious threat to national survival, the installation of English is needed. Promoting national literatures was considered necessary to stop the ethnic conflicts in the country. This explains Achebe's motivation for choosing to write in English. Writers like Achebe used it as a weapon since the survival of Nigeria as a nation-state required it. The African writers using English had to think of the question of linguistic hegemony as well, so they engaged themselves in the process of domesticating English. In keeping with the fast pace of "globalization," these writers borrow from and adapt to the new order. They reshape the foreign tongue. The African writers using English tend to deploy the strategy of transliteration. This is a very effective way of conveying the local tendencies in an African manner. But that again has its limits. This was a doctrine originally conceived by the first generation of African Anglophone writers as a second language literary theory. They wanted to use this method to create national literatures in "postcolonial" African countries. Nigerian writers have successfully used it. They succeeded with this strategy because of their sociocultural and sociopolitical predicament. These African countries south of the Sahara emerging from colonial imposition in the late fifties encountered the problem of multiethnicity. Achebe himself feels the tension and this is clear in the following remarks he makes in his collection of essays *Morning Yet on Creation Day*:

The real question is not whether Africans could write in English but whether they ought to. Is it right that a man should abandon his mother-tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no

other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it. I hope, though, that there always will be men, like the late Chief Fagunwa, who will choose to write in their native tongue and ensure that our ethnic literature will flourish side-by-side with the national one (62)

This explains Achebe's choice of language. Writers like Achebe also realized that if they used the native speaker's English as their model, they could not evade cultural domination in literature. So they created a pan-Nigerian language that unified the constituent ethnic groups. They were sure that it had links with the language of the colonial master. Now there were three possible strategies—the use of a pan-national modified English (i.e., Nigerian English), the use of various ethnic-Nigerian modified Englishes (i.e., Igbo English, Yoruba English, etc.), or the use of pidgin. But only one was considered feasible at the time of Nigerian independence, namely, the use of ethnic-Nigerian modified Englishes. Pidgin could not be used because of the hostility people showed to its English language association. The nation tried to abolish the English language of its colonial master. It was considered corrupt. School children were forbidden to use it and writers could not connect themselves to it. It is proved in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958). There is no instance of pidgin in it, but his later novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) offers examples of the usage of pidgin. This Nigerian English caused identity problems. It was closely connected to Standard English and the people using it assumed a strong sense of superiority. Only the upper and upper middle class used this English. The English used by educated Nigerians was the Nigerian English and not the ethnic Englishes. There is virtually no difference between Nigerian English and Standard British English. The Nigerian pidgin performs the role of informal English in Nigeria. Here are some quick examples: "You don't go there," "I have seen you well well," "habba o," "it don't happen," etc. This English can be distinguished from Standard English. But the Nigerians speak English the way they write it and that is why it is by and large identical in syntax and spelling with standard British written English. So the only way out was to write in various types of ethnic modified Englishes. This is what came to be known as transliteration. Transliteration does not have the same meaning in African literary theory as in Standard English. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term as "the rendering of letters or characters of one alphabet in those of another." But in the early sixties, following the political independence of several African countries, the word "transliteration" was introduced in African critical terminology as a blend of translation and literal meaning so that it is glossed as "literal translation"—a meaning that, however, is not listed in any English dictionary. This became an important term in the postcolonial language politics of African literature.

Transliteration is a procedure for introducing tropes and idioms from an African ethnic language into English through a communication of equivalent words. In Achebe's *Arrow of God* we see this equivalent transliteration. Thus, the Igbo idiom, *Were ue gi guo eregi*, which means the same as the English idiom "Read between the lines," can be introduced into an English text as "count your teeth with your tongue" (137). The Igbo words are replaced by equivalent English words, but the idiom remains an Igbo cultural artifact. The same thing happens in Bengali. If we transliterate the Bengali idiom, *chal nai kuttar bagha naam*, for instance, it would be "a

dog without a skin is named a tiger” but the English equivalent is “Cut your coat according to your cloth.”

The use of transliteration here instead of translating is curious because thinking in one language and rendering the thought in another sounds like translation. But African writers wanted to distinguish their own brand of translation. Gabriel Okara and Chinua Achebe classify it. Achebe recommends that the African writers try to develop their own varieties of English. These varieties do not coincide with any native-speaker varieties; rather its special features are able to carry an African’s “peculiar experience” to the world, an experience that is essentially bilingual and bicultural. In *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Achebe writes:

So my answer to the question: Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing? Is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask: Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker? I should say, I hope not. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience (61)

So what these writers want is a bilingual variety of English combining native features and foreign elements; the target language expressions cast in the formal mould of source language counterparts. To a British or an American reader, it seems stylistically odd in context, but generally they do not violate the rules of English syntax. There are instances of this in Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* as “a thing of shame” (13), instead of “a shameful thing,” and in *Arrow of God*, “a man of riches” (40), instead of “a rich man.” These expressions mirror the form of Igbo expressions.

The typical Nigerian Anglophone novel consists of two types of sentences—unadulterated Standard English sentences, which constitute the bulk of the text, and Igbo, Yoruba sentences. The Nigerian Anglophone novel remains largely foreign. To quote Achebe:

At last the rain came. It was sudden and tremendous. For two or three moons the sun had been gathering strength till it seemed to breathe a breath of fire on the earth. All the grass had long been scorched brown, and the sands felt like live coals to the feet. Evergreen trees wore a dusty coat of brown. The birds were silenced in the forests, and the world lay panting under the live, vibrating heat. And then came the clap of thunder. It was an angry metallic and thirsty clap, unlike the deep and liquid rumbling of the rainy season. A mighty wind arose and filled the air with dust. Palm trees swayed as the wind combed their leaves into flying crests like strange and fantastic coiffure (*Things Fall Apart* 130)

And here is Soyinka:

The rains of May become in July slit arteries of the sacrificial bull, a million bleeding punctures of the sky-bull hidden in convulsive cloud humps, black, overfed for this one event, nourished on horizon tops of endless choice grazing, distant beyond giraffe reach.” (167)

This type of English is hardly different from the English a native would use. Achebe captures folkloric dimensions of the Igbo language. His novels mediate orality and literacy by turning translations of folklore and discourses into a formal literary device.

As culture is closely tied to language, the Nigerians are bound to follow the western value system. They reshape themselves to suit the West. So classes of westernized Nigerians emerge in postcolonial Nigeria. They do not have any interest in their ancestral heritage, customs, traditions, codes of conduct, etc. They have their English/American way of life. I have spent nineteen years in Nigeria, so it will not be a difficult task to portray the texture of my experience in the country. All these years brought me in contact with different types of Nigerians. The status differences as a result of their identification with the West are apparent in Nigeria. The upper class Nigerian is very much in love with the western lifestyle. My Igbo and Yoruba friends were not at all concerned with their customs. The West has entered their blood and they believe it to be the best way of life. This is cultural imperialism and hegemony in full bloom. These educated people have seriously instilled the western values into their mindset. My friend never wore her traditional suit (a wrapper with a headscarf). She was always in skirts, jeans, and tracksuits. She even preferred the straight and soft hair to the Afro ringlets. Some Nigerians bleach their skin to make it appear “white.” This is definitely a color complex, which began with the arrival of the Europeans on the Black Continent. I went to a school in a northern state, Kaduna and the recollection of the moments evokes a much anglicized childhood.

African literature in Afro-European style has made the situation worse. Is it the literature of the Nigerian people or the native Empire? Definitely not a literature for the Nigerian populace. It is rather a literature of the people by the educated elite for the external world’s consumption. The literature is patronized more outside the country than inside. They do not even realize that they are doing something outlandish. There seems to be a Universalist strain in Nigerian literary thought. In English they found a universal medium of literary expression. In reality these writers have created, as Thiong’o rightly points out, another “hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed as Afro-European literature; that is, the literature written by Africans in European Languages” (Thiong’o 26).

So there is international English implanted in Nigeria, which does not have a colloquial register. It is understandably inaccessible to ordinary people who do not understand English. Consider the two following passages from Achebe’s *Arrow of God*:

We have come to the end of our present mission. Our duty now is to watch Ezeulu’s mouth for a message from Ulu. We have planted our yams in the farm of Anaba-nti. (209)

I can see tomorrow, that is why I can tell Umuaro: *come out of this because there is death there or do this because there is profit in it*. If they listen to me, o-o; if they refuse to listen, o-o. I have passed the stage of dancing to receive presents. (132)

The cultural signs—Anaba-nti and o-o—are buried in contexts where it is hardly accessible to ordinary Igbo people who do not know English. *Things Fall Apart* is created in favor of

non-Igbo readers because there are few ethnic linguistic or folkloric artifacts in it. The work essentially consists of plain Standard English narration. By contrast *Arrow of God* satisfies the Igbo bilingual reader. Now it is quite clear why *Things Fall Apart* is Achebe's literary masterpiece, not *Arrow of God*. It is important for Nigerian writers to reconstitute English to make it accessible to the masses and mirror the texture of Nigerian life. This does not mean that the use of Standard English comes to an end in Nigeria. It will only be used in fields requiring international input and cooperation. It will be valued in higher education, the upper levels of government and administration, and in certain professions.

Africans have tried to retain their uniqueness in many different ways. They have their national anthems and even food recipes for nation building. But some way or the other, they fall short of the ingredients needed to establish a positive sociopolitical overview. Somewhere along the way it cracks down. A section of the people can hardly stick to their traditional essence. I have seen that most Nigerians make fun of the concept of "ancestral spirits." This is an integral part of African culture/beliefs. My friends in school cracked jokes about the medicine man (the diviner). The diviner is a man or a woman whose function is to determine whether a disease or misfortune is due to witchcraft or to a "ghost" and to prescribe treatment. In African culture, it is necessary to accept, as a serious therapeutic hypothesis, the existence of ghosts and witchcraft. But some Africans, especially the educated ones, feel that it is foolish to depend on these medicine men to cure their diseases. The treatment resists the techniques of western medicine. This conflicts with the deep-rooted assumptions of western doctors who prefer to talk in terms of psychosis and neurosis. They eliminate the psychic factors in the external world. Do these Africans reject the spirit-possession because western science excludes psychic factors? Does it go against the rational thinking of the west? In Nigeria, some medicine men are arrested for prescribing remedies. On the other hand, some government hospitals allow diviners into their wards if patients ask for them. Our family doctor used to work with a diviner and sometimes treated his patients according to the diviner's advice. Some Africans believe that a disease originates from witchcraft/black magic. But only the uneducated class entertains this belief. The literate Nigerians do not believe in the power of "spirit possession." In my class a girl was punished for keeping a "voodoo" doll in her desk. She told the authorities that she wanted to stand first in class and that doll contained her soul. The voodoo man was in control of her soul through that doll and he would assist her to do well in her exams. That was too much of a "story" to believe. Our principal seized the doll and warned her not to pursue such impractical means to pass examinations. They thought it was an utterly ridiculous practice. After some days, we had our examination and the brightest girl in our class fell sick the day before her exam. It is true that the voodoo girl could not take her position, but I believe that her magic had something to do with this timely misfortune. No one seemed to take notice of this. This really works in Africa. It may sound a bit bizarre, but I have seen people recovering from incurable conditions when the medicine man set a trap to capture the ghosts that had possessed the bodies. Some Nigerians make "bouncers" (this is a countereffect magic) that is used to ward off the effects of harmful medicines used against them. Our driver had a "bouncer" done since evil spirits once attacked him. Some rich people permanently hire a medicine man to protect them from spells.

My brother in Nigeria has a diviner working for him. I guess he sees the results. Most Nigerians do not believe in the inferior spirits. They pursue the Englishman's knowledge of diseases. The educated Nigerian thinks that it is stupid to make a wax image of someone and stick pins into it. The medicine man claims that man cannot, by rational means, protect himself against the occult. He/she may dream of a danger or maybe a dead ancestor may warn him of a future mishap. Now, how does rational thinking work here? How can a rational man depend on dreams, take it seriously, and act accordingly? It is definitely unworthy of attention by a modern man. Descartes concluded that "I think, therefore I am." It is man's reasoning consciousness that matters the most in the world. This is the attitude of the other world, the world of western scientific man. Somehow he has managed to eliminate God. If thinking is rational, seeing is rational too and this leads to "seeing is believing." This automatically discards the existence of God. Why should we become blind supporters? The mind is conscious, and the rest is machine that can be wholly understood. Freud took these emotions into consideration and analyzed the forces. He integrated these forces into conscious activity. This is in line with the scientific man who sees the universe through his mind. The rational man with his conscious versus unconscious state stands in contrast to the African who has seen the ancestral spirit and dream warnings come true.

The Rise of the Postcolonial Elite in Nigeria

Nigeria gained its independence from Britain in 1960. Ceremonies of independence took place. It was definitely a moment of great joy. It seemed the end of the Empire. Images of heroism were scattered everywhere. People honored the sacrifices of millions to save their land. It was not a defeat, but a resistance. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, the Kenyan writer, pictures the night of independence in his novel *A Grain of Wheat*, observing that this was not just a moment of ecstasy, but also a moment of a thousand expectations. Independence was not just an end to colonialism, but the beginning of an African nation. A new Africa was expected to emerge. They wanted something spectacular to emerge. Ayi Armah has written about the dawning of independence in his novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. Now has the dream been fulfilled?

The literature of the immediate postcolonial era in Africa says it all. Writers realized that something had gone terribly wrong. Decolonization appeared to be a distant hope. The aftermath was not at all as pleasant as the dreams. This independence seemed to be only for a section of the people. It was for the intellectuals, bankers, and lawyers, and not for the population at large. Writers like Achebe responded to these harsh realities of the apparently independent society. These intellectuals were caught between the masses on their left and the postcolonial elite on their right. These elites were feeding on the nation much like the British rulers. Chinua Achebe in his novel *A Man of the People* exposes the "Nigerian political elite." He portrays the self-interest and corruption of this elite. Achebe can imagine no solution to the growing lawlessness of civil society in postcolonial Nigeria.

This is the stagnation of postcolonial society. The elite in all its nastiness, vulgarity, greed, and corruption rules the land. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon blames the failings of

nationalism on the “intellectual laziness of the middle class” (149). The native bourgeoisie rises to power only insofar as it seeks to replicate the bourgeoisie of the “mother country” that sustains colonial rule. In the following passage, Fanon suggests that the opportunist native bourgeoisie mistakenly attempts to survey and control the colonized masses to the same extent as the colonial bourgeoisie it attempts to displace:

The national middle class which takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace. In its narcissism, the national middle class is easily convinced that it can advantageously replace the middle class of the mother country. But that same independence which literally drives it into a corner will give rise within its ranks to catastrophic reactions, and will oblige it to send out frenzied appeals for help to the former mother country. (149)

Fanon suggests in *The Wretched of the Earth* the ways in which intellectual leaders often betray the national working class:

Before Independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty, and national dignity, but as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land, and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie. (166)

The atrocity of the postcolonial society will continue to worsen unless a major turnover occurs. Perhaps an African revolution will do. It cannot be sabotaged by its leaders. Leaders have long betrayed their people and it is high time to revolt. These elites turned to power and wealth and ignored social justice. Independence was a hoax for the people. It was an extension of the colonial system, not abolition.

Chinua Achebe reveals this very lack of contact between the leaders and the ordinary people. He also shows that the condition of existence is poor in post-independence Nigeria. Achebe reveals this in his two novels, *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the military is already in power. They came with the intention of erasing the ills of the previous regime. Now, Sam, the military head of Kanga, starts the same evil as the civilian politicians before him. The end of the novel shows that Sam is overthrown by another military regime. Since 1960, the control of state power in the country has switched between the military and the civilians. So who is caught in the trap? The ordinary people for sure. This is evident when we see a society full of contrasts and unevenness in development. Affluence exists alongside poverty in the urban areas. This is what “independence” has given them.

There is also a contrast between the town and the rural areas. In both *Anthills of the Savannah* and *A Man of the People*, the image of the rural area is a wasteland. The military intervention

is portrayed as flawed. From a broader angle, the military takeover stops the violence that erupted after the elections. The military releases Eunice from prison and pronounces Max the hero of the revolution. In *Anthills of the Savannah* it is clear that Achebe turns bitter towards the military intervention in politics. He reveals that the nation's development does not lie in the hands of the military because its dictatorial form repels the ordinary people. This irresponsible leadership is nothing but another form of colonial domination. The image of the anthill in *Anthills of the Savannah* gives us an insight into the problematic structures in postcolonial Nigeria. The image is first revealed in the title of the novel, and then repeated in three other instances.

Anthills surviving ... (28)

Anthills in the scorched landscape (194)

Gazing out into the empty... (195)

The anthills we are referring to here are the mounds of the termites that are found in the rainforest habitats of the Savannah. It is important to note that a hierarchical order prevails in the nest. Within this order, the queen occupies the center, and life in the nest revolves around her. This shows that there is an internal structure of privilege. It is like the political order in post-independence Nigeria. In fact, the anthill reflects the overall condition/state of the country. Power is at the center, in the hands of the elite social group and everything else is pushed to the margins. A system of hegemony is recreated after the fall of the Empire in Africa. The image of the anthill is like the state's image with its complex internal structures. Achebe makes the empty structure sustain the harsh conditions. These termites abandon their earlier nest to build other mounds just like the individuals who control the state. Now why has Achebe made it survive the harsh conditions? The nation needs to cancel the projects of the preceding governments and start anew. The anthill needs to be broken down which is yet to be done. This can also be an image in the sociocultural situation. Decolonizing the African mind is urgently called for. The "anthill" (the British Empire's remains) needs to disappear.

Today the western educational system serves a similar interest. It is much like the imperialist vision of the colonial period. It further exploits the postcolonial African and captures the African mind. One cannot but notice how serious mental colonization persists in this instance. The southern part of Nigeria came into contact with Europeans first through trans-Atlantic slave traders. Following the abolition of the slave trade, legitimate trade began to flourish. The start of a capitalist economy and consciousness into the indigenous scene had a catastrophic effect on the general psyche and spirit of the Nigerians. The Nigerian cultural values had given way to accommodate the new spirit of "survival of the fittest" and other western values. The consequence was immediate: hunger and starvation. Farmers had to forsake their indigenous systems of food production and become actively engaged in the mass production of cash crops. The western education introduced to Nigeria by the Christian mission schools became a threat to the survival of traditions, especially oral literary performance.

The social life and customs have been steeped in foreign influences since then. British and American influences have continued to enter the traditional arena. Of course this is facilitated

by satellite television, American movies, music, fast food, etc. This is the “global” culture we are talking about here. A present danger is the increasing Americanization of the youths in the areas of fashion, food, and so on. This is a process which can completely destroy Benin culture and replace it with an American system. African cultures/religions have undergone dramatic changes. In Benin there was a traditional religion (the ancestral worship system) in the beginning of the century. Later the Benis abandoned this religion for the two major world religions, that is, Islam and Christianity. The Nigerians tend to prefer a popular culture to an ancestral heritage. They are more inclined towards the so-called “universal” than the “regionals”.

It seems that the 21st century “globalization” is here to diminish the importance of the nation-states such as Nigeria. They can hardly raise the profile and identity of nationality groups that make up a nation-state. Ademola Dasylva, in his article *Culture Education and the Challenge of Globalization in Modern Nigeria*, points out that, “Nigeria can be active in preserving important aspects of their culture and incorporate elements in the performing arts (music, dance, drama, traditional games) and project their cultures by satellite broadcasting to the rest of the world. Instead of a ridiculous enacting of other cultures, Nigeria can be actively engaged and committed to the preservation of its national elements” (331).

Dasylva also mentions that,

Undoubtedly, Nigeria’s government has done something laudable in the publication of periodicals such as *Nigeria Magazine* and the various other books and journals that have been commissioned. Universities and academic associations have also held conferences, as often as funds would permit, both at local and international levels, during which cultural experts and oral literature scholars often pooled valuable ideas for the purpose of extending the frontiers of cultural studies, especially oral literature scholarship. (331)

The pursuit of culture conservation, enrichment, and dissemination will certainly ensure a strong identity consciousness. They must make their groups operate in the 21st century, instead of allowing them to wither away with the modern pop culture. The people could break through the mental colonization and develop a positive attitude towards their own cultural values. A new and more spiritually oriented practice of world religions, which is set within the cultural milieu of the people, can be a possible way out of the tensions. A renewed interest in African culture could be encouraged and introduced in schools at the basic levels. The local Government Councils could act responsibly to promote their rich cultural elements, not only internally but also at an international level. The 21st century has heaped opportunities and challenges ahead. The only way to contest is to be well equipped with one’s own precious resources. It is high time that the agencies work together in the preservation of the languages and national heritages of Africa. The future of the great continent of Africa can be dazzling only if the people boastfully declare a true African Continent in its purest form.

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