



English Literature & Culture Journal (JCRELC)

# VOLUME-2, ISSUE-6

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## Preface

We are delighted to present, with great pleasure, the **Volume-2, Issue-6, June 2026** of the **Journal of Creative Research in English Literature & Culture (JCRELC)** — a peer-reviewed international journal devoted to the exploration and advancement of literary and cultural scholarship.

JCRELC is part of the **SPARC Institute of Technical Research** publication series and was envisioned to meet the growing global demand for an academic platform that unites critical thinking, creative inquiry, and interdisciplinary research in the field of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**. The journal aims to serve as a bridge between scholars, educators, and practitioners, providing an inclusive space for diverse voices and perspectives.

The mission of JCRELC is to foster intellectual exchange, innovation, and academic excellence by publishing original and thought-provoking research in areas such as:

### **English Literature:**

Literary theory and criticism, comparative literature, postcolonial studies, modern and contemporary literature, diaspora studies, gender and identity, eco-criticism, digital humanities, narrative and stylistic studies, and creative writing.

### **Cultural Studies:**

Media and popular culture, film and performance studies, cultural theory, identity politics, globalization and culture, heritage and memory studies, translation and intercultural communication, visual arts, and linguistic representation in literature and media.

Each article published in this inaugural issue exemplifies the journal's commitment to promoting meaningful scholarship and fostering dialogue that connects literature and culture with the evolving dynamics of society.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all **Editorial, Reviewer, and Advisory Board Members** who have contributed their expertise, as well as to the **authors** whose valuable research enriches this publication. Our appreciation also goes to the **editorial team of the SPARC Institute of Technical Research** for their consistent guidance and support in bringing JCRELC to life.

We hope that this inaugural issue of JCRELC will serve as a valuable resource for scholars and readers alike, inspiring continued exploration and critical engagement in the vibrant domains of **English Literature and Cultural Studies**.



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# Examining the Aspects of Music and Its Importance in the Poems of Mehdi Akhavan Sales

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**Abstract**— *This research provides an in-depth analysis of the musical aspects of Mehdi Akhavan Sales' innovative poetry. Focusing on three main areas; external music (meters), lateral music (rhyme and radif), and internal music (sound and meaning), this article explores the role and importance of these elements in the structure and transmission of Akhavan's poetic concepts. In particular, in the section on internal music, by providing definitions and examining the most frequently used verbal and spiritual devices, it is emphasized how they affect the message of the poem. The aim is to clarify the vital role of music in Akhavan's poetry as one of the most prominent contemporary Iranian poets. This research aims to answer the following questions using a descriptive-analytical method: 1- What meter and rhyme patterns are used in Akhavan Sales' free verse poems and how have these choices affected the external and accompanying music of his compositions? 2- How do the verbal and spiritual devices (internal music) in Akhavan Sales' poems contribute to the musical richness and the transmission of his deep poetic themes? The research findings indicate that Akhavan Sales, by creatively utilizing prosodic meters and also making innovative changes in rhyme and radif, has created a special music in the form of his free verse that distinguishes his poetic identity. The strategic use of widely used literary devices such as metaphor, simile, pun, and repetition in Akhavan's poems has not only contributed to the aesthetics of his words, but has also been an effective tool for transmitting his emotions, social, and philosophical themes.*

**Keywords**— *Mehdi Akhavan Sales, poetry music, meter, rhyme and radif, inner music.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The discussions related to the music of Mehdi Akhavan Sales' poetry in this article consist of three general areas: meter, rhyme and radif (lateral music), and internal music. In the meter section, definitions related to meter and an introduction to its importance in free (half) poetry are examined. Also, the use of poetic meters in Akhavan's poetry collection, including his seven poems, are analyzed and their frequency is presented. In the rhyme section, discussions are raised about the role of rhyme and radif in Akhavan's poetry. In the internal music section, the most widely used and influential verbal and spiritual devices are discussed. In this section, a brief definition of literary devices is presented, which is mainly based on the contents of the book "Arts of Rhetoric and Literary Crafts" by Professor Allameh Jalal al-Din Homaei. For a better understanding, some of the devices and the words or phrases in question are highlighted so that the reader can understand the subject in question. It should be noted that due to the size of the article, the study of the traditional poetry collections of Akhavan has been omitted, though occasional references to his traditional poems are made for comparative purposes when relevant to understanding his musical innovations. This study aims to show how these musical components provide a platform for the deeper transmission of themes and emotions in Akhavan's poems. Inner music, especially relying on spiritual arrangements, plays a key role in creating the epic and lyrical spaces of his poetry. Also, the study of these components in Akhavan's Nimai'i poems establishes his position as one of the pioneers of this style in contemporary Iranian poetry. A correct understanding of this music opens a new window to understanding the hidden semantic and artistic layers of his works.

Mehdi Akhavan Sales (1929-1990), known as one of the most prominent figures of contemporary Iranian poetry, was a student and follower of Nima Yushij, the founder of Persian free verse. His poetry is characterized by a unique combination of classical prosody and modern themes, often expressing despair, social criticism, and philosophical contemplation.

## II. BACKGROUND

Regarding the present study titled "Investigating the Aspects of Music and Its Importance in the Poems of Akhavan Sales," no independent and comprehensive studies have been conducted so far, and only limited case studies and research have been conducted on this subject. Therefore, the present study has been conducted in line with this existing necessity. The studies that were used as sources in this study and are relevant to the content of the present study are introduced below:

- Adel Sawaedi and Afsaneh Ghayem (2023/1402 AH), *Investigating the Aspects of Music and Its Importance in the Poems of Akhavan Sales*
- Rezaee et al. (2016), *Investigating the Role of Repetition in the Music of Nimai'i Poems by Mehdi Akhavan Sales*
- Mohammad Zanganeh (2016), *Criticism and Study of the Background Music of Classical Poems by Mehdi Akhavan Sales*
- Mehdi Firouzian (2016), *Pathology of External Music in Nimai'i Poetry*
- Ziauddin Torabi (2000), *Musical Richness of Mehdi Akhavan Sales' Poetry*
- Mohammad Khaghani and Ruhollah Motlabi (2010), *New Poetry Metrics in Arabic and Persian Literature*

Music in the poems of Akhavan Sales, beyond being melodious, is a tool for conveying sense and giving depth to social concepts. Examining this aspect shows how meter and rhyme are linked to the modern content of poetry. The necessity of this research lies in better understanding the innovations of Akhavan Sales in breaking traditional molds. This study helps to measure the impact of verbal music on the understanding of the contemporary audience. Also, analyzing the internal rhythms of poetry reveals hidden layers of meaning to researchers. Without considering the musical dimension, the analysis of the poems of Akhavan Sales will remain incomplete and superficial. Therefore, this research is an important step in more accurately understanding the place of Akhavan Sales in contemporary Iranian literature.

## III. EXTERNAL MUSIC: METER

To understand the meaning and concept of meter, it is necessary to pay attention to the following: a) The arrangement and proportion of sounds, in such a way that the sounds together form a single system and the listener or reader feels the words are coherent and harmonious. b) The concept of meter gains meaning through proportion in time. In other words, "if proportion occurs in time, it is called meter." c) Meter is a relative concept, and the structure of the words of each nation creates a type of poetic meter for them that cannot be matched with the poetic meter of other nations.

Considering what has been said, among the poems of different nations, the important meters are: a) Syllable meter b) Stressed or percussive meter c) Musical meter d) Prosodic meter. The poetic meter is related to the message and content of the poem. Perhaps the best definition of meter is: "It is a kind of proportion, a qualitative proportion resulting from the perception of unity among multiple components. If proportion occurs in space, it is called qarineh, and if it occurs in time, it is called meter." [1]

### 3.1 The Value and Importance of Meter in Nimai'i Free Poetry

What is certain is that Nima, as the founder of free poetry (Nimai'i), never violated the principles of meter, or according to some, he never disrupted or weakened the meter of Persian poetry. In this section, an attempt has been made to prove the necessity of meter for poetry with the help of Nima's and Akhavan's opinions. Nima's theorist Akhavan says: "I have not seen any verseless poetry by Nima, and he (Nima) believes that: 'Overall, we expect a specific verse from each piece, because the poet must use all the means of beauty. Verse is what forms and completes poetry. In my opinion, verseless poetry resembles a naked person. We know that clothing and makeup can add to a person's beauty. In this case, I consider verse to be necessary and inevitable, both according to the classical rules and according to the rules that create free poetry.'"

In response to those who call Nima's poetic meter "broken meter," Akhavan says: "This type of meter, which some have called 'broken meter,' is not a miraculous creation and an enemy of other creations, but rather it is a type of meter that is adapted from the same old meters and is perfect and does not have some of the shortcomings and defects of other types."

Regarding the importance of Nima's work, Akhavan says: "...The basic, logical, necessary, and very valuable work of Nima is that by taking inspiration from the meters and the main pillars of prosody meters, it has gained greater freedom and authority for the poet." Akhavan quotes Nima in this regard: "This is also a part of the parts of poetry. The basis of these meters is the same prosody. However, I do not want the prosody to dominate us, but rather, we should dominate the prosody according to our different moods and emotions."

Nima's main work and important change in ancient prosody was to remove the constraint of equality of elements, so that the poet could use elements less or more than usual, according to the emotional requirements and needs of his poem. Akhavan says about the result of Nima's work: "As we have seen, this innovation of Nima Yushij is not only destructive of the foundation of the work of the ancients and does not confuse the basis of prosody and rhyme, but is a logical expansion of their method, along with avoiding the constraints that hinder and taking advantage of their healthy veins and nerves. While this innovation does not take away those hundred and twenty meters from us, it multiplies the use of those meters, because it places each meter at the disposal of the poet in a way that does not change its special singing mode and its original rhythms and beats. It opens up a wide field of colorful meters, with all their ups and downs, before the poet, who is naturally rhythmic and has a creative flair. This is his work of expanding meters and multiplying them; and at this point in time, this historical movement is a liberating movement and a future-building and fruitful norm." [2]

Considering what has been stated, free poetry (Nimai'i) not only does not consider itself without the need for meter, but it has also created broader possibilities for greater and better use of the meters of Persian poetry.

### 3.2 Analyzing the Proportion of Meters to Content in the Poetry of Akhavan Sales

By carefully examining the meters that Akhavan Sales has chosen to compose his poems (both traditional and free), we find that he has made this choice with full awareness. We know that one of the characteristics of a talented poet is to use appropriate meters and rhythms to express different themes. In this regard, Hafez can be mentioned as an example, who was very careful in choosing meters that are appropriate to the content of the poem.

One of the important and influential factors on the poetry of poets is the time and period in which they live. Undoubtedly, the social environment and the prevailing conditions have had a direct impact on the poetry of poets. Akhavan Sales is no exception to this rule. He lived in a specific period; but his poetry has not been influenced only by that forty to fifty year period. It is true that he tasted failure and poverty from the beginning of his life and suffered a failure in love in his youth and later in life lost his young daughter in an accident, but his despair and hopelessness are not only the result of the specific period of his life; he has the bitter experience of the defeat of the national movement in his memory; he has had a difficult time with it throughout his life and has sometimes been dismissed from his job, exiled and imprisoned. Even his personality is a protesting and always dissatisfied personality. All of these have been influential reasons for Akhavan Sales' poetry, but they have not been all of it.

Akhavan Sales has found the roots of defeat; he is a poet who is familiar with Iranian history and tradition; he sees that most of the uprisings of the Iranian people have ended in defeat; it is as if there has been an invisible hand throughout history that has willed that the Iranian people should always taste defeat; he has found the roots of this historical pain. The motivations for the manifestation of defeat in his poetry are sometimes individual, sometimes social, sometimes political, and sometimes philosophical, and sometimes he has even generalized this thought to the entire world. He is a poet-narrator, and since he has reached this understanding of defeat, he narrates it for his society. In his own words: "I am a lamenter for my dead homeland." Perhaps this is why he even had a special view of the issue of religion; he was looking for a religion that could free humanity from this continuous defeat. Akhavan Sales is a poet who has experienced deep sorrow, and this sorrow is a symbolic state of despair and hopelessness that ripples through his poetry; poems such as "The Inscription," "The End of the Shahnameh," "The Barren," "Winter," and others are examples so obvious and abundant that there is no need to mention and explain them further.

With a statistical look, we find that Akhavan Sales has mostly used verses that express the theme of failure and despair and have the capacity to express these concepts in terms of rhythm and melody. For example, in his poems, he has used a particular meter thirteen times in the *Winter* collection, seven times in the *End of the Shahnameh* collection, eleven times in the *This Avesta* collection, sixteen times in the *Hell but Cold* collection, and twelve times in the *In the Small Yard of Autumn, in Prison* collection, which is an observation of this issue. The last word is that all the factors that have been mentioned have directly or indirectly brought the poet closer to this despair and hopelessness. He believes that despair is better than false and illusory hope; and this thought is reflected in his poetry, and the epithet "Hope" in his poem is only an unattainable dream that the poet has tried throughout his life not to be happy with, but to explore the roots of the eternal and incurable failure of man and express it in his poetry—a failure that leaves no room for hope.

#### IV. LATERAL MUSIC: RHYME AND RADIF IN THE POETRY OF AKHAVAN SALES

##### 4.1 Rhyme in Traditional and Free Poetry: Similarities and Differences

The necessity of rhyme in poetry is generally accepted by all poets and poetry lovers. As Nima, the founder of the free poetry style (understanding "free poetry" as opposed to traditional poetry, meaning poetry that does not follow the rules of traditional poetry but has meter and rhyme), says about rhyme: "If there is no rhyme, what will it be? Your empty bubble, poetry without rhyme is like a person without bones and meter without rhythm." [3] Therefore, in the following discussion, we do not intend to prove the necessity of rhyme in poetry; rather, we raise the question: Is the method of using rhyme in traditional and free poetry the same, or are there differences?

One of the main differences is that in traditional poetry, rhyme is introduced exactly where it has been previously designated, and the listener, when encountering traditional poetry, looks for rhyme in each verse like a child accustomed to regular meals. It is true that rhyme in a verse strengthens and consolidates the verse and, like a clamp, holds it in place, but after a while, it tires the listener due to repetition and monotony, and the effect of rhyme is reduced.

When encountering free verse, the reader finds the rhymes disrupted, and it is natural that he will initially make some excuses. To adapt to the new conditions, he is like a thirsty person in the desert who has to walk a path for a sip of water, and if he suddenly reaches water, he will enjoy it much better and be satisfied, and he will understand the real value of water better. Rhyme in free verse is like water in the desert, and it is for this reason that rhyme in free verse is so distinctive that it can never be compared to traditional poetry. Perhaps this is why some poets place the most key words in free verse in the place of rhyme, in order to emphasize them and make the rhyme bright and prominent.

##### Example from the *Winter* collection:

I am certain that there is no prophetic or imamic blood in my veins /  
Nor is there any khan or king's blood /  
The old man, Nadim, told me /  
That being without pride is not a sin [4]

This poem specifically highlights "not being from the lineage of a king is not a sin" through rhyme, in such a way that the reader feels satisfaction and pleasure at the end of the stanza, and it also gives unity to the poem.

##### Another example from the *This Avesta* collection:

With you is a drunken conversation /  
I am drunk and I know that I am /  
O all that is, are you also? [5]

Here again "drunken" and "being" are rhymed together and paired so beautifully that the reader unconsciously adds at the end of the poem "so drunk!"

The great danger that rhyme poses to the poet in traditional poetry is that he falls into the abyss of rhymes following the poet rather than the rhymes following the poet. We know that in free poetry, rhyme is at the poet's disposal and he uses it correctly wherever he deems necessary, and the more skillful the poet is, the better and more appropriately he will use rhymes.

But in traditional poetry, as soon as a few rhymes are composed, other rhymes are associated and it is possible for the poet to distance himself from the original by following rhymes. Perhaps this is why the themes of, for example, ghazals in Persian poetry are close to each other, and this is a great danger that threatens the poetry. In some cases, due to the frequent repetition of rhymes of the same family, the reader already recognizes the rhyme.

##### Example from the *Arghnoun* collection:

Be golden and be a golden wire /  
Be a seafarer and be a river /  
In this cage of sorrow, what a peacock, what a boom /

| Because the eternal path is, wherever...

Here the reader replaces the dot with the word "Buddha."

**Another example from the same book:**

| A crack from behind the sky and shone /

| Like a bloody tulip on the face...[6]

Here the reader replaces the dot with the word "sun."

There are many examples; one can open any of the traditional poetry collections and easily find examples, but here, since we are talking about the poetry of Akhavan Sales, the examples were also chosen from his poems. But in free verse, the poet does not fall into this trap, and thought can follow its natural course, and along the way, in the garden of rhymes, pick the flowers of its choice and adorn its poetry basket.

**4.2 The Role of Rhyme in Akhavan Sales' Poetry**

**4.2.1 The Influence of Rhyme on the Music of Poetry**

Undoubtedly, rhyme has a direct effect on the music of poetry, so the more common the rhyme letters, the greater this effect will be.

**Example from the *End of the Shahnameh* collection:**

| They will remain and drive them away /

| until their hearts are free from the love of the lowly earth /

| And the sky, this crystal dome with its distant roof /

| called them to its green meadows[7]

**4.2.2 Rhyme Proportion**

In traditional poetry, rhyme has a specific place, but in free verse, the poet determines this place for rhyme, so that the more skillful the poet is, the better he can place the jewel of rhyme on the ring of poetry. One of the points that must be observed in the rhyme of free verse poetry is to create a proportion between rhymes, so that the previous rhyme is ready to accept the next rhyme.

**Example from the *Winter* collection:**

| They do not want to answer the greeting, the heads are not in the grip /

| No one raises his head to answer and meet the friends /

| Hold on, except for the feet in front, he cannot /

| For the path is dark and slippery, /

| And if the hand of love reaches out to someone /

| Reluctantly, he brings his hand out of the embrace /

| Because the cold is fierce and burning[8]

**Example of not observing proportion, from the *This Avesta* collection:**

| Between knowing /

| and not knowing /

| As long as the world remains, there is a boundary /

| It has been so /

| Until the world was, there is.

This would have been better if either the last line rhymed with the third line ("As long as the world remains, there is a boundary"), or a line had been composed between the last and penultimate lines to make the rhyme more acceptable.

#### 4.2.3 Response to Expectation

When reading a poem, each rhyme creates an expectation in the reader that must be answered in the next rhyme. This type of response is clearly seen in couplets and quatrains, so that the rhyme of the fourth line should be the end of the expectation.

##### Two examples from the *This Avesta* collection:

Our sea has become dry and deserted /  
Today is bad and our tomorrow is even worse /  
The dark saddle of the devil's heart is a handful of attributes (anticipation) /  
Because the hereafter has become our world (answer) (Quatrain/90)

"... I will tell you the sorrow of my heart, cave! /  
Tell me, is there no longer any hope of salvation for me? (anticipation) /  
The voice answered in a plaintive voice: /  
... Yes, there is no more." [9]

#### 4.2.4 The Placement of Rhyme in Free Poetry

One of the problems of young poets in composing free verse poetry is how to recognize the right place of rhyme. Apart from the principle of proportion mentioned earlier and its direct connection with the beauty of the poem, in free verse poetry, rhyme depends on the subject of the poem and the rhyme also changes with the change of subject.

##### Example from the *Winter* collection:

"I am with you, oh... you /  
springs that pass through this passage! /  
With a look of all ease and sweetness and pride /  
drunk and in harmony with silence /  
you look at the earth and at time! /  
In this great plain /  
there was a small nameless spring /  
hidden in the dark house of the earth /  
at the dawn of a cold and black night /  
it opened its eyes to the world (Forgetfulness/70, first and second stanzas)

Therefore, where different subjects are placed at a short distance from each other, rhyme is not used. It is also better for rhyme to be at the end of a sentence, because a sentence is a single unit of the language system that conveys a complete concept. So the end of each sentence is a suitable place for rhyme to be placed, which ends with an emphasis on the rhyme of the sentence and conveys the intended concept.

##### Example from the *Winter* collection:

Monsin, but with me, Monsin /  
Do not lean on me, O silk curtain of sarcasm! /  
That I have become evil /

My belly! My ass! /  
I have become a rabid wolf.

("Do not lean on me, O silk curtain of sarcasm! / That I have become evil" is one sentence and "My belly! My ass! / I have become a rabid wolf" is the next sentence.)

#### 4.2.5 Inducing a Concept Through Rhythm

Sometimes the poet suggests concepts based on the rhythm of the rhyming words, which is also a sign of the power of rhyme and its value.

##### Example from the *Winter* collection:

My brave Christ! O old fear in a dirty shirt! /  
The weather is so uncouth... Oh... /  
May your heart be warm and your head be happy! /  
You answer my greeting, open the door.

The word "Oh" shows the poet's dissatisfaction with the current situation.

##### Another example from the *This Avesta* collection:

The thunder cracked, crackled /  
Between the south and the east /  
Lightning struck /  
Now the rain was a clatter[10]

The words "crack, east, lightning" show the existence of thunder and lightning well and create an image.

#### 4.2.6 Rhyme in Traditional Poetry and Arabic Vocabulary

One of the problems of traditional poetry is that when the poet is in a rhyme difficulty, he uses Arabic words to fill the rhyme gap, and in this way Arabic words enter the poem. Since the Arabic language has many derived forms, more rhymes are found in it than in Persian. This defect is seen throughout different periods and in the poetry of poets.

##### Examples from the poetry of Akhavan Sales:

From the *Arghnoun* collection: In the poem "Chara," the poet rhymes Arabic words (jars, fares, qabs) with Persian words (nafas, faryadars, etc.). In the poem "Polad Sakht," the poet rhymes Arabic words (takfir, tathir, and tazwir) with words (zanjir, shamshir, etc.). In the poem "Hashdar," the poet has used Arabic words (hal, munzal, majallal, mudallal, mursal) as rhymes[11].

#### 4.2.7 Rhyme Emphasis in Free Verse

Rhyme is more emphasized in free verse, and sometimes the poet increases this emphasis by placing the rhyming word alone on a line, so that the word stands out well.

##### Example from the *End of the Shahnameh* collection:

But /  
he /  
with his eternal fruit, the greenness that is constant /  
has taken a lifetime

##### Another example from the same book:

The capital of such a century /  
Where? /

On which unmarked line is it /

In which direction?[12]

#### 4.2.8 Internal Rhyme

Internal rhyme in poetry enhances its musicality. Akhavan Sales rarely used internal rhyme in his poems.

##### Example from the *Hell but Cold* collection:

A reader to my world, not sitting on my head /

So that I may satisfy my heart, or from your house to my heart, a person who dies and procreates, /

may my fear and astonishment increase /

May my problem not be solved, may another earth be thrown upon my head[13]

#### 4.2.9 Defective Rhyme

In terms of observing the rules, Akhavan Sales' poetry is sound poetry and has no flaws, and it is rarely seen that there is a defective rhyme.

### V. INTERNAL MUSIC: VERBAL DEVICES IN AKHAVAN SALES' POETRY

Verbal devices refer to the adornment and beauty of poetry that depends on the words themselves, such that if we change the words while maintaining the meaning, that beauty will disappear.

#### Introduction

Poetry is the creation of beauty through language, and the poet's material for creating beauty and creating poetry is words. But poetry is not just about using words in a normal way; rather, it is the use of words in a special way that creates beauty and affects the reader. If a poet uses words to create beauty and uses special techniques in this regard, he has created verbal beauty, and the devices he has used are called verbal devices.

To create beauty in his poetry, Akhavan Sales has used verbal devices, especially puns and repetition. However, their frequency in his free verse is low, and although repetition is used a lot in Akhavan's poetry, it does not have artistic value in all cases. The device of reflection has been used only in two cases, but beautifully.

#### 5.1 Puns in Akhavan Sales' Poetry

Puns (jinās) occur when the speaker or writer uses words of the same gender in his speech that are similar in appearance but different in meaning. Two similar words are called two elements of puns, and there are several types of puns. The art of puns has been used to a considerable extent in Akhavan Sales' works, but what is interesting is that the frequency of puns in free poems is greatly reduced, so that the number of puns used in the six collections (*Winter*, *The End of the Shahnameh*, *This Avesta*, *Hell but Cold*, *In the Small Yard of Autumn*, *in Prison*, and *Life Says: But We Must Live Again*) is almost as many as the number of puns used in the *Arghnoun* collection alone. Also, present and past tense puns are the most used, so that the number of their uses is as many as all other types of puns combined.

##### Examples of puns (the punning elements are highlighted):

###### From the *Winter* collection:

Letters turn black /

Creeps wither[14]

###### From the *End of the Shahnameh* collection:

In the buildings of its far-flung palaces, the sweet stream trembles[15]

###### From the *This Avesta* collection:

Like a ribbon of old age, it is worn and worn[16]

###### From the *Life Says: But We Must Still Live* collection:

But still one must live... /  
Made with burnt wood, its difference is from Alef to Vav, /  
If we are the jewel of the sun's crown /  
And the color of the depths of the earth[17]

## 5.2 Assonance and Consonance in Akhavan Sales' Poetry

Repetition of letters, even if not regular, is beautiful in emotional and beautiful words, provided that the distance between the letters is such that the mind perceives the repetition. Of course, the repetition of fricative letters such as (s, sh, z, zh, f, etc.) is more noticeable than stop letters such as (b, p, t, k, etc.). On the other hand, some letters are more beautiful than others. For example, long vowels are completely musical and melodious, followed by short vowels. Among the consonants, the consonants (zh, ch, sh, z, f, etc.) are more pleasing to the ear[18]. The repetition of the letters "s" and "sh" is more prominent in Akhavan Sales' poetry.

### Examples from Akhavan Sales' poetry collections:

#### From the *Winter* collection:

The hair in my hair tried with the effects of sleep /  
The swaying of the king's robes, the design of my hair was /  
Not from my face, not from my rust, I am the same colorless /  
Come, open the door, open it, my heart is longing[19]

#### From the *End of the Shahnameh* collection:

It was night and cold /  
And the cold is wet and the wetness is dark and the darkness is heavy[20]

#### From the *This Avesta* collection:

The bright spring before my eyes was pleasant[21]

#### From the *Hell but Cold* collection:

The plain was bright and in me an unknown fire was bright

#### From the *In the Small Yard of Autumn, in Prison* collection:

And under my steps the dry rustling of autumn grew more and more and was extinguished[22]

## VI. SPIRITUAL MUSIC IN THE POETRY OF AKHAVAN SALES

Spiritual art refers to the beauty of decoration that is related to meaning rather than to the word. If we change the words while maintaining the meaning, that beauty still remains, because beauty is directly related to meaning. If some benefit of literary beauty is also gained by the words, it is subordinate to the meanings. In other words, the beauty of spiritual art is directed primarily to the meanings, and secondarily may also spread to the words.

### Introduction

We have said before that poetry is the creation of beauty with words, and the poet has no other materials for it than words. But just having words is not enough; rather, the way of using words is much more important. This is where the poet creates his work by using special tools. If a poet uses the means of meaning in creating his work, and applies the meanings beautifully and artistically in a way that creates pleasure and impact, he has benefited from spiritual music (spiritual devices) in his work.

Akhavan Sales has also used spiritual music well in his poetry. He has taken the best advantage of allusions (especially the allusions of proportion), the use of metaphors, the observance of analogies, and good reasoning. He has used more personification in free verse poetry, and the frequency of sensuality is also much higher in free verse poetry, as personification is much more common. In this section, we will discuss the spiritual music of Akhavan Sales' poetry.

## VII. THE USE OF PROVERBS IN THE POETRY OF AKHAVAN SALES

The use of proverbs means decorating a verse or prose phrase with a sentence that is a proverb or similar to a proverb and contains a wise message. This art everywhere helps to decorate and strengthen the foundation of speech. Sometimes the use of a proverb in verse, prose, oratory, and speech has more effect in developing the purpose and attracting the attention of the listener than several verses of poetry and several pages of articles and treatises. Akhavan Sales has made good use of this art, and the examples themselves are sufficiently eloquent.

### Examples from Akhavan Sales' poetry collections:

#### From the *Winter* collection:

Rise and be a man, but beware, beware /  
You must not be afraid

#### From the *This Avesta* collection:

He fell from his horse, the yellow dog, this jackal, after all /  
Have you not heard that every round has walnuts?[25]

#### From the *Life Says: But We Must Still Live* collection:

But still one must live... /  
After this, do not let your foot out of your kilim, /  
every end will eventually hit a stone, /  
the saddle will not turn into a footrest, or a heel, /  
my soul has descended from the devil's donkey[26]

## VIII. CONCLUSION

In examining the music of Mehdi Akhavan Sales' poetry, it can be seen that the element of music is one of the most important foundations for the formation of the artistic and expressive structure of his poetry. By consciously utilizing the musical capacities of language, Akhavan Sales has been able to create a deep and effective connection between form and meaning.

An examination of external music in his poems shows that meter is not only a phonetic format, but also a tool for conveying emotion, inducing space, and strengthening poetic tone. The variety of meters and rhythms in Akhavan Sales' poetry collections testifies to his mastery of the musical possibilities of poetry and his detailed familiarity with both tradition and innovation.

In the field of lateral music, rhyme and radif play a role beyond verbal arrangement in his poetry, and in many cases, they help to integrate the structure of the poem, highlight the meaning, and strengthen the rhythm of the words. By carefully using rhyme, Akhavan Sales has been able to avoid monotony while at the same time maintaining the phonetic coherence of the poem. Also, the radif in some of his poems has become a factor of semantic and emotional emphasis and has contributed to the permanence of the poetic atmosphere.

In the area of internal music, the frequency and diversity of verbal and spiritual devices show that Akhavan Sales' poetic language is a completely artistic, selective language with a high capacity for induction. Devices such as repetition, consideration of analogy, contrast, pun, and proportion, in addition to creating harmony, have played an important role in deepening the semantic layers of his poetry. These features have caused the music in Akhavan Sales' poetry not to remain only at the level of sound, but to be mixed with meaning, image, and emotion.

Therefore, the music of Akhavan Sales' poetry should be considered a fundamental element in the formation of his stylistic identity. The results of this research show that Akhavan Sales achieved a special and effective way of utilizing musical elements by combining the prosody tradition and the capacities of Nimai'i poetry. This has given his poetry structural strength, linguistic richness, and special emotional impact.

In sum, the music of poetry in the works of Akhavan Sales is not a secondary element, but one of the main pillars of his literary creation, and its study can provide a clearer way to understand the poetic world and the artistic expression of this prominent poet.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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# Mapping Models of Mutual Coexistence in African Literature

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**Abstract**— *Moving from the premise that African literature can introduce the reader to and inform him or her about the changing world of coexistence on the continent and elsewhere, this paper employs sample texts from contemporary African literature to explore the varying perspectives from which African writers represent changing historical phases of mutual coexistence on the continent in their works. It aims at showing how the literature reveals more about the "customs, conflicts, stresses, changes and transformations" (Ngugi 1997, p. 4) that accompany social movements and evolution over time. My paper argues that the African continent's historical encounter with the western world has primarily, at least in the literature I examine here, informed and transformed the ways in which people perceive and relate with each other in society. I use Ato Quayson's reading practice dubbed "Calibrations" in my analysis.*

**Keywords**— *Subsistence, Coexistence, Transformations, Relationships, Unison.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, questions of mutual coexistence have increasingly been brought to the world stage by globalisation and a complex international political system that have accentuated the realities of conflict, violence, and combat. Such questions, germane to the social science disciplines, have caught the attention of literature which has debated the subject from a variety of interesting perspectives. Primarily, literature deals with humans in society, exploring how they live and relate with one another in their daily subsistence and conduct of affairs. These interactive processes lay the groundwork for the formation of social collectives organically linked on the basis of defined shared relations. As x-rayed in Pozo (2004), Ngugi wa Thiong'o notes that the literary artist is chiefly interested in human relationships and their quality, which do not "occur in a vacuum [but] develop in the context of ecology, economics, politics, culture and psyche" (p. 5). Ngugi (1997)'s comments on the rapport between art and human society positions literature as the conscious acts of men and women in society. Literature is thus carved out as a product of human intellect and imagination fixed towards social relations as can be visualised from his words: "the very act of writing even at the level of the individual implies social relationship: one is writing about somebody for somebody" (p. 4).

From another perspective, literature's social character endows mutual coexistence with the capacity to "reflect deeply on the nature of being" (Diamond, 1989, p. 435). For Ojaide & Obi (2002), social issues and the way people relate are the subject of literature, whether in drama, fiction or poetry. "How individuals react; man and woman in love; friendship; the individual and the larger society; human relationships, in short, are the sine qua non of literature" (p. 5). The views of these writers and critics establish literature's groundedness in society, while also underscoring its capacity to reflect that society and also to reflect on it. This resonates with my premise, in this paper, that African literature, in its various iterations, can serve as an effective tool in interrogating paradigms of mutual coexistence on the continent and beyond. As it were, the literature has, over the years, represented, commented on, and even proposed models of living together in society at the familial, tribal, national and transnational levels.

Moving then from the understanding that African literature can introduce the reader to and inform him or her about the changing world of coexistence on the continent and elsewhere, this paper employs sample texts from contemporary African literature to explore the varying perspectives from which African writers represent and debate varying historical phases of mutual

coexistence on the continent in their oeuvre. It aims at showing how the literature reveals more about the "customs, conflicts, stresses, changes and transformations" (Ngugi 1997, p. 4) that accompany social movements and evolution over time. This resonates with Saudi Arabian novelist Mohamed Hasan Alwan's views that "only fiction can pick up what history has ignored" (in Koeble 2017). My paper argues that the African continent's historical encounter with the western world has primarily, at least in the literature I examine here, informed and transformed the ways in which people perceive and relate with each other in society. I use Ato Quayson's reading practice dubbed "Calibrations" in my analysis.

"Calibrations" is a flexible interpretive practice that operates at the confluence between art, aesthetics and the social. It reads literature and what lies beyond "as a way of understanding structures of transformation, process and contradiction that inform both literature and society" (Quayson 2003, p. xi). This simply implies exploring the literary/aesthetic domain in a bid to shed light on larger social processes. As underscored above, the ways in which African peoples have lived and continued to live together, both on the continent and elsewhere, have undergone palpable and life-changing transformations that have been registered in literature. This offers the literary critic an interesting and effective paradigm through which to come to terms with such larger social processes. As a dialectical mode of inquiry that marries such disciplines as psychoanalysis, Marxism and politics, "Calibrations" brings to the fore "the two poles [literary and social] as containing within themselves interrelating segments that are themselves in a dialectical relationship to various other sub segments in the other pole(s)" (Quayson 2003, p. xxxii). From this, one can deduce that Quayson's analytical premise serves as an appropriate tool in investigating the varying, but interesting ways in which African literature intersects and comments on the models of living together that have characterised the continent in its historical evolution; the theory's shortcomings notwithstanding (Bahri 2005 & Adéèko 2005).

Durosimi (1980) observes that "oral epics, folk stories and folk songs have led researchers into the truth of the African continent's past" (p. 1), revealing how people have mutually co-existed for more than two million years, "wrestling with [the] environment to make it yield the means of life, food, clothes, shelter" (Ngugi 1997, p. 4). While these observations continue to buttress my view that literature can be useful in mirroring social life on the continent, I hasten to add that in this paper, I will be examining issues of coexistence informed by the history of Africa's encounter with Europe which, for expository purposes, have been sectioned into the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial phases. The reasons informing my choice are not far-fetched: firstly, I am exploring written literature which is an offshoot of this encounter. (I am aware of the fact that African peoples interacted with one another on the continent before having contact with the outside world. I am equally abreast with the continent's sustained contact with the Arab world before the period I refer to. This invariably informed and affected the way African peoples lived together). Secondly, the magnitude of the outcome of this encounter and its ensuing historical implications has informed and continues to inform creative writing from the continent. For purposes of critical exegesis, I would also like to indicate that the models of living together will be examined invariably from the point of view of the family, tribe and nation. The intersection between these forms of coexistence, from a literary perspective, is obvious when one considers how, from a metaphorical perspective, the literal family of blood relations can validly represent the tribe and/or the nation. I begin my analysis with the traditional model often associated with the African continent before the advent of colonialism.

## II. MAPPING TRADITIONAL MODELS OF COEXISTENCE: LITERATURE AS RECOVERY

Written African literature began as a project of reconstructing the past in a response to a colonial discourse that sought to undermine the African way of life. While such a project, with regard to questions of coexistence, could be highly ambiguous given the dynamic nature of culture, suffice it to say it was a necessary phase in the counter-discursive framework of African writing. Seminal works such as Achebe (1958), Amadi (1966), Nwapa (1966), Rotimi (1971), Laye (1966) and Diop (1996) represent how African communities coexisted in a traditional setting before contact with the west.

Living together in the traditional African community was informed by the awareness that an individual in the community was not "an isolated ego, but... an entity whose being and survival is consequent upon its union with other human beings within an identified locality" (Ogbujah 2014, p. 209). G.D. Killam notes that in this space "the general accord about the politics and prescriptions of life and living are agreed upon" by all and sundry (1977, p. 83). This is the picture one has when reading works like Achebe (1958), Laye (1966) and Diop (1996). In Achebe (1958) for instance, the author presents a prototype of this kind of society built on traditional values and an ethics of community. Set in an imagined traditional Ibo community, namely, Umuofia, before the advent of the colonial powers, the novel presents a society with its own manifest way of life largely defined by a communal ethos. In this space, the clan acts as one. Specific laws and customs guide the behaviour of members while integrating a traditional religion which undergirds the governance ethic of the community. All members of the community are expected to learn and understand the ramifications of the societal set up given that their lives, as individuals and as part of the

community, are conducted by this ethic. Interestingly, it is a social system that is equally tested and stabilised by what Carroll (1980) calls "the questioning, modification, and adaptation which are part of the Igbo way of life" (p. 39). All this is for the good of the clan which takes precedence over the individual. For instance, when Okonkwo, a representative figure of this society, inadvertently kills a clansman, he is banished from the land and his property is destroyed in a bid to spare the clan the wrath of Ani, the earth goddess. The novelist's use of the proverb "if one finger brought oil it soiled the others" (Carroll 1980, p. 80) appropriately underlines this perspective of things in the novel. Furthermore, when situations of conflict arise, a capable traditional justice system exists not only to address such deviant behaviour but also to intervene in matters of conflict resolution, veritable challenges to mutual coexistence in society. The novelist presents this system in action through episodes where the justice system swings into action and restores peace between feuding parties at the domestic and inter-tribal levels. The conflict with the neighbouring village of Mbaino, the resolution of the matrimonial conflict between Mgbagfo and her husband Uzowulu by the Egwugwu (the spirits of the ancestors), all underline the workings of the communal model in the novel.

At another level, communal sharing, otherwise known as solidarity, is presented as one of the major characteristics of the traditional model of living together. This quality, in the highly developed sense of community, is a necessity and not a social virtue. It is indispensable for the individual's and the community's survival. That may be why the South African Steve Biko (1987) acknowledges that while growing up it was never considered repugnant to ask one's neighbours for help if one were struggling. In *The African Child* (1954), Camara Laye emphasizes this perspective through his depiction of the rice harvesting episode. In the narrative, the novelist's autobiographical strains, in their realistic ethos, become the weapon with which to make forays into a coherent traditional and communal context where varying aspects of sharing at all levels are described. Through vivid description reinforced by lyricism and apt diction, the reader is given a succinct picture of a community at work:

Our husbandmen were singing in chorus and reaping in unison; their voices and their gestures were all harmonious and in harmony; they were one! - united by the same task, united by the same song. They were bound to one another, united by the same soul: each and every one was tasting the delight, savouring the common pleasure of accomplishing a common task (Laye 1954, p. 51).

The use of words and phrases as well as parallelisms that denote collectiveness and oneness such as "unison," "harmony," "they were one," "united by the same task" and "united by the same song," dramatizes the communal ethos of the traditional model of living together, which, in the words of Palmer (1968), reinforces "the impression of a society which is stable and orderly because it clings to tradition, the wisdom of the ancients and the worship of the gods" (p. 57).

It is the stability and order captured in the preceding lines by Palmer that David Diop's poem "Loser of Everything" draws attention to. Through the technique of contrast, the poet focuses on how African families lived together before the coming of the white man. This two-stanza poem juxtaposes two models of living together for the African, before and after the advent of colonialism. The poetic vision is aimed at highlighting the destructive ethos of colonialism and to do this, the poet presents traditional African society in romantic overtones in stanza one as counterpoint:

The sun used to laugh in my hut  
And my women were lovely and lissome  
Like palms in the evening breeze  
My children would glide over the mighty river  
And my canoes would battle with crocodiles  
The motherly moon accompanied our dances  
The heavy frantic rhythm of the tomtom,  
Tomtom of joy, tomtom of carefree life  
Amid the fires of liberty (Diop 1996, p. 40)

Through techniques of personification, metaphor, alliteration, and the adoption of the continent as the speaking voice in the lines above, the poet succeeds in conveying the image of a community where people are one with their natural environment; a community, to borrow the words of G.D. Killam (1977), with "its own humane needs and values and dignity" (p. 84). These examples, by no means exhaustive, give one glimpses of the traditional model of co-existence in pre-colonial Africa. While some writers like Laye and Diop seem to romanticize such a model while glossing over its barbarities, others like Achebe give realistic accounts, bringing out some of the aspects that were the bane of the model, and which ironically made it vulnerable to external influence. Yet what stands out in these fictional representations is the society's capacity to seek answers within the

parameters of its own model to conflicts within and without the clan (witness the resolution of the conflict between Umuofia and Mbaino in Achebe (1958)).

One can safely conclude that the project of re-imagining the traditional model of coexistence in these texts, as in most of the literature set in the pre-colonial period, is not only crucial in rehabilitating the cultural past especially as it still forms a part of the present (Obiechina 1968, p. 33), but also in eliciting a renewed dialogue about its significance in today's contemporary scene, bedeviled by inter-communal conflicts, wars, religious, and ethnic bigotry.

### III. "OF TWO WORLDS": REPRESENTING COLONIAL SPACES

The extent to which colonialism forever altered the social, cultural, political, and religious way of life of the African has been documented by historians, sociologists, and anthropologists alike. Edem Kodjo, for one, notes that as a result of colonialism, the African was "torn away from his past, propelled into a universe fashioned from outside that suppresses his values [leaving] him dumbfounded by a cultural invasion that marginalize[d] him" (as cited in Motseko 2012, p. xx). This was simply so because colonial ideology, as Ngugi (1969) explicates, was hinged on a consideration of the "native" as "a clean slate on which anything could be scribbled. He was subjected to a constant barrage of hints that western culture [was] all in all" (pp. 56-57). Such a perspective was bound to engender the kinds of upheavals and conflicts that came to dominate African communities upon the wake of colonialism.

Seminal texts of the colonial period such as Achebe (1958), Achebe (1960), Achebe (1964) and Ngugi (1965) explore the extent to which the colonial contact affected the relationships among Africans themselves and then with the white man. As a mode of being, colonialism, as already noted in the preceding paragraph, brought about a marked alteration in the ways in which pre-colonial communities co-existed. It called more or less for a replacement of traditional forms. Baker et al. (1995) note, in this regard, that "colonialism breaks things.... The self of the colonizer explodes a native cultural solidarity, producing the spiritual confusion, psychic wounding, and economic exploitation of a new and dominated other" (p. 1047). The outcome, as some of my texts emphasize, was nothing but inevitable conflict. Generally, cast in the protest mode, the texts set within this period decry the destruction of the traditional modes of existence while delineating how characters seek to resist the inexorable transformation and subjugation of their way of life by the colonial Eurocentric perspective. In the first place, the works present hitherto united and harmonious communities trying to come to terms with the colonial model of coexistence determined by what Mudimbe (1988) calls the "domination of physical space, the reformation of natives' minds and the integration of local economies and histories into the Western perspective" (p. 2). The initial response to such efforts at forceful transformation and subjugation is usually resistance on the part of those whose way of life is threatened by external forces. The presence of a marauding culture, as I have noted earlier, is an invitation to conflict. One finds this in the second and third parts of Achebe (1958). These portions of the novel chronicle the changes that occur in Umuofia during Okonkwo's exile to Mbanta, his maternal clan, as well as his reactions to them upon his return. The protagonist's absence has witnessed the advent of the missionaries, their establishment of a church and a government with courts, judges, and court messengers. As the conflict between the colonial and traditional forces in Umuofia heightens upon Okonkwo's return, the latter seeks to rouse his people to resist the encroachment of the white man. Unfortunately, his resistance call is not heeded by the people who fail to stand together as one with him. This leads to his suicide. The hero's demise at the end of the novel has been read both as a contrast between the European and Igbo ways of life as well as Achebe's indictment of colonialism's destruction of the traditional way of life. A close reading of his next two novels, Achebe (1960) and Achebe (1964), reveals that his preoccupation with colonialism's complex impact on indigenous modes of life is equally underscored.

In Achebe (1960), the story of Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of Achebe (1958)'s protagonist Okonkwo, serves to highlight the conflict of cultures between Europe and Africa, as well as the outcome, for the hero, in the traditional-cum-modern society that is colonial Nigeria. In the novel, Obi's dilemma arises from the fact that being a child of two worlds (an Igbo man who has studied in England and is expected in the colonial context to adhere to tradition) engenders in him what Catherine L. Innes calls the lack of "any deeply felt moral convictions" (1986, p. 701). The result is that Obi, an agent working with the colonial government, runs into debts, takes bribes and is caught and condemned by the colonial legal system. What strikes one in the novel are the varying perspectives from which the hero's tragedy is perceived by both cultures in which he moves and operates. For the colonial powers, this is simply a confirmation of the corrupt nature of Africans, while for his Igbo kinsmen, it is their son's failure to appropriate the white man's skills that leads to his unmasking. In such diverse response is a message with regard to questions of coexistence, namely that conflicting cultural spaces extract the fundamental aspects of each culture in the ferment, leaving the individual (caught in its wake) in a dilemma with no moral bearings; bearings necessary for a holistic perspective of life in society. If traditional communities succeeded more or less to inculcate this ethic among the people, it is

not the case in the cacophony of the colonial space, characterized by contrasting and conflicting cultures. Narrative voice and tone aptly delineate such outcomes. Catherine Innes says, in this regard, that "the tone and narrative voice of the novel is correspondingly flat and uncommitted, a detached voice which owes allegiance to no community" (1986, p. 703).

Achebe (1964), like Ngugi (1965), both interrogates and proposes ways in which the African can begin to broach the issue of living together with one another and with the colonialist in society. In Achebe's novel, *Ezeulu*, the chief priest of the clan god Ulu, seems to embody Achebe's vision of how to coexist in the new dispensation. This vision is informed by the urgency to assess the new culture, learn to live with it and probably find something worthwhile in it that will enhance mutual coexistence. Confronted with the reality of a new way of life brought about by colonialism, therefore, *Ezeulu*, even if from an egocentric perspective, sees the need to recognize European culture, dialogue with it and get what can be of benefit in it. He therefore sends his son, Oduche, to the white man's school, on the strength of the argument that "the world is like a mask dancing, if you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow" (Achebe 1964, p. 46). The proverb is apt in underlining the dynamic nature of culture; a dynamism informed by the understanding that change is in the very nature of things, and it is in the interest of anyone involved to adapt to it in order to co-exist with the other. It is important to stress that in as much as *Ezeulu* has this perspective, it can be read from his later reactions in the novel (note his refusal to become a warrant chief) that, while it is important to accept to mutually coexist with others, this ought to be informed by considerations of equality and human dignity.

Ngugi (1965), in line with Achebe (1964), underlines the hassles of living in the colonial space where the different aspects that held traditional society are challenged by colonial culture especially in the sphere of religion. In the novel, the reader is not lost to the unity in division symbolism that is the river Honia flowing between the Christian Makuyu and the traditional Kameno:

The two ridges lay side by side. One was Kameno and the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life.... A river flowed through the valley of life.... The river was called Honia, which meant cure, or bring-back-to-life.... Honia was the soul of Kameno and Makuyu. It joined them. And men, cattle, wild beasts and trees, were all united by this life-stream (Ngugi 1965, p. 1).

However, as a result of the Christianization of Makuyu, tribal antagonism holds sway between the two ridges as both struggle to gain control over the other. In this context, Chege, upholder of the tribal law of Kameno, perceives the need to have knowledge of the ways of the white man. He sends his son, Waiyaki, to the colonial school with the advice that the latter should "learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices" (Ngugi 1965, p. 137). Waiyaki, the hero of the novel, on his part, believes that by virtue of his grasp of both the traditional and colonial cultures, he can re-unite the feuding Gikuyu tribes of Makuyu and Kameno; feuding brought about by the encroachment of colonial culture into a hitherto united people, but this is without counting on the tribal allegiances and jealousies exacerbated by the colonial contact.

The conclusion here is that faced with new modes of existence that challenge existing ones, holding unto one's position and refusing to examine the new mode may prove fatal, given the culture's dynamic quality. While Achebe (1958) x-rays the above behaviour through *Okonkwo*, Ngugi (1965) does the same through some of the inhabitants of Kameno in them saying, "we are not going to change. We are not going to listen to anything. This is what we believe, and you must take your religion wherever you want to. Take your philosophies wherever you want. We have our own philosophies" (Ngugi 1965, p. 75). Interestingly, those like *Ezeulu* and Waiyaki who seek to come to grips with, access, and incorporate the new models into traditional ones in order to build viable communities, also come to a tragic end. Does this presuppose that this model too is problematic? Far from it! Rather, it simply underscores the complexities fraught with the dialogue between cultures; complexities that need to be addressed for harmonious coexistence. Some of the issues at stake, as one has observed in the case of *Ezeulu*, are the vital subjects of equality and dignity of the person. The writers seem to be suggesting that for people to coexist mutually there is the need to look at the other culture from a position of parity and respect. But what happens after the colonial powers have officially handed over power to Africans themselves? How do the people live together with each other in the matrix of the legacies of colonialism? The next portion of my essay maps postcolonial Africa and the different ways in which people coexist in this context.

#### IV. REPRESENTING POSTCOLONIAL MODELS OF COEXISTENCE

In the study of African nationalism, it has been observed that state formation was basically a fraught exercise as the colonial powers brought together groups of people who never had a history of living together while, in some cases, divided people who had hitherto lived together. This posed a huge problem for nation building as leaders had to look for the appropriate model to

bring together often disparate groups of persons, who now found themselves obliged, by the force of history, to mutually coexist. This situation was further complicated by the rising streak of individual acquisitiveness and materialism which were hallmarks of the colonial legacy. These have so defined the African postcolonial space that Ake (2003) calls the period an "age of militant materialism" (p. 13). This explains why after independence, the expectations of the masses were hardly met by the new elite who saw the state as a conglomeration of offices and resources to be exploited for personal gain. It was no surprise then that the basic promise of freedom, a better standard of living, and the endless possibilities of progress never materialized for the citizenry. Instead, the post-independent leadership, as I have noted, gravitated towards the state to achieve personal, economic, and social power often to the detriment of the masses. This situation challenged the vestiges of communal life on the continent. African writers decry this situation where co-existence is defined by class, gender, and other factors. Ngugi says to this effect that "wherever there are classes of people in society, there will always be conflicts in the world outlooks of the various social groups" (in Pozo 2004). The coups and counter coups, inter-ethnic rivalries and all kinds of conflict that challenge co-existence among people in the postcolonial space is informed by this state of things. The literary works Armah (1968), Butake (2005a) and (2005b), Ngome (1992), and Mpe (2001), for example, map how politics, issues of class and neo-colonial legacies intersect coexistence in the postcolony.

In Armah's novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), the hero, the Man, who refuses to join the rest of the elite in the frenetic search for wealth, for example, reminisces on how his erstwhile classmate, Minister Koomson, has grown rich through corruption and now lives in the residential areas of Accra while he lives in the suburbs. Koomson no longer feels comfortable in the Man's presence and only comes to him if he (Koomson) wants to use the former for his selfish purposes. The suffering of the masses is at the basis of the coup at the end of the novel (even if the soldiers who take over power are as corrupt as the regime that has been overthrown). It is important to note how Minister Koomson returns to the Man's home upon escaping from the coup plotters. Thanks to the man's efforts, he is able to escape by sea to a neighboring country. This once more accentuates the exploitation of the lower classes in society by those in positions of power in the post-independence space; an issue handled by Henry Barlow in his poem "Building the Nation," which I quote at length:

Today I did my share  
In building the nation.  
I drove a Permanent Secretary  
To an important, urgent function  
In fact, to a luncheon at the Vic.

The menu reflected its importance  
Cold bell beer with small talk,  
Then fried chicken with niceties  
Wine to fill the hollowness of the laughs  
Ice-cream to cover the stereotype jokes  
Coffee to keep the PS awake on the return journey.

I drove the Permanent Secretary back.  
He yawned many times in back of the car  
Then to keep awake, he suddenly asked,  
Did you have any lunch friend?  
I replied looking straight ahead  
And secretly smiling at his belated concern  
That I had not, but was slimming!  
Upon which he said with a seriousness  
That amused more than annoyed me,  
Mwananchi, I too had none!  
I attended to matters of state.  
Highly delicate diplomatic duties you know,  
And friend, it goes against my grain,  
Causes me stomach ulcers and wind.  
Ah, he continued, yawning again,

The pains we suffer in building the nation!

So the PS had ulcers too!  
My ulcers I think are equally painful  
Only they are caused by hunger,  
Not sumptuous lunches!

So two nation builders  
Arrived home this evening  
With terrible stomach pains  
The result of building the nation –  
Different ways (Barlow 2000, p. 11)

This poem of five stanzas of unequal length draws on the binaries characteristic of the postcolonial space to make comments on how classicism defines and informs the ethics of mutual coexistence. As its title suggests, one is in the realm of nation-building; a realm that demands the full and genuine co-operation of all members of the nation. It stands to reason that such co-operation will ensure a shared livelihood anchored in the equitable distribution of tasks and profits. This, however, is not the case in the poem. Here, we have someone from the ruling class, namely, the Permanent Secretary, and someone from the lower classes, his driver, who both engage in the task of building the nation, each at his own level. Through irony, metaphor and humour, the poet aptly underlines how, in feeding fat on the nation's wealth while his driver goes hungry, the PS is the one of the two who has reneged on his duties as far as these issues are concerned. What is important to note is that the downtrodden are not unaware of the situation as the poetic persona subtly indicates that at the appropriate time, they will revolt against their oppressors. The poet's vision is social, informed by the ethics of traditional society, based on the need to ensure that all classes of society mutually benefit from the national wealth. The reader may, from this poem written in the 1970s, better understand the turbulent history of Uganda and other countries on the continent; turbulence that has largely been anchored in discourses of resource distribution, crucial in the dynamics of mutual coexistence.

As Achille Mbembe describes in Hoeller (2005), contexts where tribalism and ethnicity hold sway and determine how people live together in a multicultural context are "timespace characterized by proliferation and multiplicity...an era of dispersed entanglements, the unity of which is produced out of diversity" (p. 35). Butake (2005a) too highlights the shortcomings of a strict tribal model in a modern context by showing how Bobe Ngong, father of the hero of the play *Fointam Ngong*, has to review his position on his son marrying outside the tribe because he has come to realize that "marriage is not a question of tribe but rather character and love [and] that we cannot build this nation on tribalism and partisanship" (Butake 2005a, p. 76). This position, grounded in cognitive activity, draws from increased understanding of each other and of the cultural environment which makes for humanisation. Sama, Fointam's friend, corroborates this when he says, "...man is basically the same whether he be Bikom or Metta or I don't know what tribe" (Butake 2005a, p. 29). Fointam, on his part, after living side by side with other cultural groups in the major towns where he has studied and worked, comes to understand that genuine cohesion, in a multi-ethnic Cameroon, can only be achieved through a true acceptance of difference and diversity. For him, tribal sentiments are a bane to the construction of a national identity. "With this type of tribal sentiments do you think we will ever succeed in building a strong and united nation? If every tribe were to fence itself in, the concept of the nation will flounder in no time. I think it is our duty to prove these diehard traditionalists mistaken in their judgement" (Butake 2005a, p. 29).

In a post-colonial context where the ironies of history have brought together peoples of different cultures into one nation, the question raised and answered by the Cameroonian playwrights Victor Epie Ngome in *What God Has Put Asunder* (1992) and Bole Butake in *Family Saga* (2005b) is crucial in the debate of how living together today can be framed and imagined. For Ngome, where the relationship has irretrievably broken down because of irreconcilable differences, the way out is for both parties in the marriage union to go their separate ways if their coexistence is not "constructed on the basis of mutual respect and the provision of opportunities for all to express their identities and partake equally in building a viable nation devoid of neo-colonial manipulation" (Takem 2008). From the perspective of Butake (2005b), in a family situation where a brother subjugates and exploits the other brother and his children on a false premise sustained by the situation where the "Deed of Brotherhood" has been falsified and transformed into a "Deed of Bondagehood," there is the need for the suppressed brother to call attention to his plight through the processes of re-memory and history. Such an exercise begins with questioning the status quo in order to identify the root causes of the predicament. In this play, Butake employs strategies of applied theatre, drama, and traditional oral narration as appropriate weapons in providing Kamala and the audience (who are invited to be a

part of the drama of existence of the family) with the opportunity to practically engage in looking for solutions to issues that affect them. Engaging everyone in finding solutions highlights the importance of transformative dialogue; a dialogue that equally engages Kamalo, the troublemaker. It is only through such genuine dialogue that defining the parameters of living together in that context can be achieved.

The situation in post-Apartheid South Africa merits some attention even so because the concept of the "rainbow nation" offers an excellent opportunity to interrogate living together in this post-colonial space. The metaphor of the rainbow nation, according to Niq Mhlongo, means that post-apartheid South Africa "is supposed to accommodate everyone, hence its attractive colours" (in Diez 2010) but this is not so, as Mpe's (2001) *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* suggests. Constructed within the discourses of the rainbow nation, this paradigmatic novel deals with life in post-Apartheid South Africa. It employs the space that is Hillbrow, a suburb of Johannesburg, to investigate inter-African migration in South Africa. Through an aesthetic informed by oral traditional story telling techniques reinforced by the communal first person narrative point of view, Mpe tells a story of mutual coexistence in "one of the most crowded, disadvantaged, violent inner-city neighbourhoods of post-Apartheid Johannesburg...exploring the intersection of complex issues—linguistic and literary marginalization, xenophobia, suicide, AIDS, and rural superstition" (Schreiber 2017). The novel aims at showing how relationships, informed and constructed by prejudice, fear, and suspicion, are not only the staple of post-Apartheid South Africa, but are becoming a worldwide phenomenon increasingly on the rise in a global age. In the mix of people in this space, namely, the special ones (the locals) who have a high sense of moral ground and the immigrants, known in derogatory terms as the *Makwerekwere*, who are considered the most dangerous criminals on earth, the novel shows how increased migration of other Africans to South Africa has fuelled xenophobia often leading to violence and deaths. The immigrants try to steer clear of trouble but are blamed by the locals for all the problems in the neighbourhood. In all, the novel aptly summarizes my premise in this paper, namely that the current global dispensation has ironically exacerbated the notion of mutual coexistence of people in society.

## V. CONCLUSION

This analysis of sample texts from written African literature of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods reveals the rich dialogue around the subject of mutual coexistence in African societies. While the communal ideal remains the defining model of living together in African contexts, the works nevertheless explore other paradigmatic situations that are already fraught with conflicts. In such contexts, the writers suggest either outright separation between inimical groups or constructive dialogue, based, as we find in the case of Ezeulu in Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964) and Kamala and Kamalo in Butake's *Family Saga* (2005b), on dignity and equality of the human being. This draws from the understanding that, as people live on planet earth, they will be bound to meet others or live together with them. Those who withdraw into themselves will implode, for, as Ngugi again notes, "culture contact is the oxygen of any civilization" (Ngugi 1997, p. 23). But while this might be so, I argue that there is the need for the following to obtain for this oxygen to be comfortably breathed by all. I am here alluding to the importance of referring constantly to the essential unity and interdependence of humanity, public participation to strengthen living together as well as the value of acknowledging guilt and remorse and the granting of forgiveness. The writers I have studied here have employed different aesthetic premises to map these in their works while equally insisting that, where social cohesion is fragmented, the need to identify mechanisms and institutions for conflict resolution becomes ultimately crucial.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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# Gender Parity, Growing Economies: Refiguring Female Power in Japanese and Yoruba Proverbs

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**Abstract**— Cultural affirmations and their extensions have been relatively unyielding in their representations of female power and essence. Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria and the majorly ethnically homogenous population of Japan, oral traditions, particularly proverbs, have always provided a contestable site for investigating gender relations as part of an overall template for social structures. Proverbs are critical lenses for the apprehension of cultural epistemes and their knowledge productions. The Yoruba and Japanese are remarked for their strong cultural belief systems which foreground communal acceptability, conformity, ideology and power relations. Japanese proverbs, as well as their Yoruba parallels, are forms of veiled speeches in oral traditions and folklore which communicate society's foundations, formations, religious, cultural and societal idiosyncrasies. This paper, while drawing inspiration from a feminist literary theory and through an analysis of selected Yoruba and Japanese proverbs, contends that within such belief systems are maxims which negate the female essence and shrinks her relevance. While some of the proverbs analysed celebrate women in few instances, they equally unveil the burden of marginalization placed on women. The essay reveals that gender parity as a given for economic growth in a new world order is only achievable when these cultural strictures against women are dismantled.

**Keywords**— Gender parity, female power, Japan, Yoruba, proverbs.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Yoruba proverbs (òwè) serve as repositories of cultural wisdom, reflecting the collective consciousness of the Yoruba people. These proverbs, often succinct and metaphorical, embody communal values, social norms, and moral lessons passed down through generations. The communal role of Yoruba proverbs lies in their ability to sustain cultural identity by emphasizing shared beliefs, respect for hierarchy, and the importance of unity (Oyetimi, "Oral Narrative" 12). For example, the proverb "Àgbájó ọwọ́ lá fi òsọyà, ọwọ́ kan ò gbérù d'òrùn" (Unity is strength; one hand cannot lift a load to the head) underscores the significance of collaboration and collective effort in Yoruba society. This communal ethos ensures that individuals prioritize societal welfare over personal ambitions, creating a strong sense of belonging and interdependence (Akporobaro, 1994). Through the promotion of values such as teamwork and communal responsibility, proverbs reinforce the interconnectedness that defines Yoruba social life.

In addition to fostering community spirit, Yoruba proverbs serve didactic purposes by acting as tools for moral instruction and character formation. Elders use proverbs to guide behavior, caution against moral lapses, and reinforce societal expectations. For instance, "Omọ tó bá ẹ̀rẹ̀ pẹ̀lú kẹ́rín ẹ̀yẹ, yóó fò pẹ̀lú rẹ̀" (A child who plays with a bird will fly with it) warns against bad company, emphasizing the importance of choosing companions wisely. Similarly, gendered proverbs like "Obinrin lo bi ni, ki a to ni Baba" (A woman gives birth to a child before a father exists) highlight the primacy of women in childbirth, acknowledging their essential role in family and societal continuity. However, this proverb also confines women's significance to reproductive functions, subtly reinforcing patriarchal norms that limit their agency. Such proverbs, while instructive, often perpetuate gendered stereotypes that reflect societal biases rather than challenge them (Odeunmi, 2008).

Moreover, Yoruba proverbs act as instruments of social control, reflecting and perpetuating hierarchical structures, particularly in gender relations. The proverb "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" (A woman is not strong except through her husband) encapsulates the patriarchal ideology that subordinates women's agency to male authority. This reinforces the belief that a woman's value and strength are derived from her association with men, thereby limiting her potential for independent identity and leadership. By reiterating such narratives, Yoruba proverbs sustain traditional power dynamics that prioritize male dominance while offering limited recognition of female capabilities (Adeleke, 2019). Conversely, proverbs like "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) celebrate women's foundational role in societal development. While this acknowledgment seems empowering, it often frames women's contributions within nurturing and reproductive capacities, sidelining other dimensions of their agency.

In contemporary discourse, these dual roles of Yoruba proverbs—communal and didactic—highlight their importance as both cultural assets and instruments of critique. While proverbs preserve Yoruba identity and offer moral guidance, their patriarchal undertones necessitate critical engagement (Oyetimi, "Oral Distillates" 330). Feminist scholars argue for a reinterpretation of these proverbs to challenge gender biases and promote egalitarian values. For instance, re-framing "Obinrin lo bi ni, ki a to ni Baba" to emphasize the indispensability of both men and women in familial and societal structures could foster gender parity. By critically engaging with Yoruba proverbs, scholars and activists can transform these cultural expressions into tools for advocacy and social reform, ensuring that they evolve to reflect progressive values while retaining their communal and didactic significance (Oyewumi, 1997).

Japanese proverbs (kotowaza) are deeply embedded in the nation's cultural fabric, serving as tools for social cohesion and the reinforcement of traditional norms. These concise sayings often encapsulate values that promote societal conformity, urging individuals to align their behaviors with established norms. Proverbs serve as both mirrors and molds of societal hierarchies, ensuring the transmission of cultural expectations across generations (Hendry, 1995). For example, the proverb "Deru kugi wa utareru" (The nail that sticks out gets hammered down) reflects the cultural emphasis on collective harmony and discourages individuality that disrupts societal equilibrium. This conformity extends to gender roles, where proverbs outline and reinforce distinct expectations for men and women. In a patriarchal society like Japan, such sayings perpetuate male authority and female subservience, embedding these roles in everyday discourse.

Within the domain of gender roles, Japanese proverbs often prescribe an idealized image of femininity that confines women to nurturing and submissive roles. For instance, "Onna no naka no onna" (A woman among women) suggests an archetypal ideal of womanhood, characterized by virtues such as modesty, gentleness, and domesticity. While this phrase may appear to celebrate women, it implicitly enforces traditional expectations, limiting their roles to caregivers and homemakers. Similarly, the saying "Ryōsai kenbo" (Good wife, wise mother) encapsulates the Meiji-era ideology that continues to influence gender norms in Japan. This proverb glorifies women's roles within the family while marginalizing their contributions in public or professional spheres. By idealizing such roles, these proverbs discourage deviation from traditional expectations, reinforcing societal pressures that prioritize conformity over personal aspirations (Sugimoto, 2020).

Japanese proverbs also highlight the hierarchical structure of gender relations, emphasizing male authority and female subservience. Through repeated usage, such proverbs naturalize gender hierarchies, making them appear as immutable cultural truths (Nakane, 1970). A common saying, "Danson jōhi" (Respect men, despise women), reflects the deeply ingrained patriarchal values that historically dominated Japanese society. Although contemporary Japan has made strides toward gender equality, this proverb exemplifies the residual biases that still pervade cultural attitudes. Another proverb, "Otoko wa sokai, onna wa sankai" (Men should go out into the world; women should stay in the home), reinforces the dichotomy between male public dominance and female domesticity. These sayings not only legitimize male privilege but also sustain a cultural framework where women's worth is measured by their adherence to prescribed roles.

Despite their prescriptive nature, Japanese proverbs can also be reinterpreted as tools for critical reflection on societal values. Feminist scholars have argued for a deconstruction of these sayings to challenge their restrictive implications and advocate for more egalitarian interpretations. For example, "Onna wa sansai, ko wa sankai" (A woman blooms three times; a child blossoms three times) could be reframed to highlight the multifaceted contributions of women beyond traditional roles. Similarly, promoting alternative proverbs that celebrate female agency, such as "Onna no chikara wa sanzensekai o ugokasu" (A woman's power moves the three worlds), can help reshape societal attitudes toward gender equity. By critically engaging with these cultural artifacts, scholars and activists can transform Japanese proverbs into vehicles for progressive change, fostering an environment where traditional wisdom coexists with modern values (Inoue, 2006).

## II. GENDER AND POWER DYNAMICS IN PROVERBS

### 2.1 Negative Depictions of Female Essence

In Yoruba culture, proverbs often articulate societal attitudes toward gender, with many portraying women as subordinate or dependent (Oyetimi, "Cultural Ecological Knowledge" 105). The saying "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" (A woman is not strong except through her husband) encapsulates the patriarchal belief that a woman's power and relevance are derived from her association with a man. This proverb diminishes women's individual agency, framing their significance within the context of marriage. Such a portrayal reinforces the societal expectation that a woman's value is tied to her ability to support and amplify her husband's stature, rather than her own accomplishments.

Another Yoruba proverb, "Ile ni a ti n ko eso r'ode" (Charity begins at home), when applied to women, is often interpreted to mean that a woman's primary domain is the home, where her contributions are confined to caregiving and domestic management. This saying, while emphasizing the importance of familial stability, sidelines women's potential contributions to public life or leadership (Oyetimi, "Masculinity and Heroism" 4). Proverbs like these not only reflect but also perpetuate the patriarchal norms that prioritize male authority and confine women to supportive or secondary roles in society.

Similarly, Japanese proverbs codify patriarchal norms, often portraying women as subordinate or dependent on men. The proverb "Onna wa sansaku ni ie ni iru ga yoshi" (A woman is best kept within the three confines: her father's house, her husband's house, and her son's house) underscores the traditional Japanese expectation that women's lives are defined by their relationships with male family members. This saying not only restricts women's mobility and independence but also reinforces the notion that women's primary role is to serve men across different stages of life.

Another example, "Otoko wa sokai, onna wa sankai" (Men should go out into the world; women should stay in the home), reflects the dichotomy between male public dominance and female domesticity. This proverb suggests that the public sphere—associated with work, leadership, and influence—is exclusively male, while women are relegated to the private sphere. Such proverbs sustain the patriarchal ideology that limits women's opportunities for education, professional growth, and leadership, reinforcing the belief that their worth is tied to their domestic roles.

Both Yoruba and Japanese proverbs reveal striking similarities in their reinforcement of patriarchal norms. They emphasize male authority and female subordination while legitimizing societal structures that restrict women's autonomy. For instance, "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" and "Onna wa sansaku ni ie ni iru ga yoshi" both portray women's strength and worth as being contingent on their relationships with men. These proverbs naturalize the gender hierarchy, making it appear as an immutable cultural truth rather than a social construct.

However, there are subtle differences in the cultural contexts they reflect. Yoruba proverbs often center around the family as the nucleus of societal organization, emphasizing women's roles as wives and mothers. In contrast, Japanese proverbs extend this dependency across a woman's life stages, emphasizing her subordination within her natal, marital, and post-marital homes. These variations highlight the specific ways in which patriarchal norms are articulated and maintained in different cultural settings.

Proverbs like these, while reflecting historical realities, pose significant challenges for contemporary efforts toward gender equality. Their continued use perpetuates stereotypes that limit women's potential and reinforce discriminatory practices. However, critical engagement with these sayings offers opportunities for reinterpretation and reform. For instance, feminist scholars and cultural practitioners can reframe such proverbs to highlight the indispensable roles women play in societal development beyond traditional expectations. By deconstructing these cultural artifacts, societies can foster more inclusive narratives that challenge patriarchal norms and promote gender equity.

### 2.2 Veiled Speeches of Resistance

While many proverbs reflect and perpetuate patriarchal norms, others subtly affirm women's power and agency despite restrictive cultural frameworks. These sayings offer glimpses of recognition for women's foundational roles in society, their influence in collective success, and their indispensable contributions to societal well-being. In Yoruba culture, the proverb "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) foregrounds the indispensability of women in the origin and continuity of human existence. This saying affirms that women are central to life itself, challenging the notion that their significance is confined to their reproductive roles. It subtly recognizes women's creative power and their irreplaceable contributions to societal foundation and progress. While patriarchal interpretations might limit this acknowledgment to

biological functions, the underlying message points to a deeper reverence for women's existence as vital to the community's survival and continuity.

Another Yoruba proverb, "Ti obinrin ba so ile di ile, ile naa a tu di oko" (If a woman makes a home, the home will become prosperous), emphasizes the transformative potential of women in familial and communal spaces. This saying highlights women's agency in fostering stability, growth, and harmony within the household. Although it operates within the framework of domestic roles, it affirms women's unique ability to influence and elevate the family's well-being, subtly challenging the notion of male dominance in decision-making processes. Such proverbs illustrate the Yoruba worldview that, even in restrictive settings, women wield significant power in shaping societal outcomes.

Japanese proverbs also reflect moments where women's power is acknowledged, particularly in the context of collective achievements. The saying "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" (If a woman is your ally, you can conquer the world) underscores the importance of women's support and partnership in achieving great feats. This proverb, while still framing women's influence as relational, highlights their strategic and emotional contributions to success. By recognizing women as essential allies, it subtly challenges the idea that male achievement exists independently of female agency.

Similarly, "Onna wa taiyō de aru" (A woman is the sun) suggests a powerful metaphor for women's indispensable role in providing warmth, life, and energy to the world. This saying conveys a deeper acknowledgment of women's centrality to society's well-being and progress. While it may not directly address gender equity, it poetically affirms the profound impact of women's presence and contributions, offering an alternative narrative to the restrictive roles often prescribed in patriarchal cultures.

Both Yoruba and Japanese proverbs reveal that even within restrictive cultural paradigms, women's power and agency are sometimes affirmed, albeit in subtle ways. Yoruba proverbs often emphasize women's foundational and transformative roles in communal and familial settings, as seen in sayings like "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" and "Ti obinrin ba so ile di ile, ile naa a tu di oko." These proverbs challenge simplistic portrayals of women as merely subordinate, instead highlighting their essential contributions to societal growth and harmony.

Japanese proverbs, on the other hand, frequently frame women's power in relational or symbolic terms, as seen in "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" and "Onna wa taiyō de aru." While these sayings acknowledge women's influence, they do so within a context that often links their significance to their support of others. Nevertheless, they provide opportunities for reimagining women's roles as integral to success and societal well-being.

These affirmations of women's agency within proverbs offer a starting point for rethinking restrictive cultural norms. By foregrounding women's indispensability and influence, such sayings challenge dominant narratives that marginalize female contributions. For contemporary societies striving for gender parity, these proverbs can serve as cultural touchstones for advocating greater recognition of women's roles beyond traditional constraints. Critical reinterpretation of these sayings can reveal their potential as tools for empowerment, emphasizing their capacity to inspire a more equitable understanding of gender roles in both Yoruba and Japanese contexts.

### III. FEMINIST REINTERPRETATION OF PROVERBS

Feminist theory provides a critical lens to analyze and reinterpret cultural proverbs, often seen as vehicles for societal norms that perpetuate gender inequality. By deconstructing the patriarchal underpinnings in these expressions, feminist reinterpretation challenges biases and reclaims proverbs to affirm women's agency, strength, and significance. This process not only critiques cultural narratives but also proposes new meanings that align with gender equity.

Proverbs often encapsulate societal attitudes that prioritize male dominance and depict women as secondary or dependent. For example, the Yoruba saying "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" (A woman is not strong except through her husband) enforces the notion that women's power is contingent upon their relationships with men. Similarly, the Japanese proverb "Onna wa sansaku ni ie ni iru ga yoshi" (A woman is best kept within the three confines: her father's house, her husband's house, and her son's house) reduces women to passive participants confined to male-defined spaces.

Feminist theory critiques such sayings as instruments of patriarchy that normalize the subordination of women (Beauvoir, 1949). These proverbs function as cultural artifacts that perpetuate structural inequality, framing women's roles as inherently supportive rather than independent or influential. Feminist scholars like Judith Butler argue that such narratives produce gendered performativity, restricting women to predefined roles that reinforce male dominance (Hooks, 1984).

Through feminist reinterpretation, proverbs can be reframed to emphasize women's inherent value and contributions. For instance, the Yoruba proverb "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) can be reimagined to highlight the foundational role of women not just in childbirth but in societal, intellectual, and economic spheres. This shift moves beyond the biological lens, affirming women as creators, innovators, and leaders.

Similarly, the Japanese saying "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" (If a woman is your ally, you can conquer the world) subtly acknowledges the influence of women in collective success. A feminist reinterpretation can amplify this acknowledgment by framing women as equal partners whose contributions are critical to achieving societal progress, rather than as ancillary supporters.

Proverbs reflect the cultural values and ideologies of their societies, and their reinterpretation offers an opportunity to transform these narratives. In Yoruba culture, "Ti obinrin ba so ile di ile, ile naa a tu di oko" (If a woman makes a home, the home will become prosperous) traditionally emphasizes women's domestic roles. However, a feminist reinterpretation can extend this idea to celebrate women's broader societal leadership, positioning them as pivotal in community-building and governance.

In Japanese culture, the proverb "Onna wa taiyō de aru" (A woman is the sun) symbolizes women's centrality in life. Reinterpreted through a feminist lens, this proverb can affirm women's power to illuminate and influence all aspects of existence, including political, intellectual, and economic domains, thereby challenging traditional limitations on their roles.

Feminist reinterpretation of proverbs is a powerful tool for cultural transformation. It critiques and dismantles the biases embedded in these sayings while reconstructing them to align with gender equity. This process not only empowers women by affirming their agency but also educates society about the importance of inclusive narratives that reflect the realities of both genders.

Reinterpreted proverbs can underscore the complementary roles of men and women in societal development. For instance, the Yoruba saying "Ti obinrin o ba si, ile o le dabi ile" (Without a woman, a house cannot become a home) can be expanded to emphasize the indispensability of women in creating balanced and productive societies. Similarly, the Japanese proverb "Onna wa taiyō de aru" (A woman is the sun) can be reinterpreted to reflect women's pivotal contributions beyond the domestic sphere, acknowledging their role in economic, political, and social advancement. These reinterpretations shift the narrative from women's dependence to their integral roles in driving progress, aligning with studies that show societies with greater gender parity experience higher economic growth (World Economic Forum, 2021).

In Yoruba culture, "Igi kan o le da'gba" (One tree does not make a forest) highlights the importance of cooperation. When applied to gender relations, this proverb can emphasize the necessity of partnership between men and women in achieving communal and economic goals. Reframing this saying to explicitly include gender dynamics could challenge patriarchal norms that isolate decision-making to men, fostering a collaborative environment where women's perspectives are equally valued.

The Japanese proverb "Ryōshu wa futari de tsukuru" (Good sake is made by two brewers) traditionally symbolizes teamwork. Reinterpreted, it can highlight the shared responsibility of men and women in societal development. By applying this principle to gender relations, the proverb underscores the idea that mutual respect and collaboration are essential for creating a harmonious and prosperous society.

Both Yoruba and Japanese cultures contain proverbs that, when reinterpreted, reveal a latent potential for advocating gender parity. The Yoruba proverb "Eyin ni i mo pe Ikan s'ere ara re" (The back only knows when the stomach is full) can be paralleled with the Japanese saying "Aun no kokyū" (Harmony achieved by breathing in unison). Both sayings can symbolize the interconnectedness and mutual dependency of men and women, emphasizing that societal harmony and progress depend on balanced and inclusive contributions from all genders.

Progressive proverbs that explicitly or implicitly advocate for gender parity can also serve as powerful advocacy tools. The Yoruba saying "A jeji owo kan ko gberu dori" (One hand cannot lift a load to the head) aligns with the Japanese "Hito wa hitori ja ikite ikenai" (No one can live alone). Both sayings can be reframed to highlight the interdependence of men and women in achieving common goals, reinforcing the need for shared power and responsibilities.

Reimagined proverbs have the potential to shift cultural narratives, replacing outdated gender norms with progressive values that promote equality. When proverbs like "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" (If a woman is your ally, you can conquer the world) and "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) are highlighted in public discourse, they can inspire policies and practices that prioritize women's empowerment and inclusion. Societies that embrace such progressive

ideologies are better positioned to leverage the full potential of their populations, enhancing innovation, productivity, and economic resilience.

#### IV. LINKING GENDER PARITY TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

Feminist economic theories, which interrogate the intersections of gender, labor, and economic structures, provide a compelling framework for understanding the societal benefits of dismantling cultural restrictions on women's power. These theories emphasize the importance of equitable participation of women in all spheres of life—social, economic, and political—as a pathway to achieving sustainable development and societal transformation. When applied to the reinterpretation of cultural norms embedded in proverbs, feminist economic theories reveal how rethinking gendered narratives can catalyze progress at both micro and macro levels.

Central to feminist economic thought is the assertion that gender parity is not just a social justice issue but an economic necessity. Scholars like Diane Elson and Naila Kabeer argue that gender inequalities restrict economic growth by limiting women's participation in labor markets, decision-making, and innovation (Elson, 1999; Kabeer, 1994). Restrictive proverbs, such as the Yoruba "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" (A woman is not strong except through her husband) and the Japanese "Onna wa sansaku ni ie ni iru ga yoshi" (A woman is best kept within the three confines: her father's house, her husband's house, and her son's house), reinforce systemic limitations on women's agency, effectively curbing their contributions to society. Dismantling these cultural strictures enables women to take on leadership roles and participate more fully in economic and social activities, creating a multiplier effect on productivity and growth.

Feminist economic theories also critique traditional definitions of work that undervalue women's contributions, especially in caregiving and community-building roles (Folbre, 1994). Proverbs like "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) and "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" (If a woman is your ally, you can conquer the world) can be reframed to highlight the foundational role of women in both domestic and public spheres. By shifting the focus from women's traditional roles to their broader capacities for leadership, innovation, and collaboration, these reinterpretations challenge patriarchal hierarchies and affirm women's essential contributions to societal well-being.

Feminist economic theories also draw on intersectionality to examine how race, class, and culture compound gender inequalities (Crenshaw, 1991). In the Yoruba and Japanese contexts, proverbs often reflect the intersection of gender with communal values and hierarchical structures. Reinterpreted sayings that emphasize collaboration and mutual respect—such as "Ti obinrin o ba si, ile o le dabi ile" (Without a woman, a house cannot become a home) or "Ryōshu wa futari de tsukuru" (Good sake is made by two brewers)—can disrupt these intersecting oppressions. This rethinking aligns with feminist arguments that inclusive policies and practices, driven by cultural shifts, are necessary to achieve equitable development outcomes.

The societal benefits of dismantling cultural restrictions on women's power are well-documented in feminist economic research. Societies with higher levels of gender equality experience improved child welfare, reduced poverty rates, and increased educational attainment, all of which are critical for long-term development (World Economic Forum, 2021). Reinterpreting proverbs to promote gender parity serves as a cultural strategy for advancing these goals. For example, Yoruba and Japanese proverbs that celebrate women's influence, such as "A jeji owo kan ko gberu dori" (One hand cannot lift a load to the head) and "Aun no kokyū" (Harmony achieved by breathing in unison), can inspire narratives that position women as equal partners in societal progress, thus reinforcing feminist economic principles.

Both Yoruba and Japanese cultures face the challenge of addressing gender disparities within broader systems of communal values and hierarchical structures. In Yoruba culture, the communal emphasis often prioritizes collective harmony over individual autonomy, which can obscure women's contributions. Similarly, in Japanese society, the cultural ideal of *wa* (harmony) often results in women's subordination to maintain societal cohesion. However, these communal values also provide a foundation for promoting gender parity by reframing proverbs to highlight women as integral to societal harmony and success.

For instance, the Yoruba proverb "Ti obinrin o ba si, ile o le dabi ile" (Without a woman, a house cannot become a home) and the Japanese saying "Ryōshu wa futari de tsukuru" (Good sake is made by two brewers) both underscore the necessity of collaboration. Reinterpreted through a feminist lens, these proverbs can advocate for mutual respect and equality in partnerships, positioning women as indispensable contributors to collective prosperity.

Analyzing these proverbs through a comparative lens underscores the shared potential of Yoruba and Japanese societies to redefine cultural narratives in ways that support gender parity. By challenging restrictive proverbs and amplifying those that

affirm women's agency, both cultures can create more inclusive frameworks that not only empower women but also benefit society as a whole.

Feminist scholars like Naila Kabeer argue that gender equality is not only a moral imperative but also a catalyst for economic and social progress (Kabeer, 1994). Drawing on this perspective, Yoruba and Japanese proverbs can serve as tools for cultural reformation, promoting values of equity, collaboration, and respect. In doing so, these societies can align traditional wisdom with contemporary ideals, paving the way for sustainable development driven by shared contributions from all genders.

## V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of Yoruba and Japanese proverbs reveals that these cultural aphorisms often perpetuate patriarchal narratives, portraying women as inferior or dependent while restricting their roles to domestic and reproductive functions. Examples like the Yoruba proverb "Obinrin kii se alagbara, bi ko se ti oko re" (A woman is not strong except through her husband) and the Japanese saying "Onna wa sansaku ni ie ni iru ga yoshi" (A woman is best kept within the three confines) illustrate how these cultural expressions reinforce traditional gender hierarchies.

However, the research also uncovers proverbs that subtly affirm women's foundational roles and potential for influence. Sayings like "Obinrin la fi da ile aye" (The world was created with a woman) and "Onna wa mikata ni suru to tenka o toru" (If a woman is your ally, you can conquer the world) demonstrate that cultural narratives can also highlight women's indispensability in societal growth and collaboration.

Dismantling patriarchal narratives embedded in Yoruba and Japanese proverbs is a cultural imperative for achieving gender parity and economic growth. By reinterpreting these cultural artifacts to affirm women's agency and value, societies can align traditional wisdom with contemporary ideals of equity and inclusion. Through education, cultural advocacy, media integration, and policy development, feminist reinterpretations of proverbs can inspire a more equitable future, ensuring that cultural heritage becomes a foundation for progress rather than a barrier to it

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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# Emotive Suffering and Neo-Apartheid Literary Constructs in Yewande Omotoso's *Bom Boy*

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**Abstract**— *Psychological impairments in literary works set in Africa, that foreground apartheid and related discriminatory circumstances in African settings, examine how systemic oppression, anguish, suffering and trauma construct the experiences of individuals and societies caught within these confines. While existing studies on related perspectives have focused on general socio-economic, political and health-related issues, there has been limited examination of literary texts that depict contemporary settings, especially in post-apartheid contexts. This study re-examines literary depictions of the connected motifs of mental distress in Yewande Omotoso's Bom Boy. This is with a view to exploring how alienation, ignorance and social stratification reveal psychological impairments, not just as an individual experience, but as a condition that reflects on collective conditions. Through an analysis of characters, events, and settings, this study demonstrates that contemporary literary works serve as testaments to historical burden of traumatic memory, as well as the resilience exhibited through conscious effort to rewrite narratives, using fiction to establish reality.*

**Keywords**— *Mental distress, Apartheid, Psychological trauma, Africa, Yewande Omotoso's Bom Boy*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Societal experiences, as captured in African literary works, relate to the experiences of underdevelopment that constantly ail the continent and stifle progress. In reading African literature, Lucianne Englert observes that there are several meanings that can be gleaned from what is defined as the literary, when considered from the purview of Africa. In spite of these variations, the main points in African literary writing revolve around similar themes that project psychological suffering that continues to reflect as a blight on the continent through neo-colonial perspectives.

The concept of mental trauma in African texts is one that cuts through several African societies. Nicola Malizia defines psychological trauma as "the direct personal experience of an event that may cause or lead to death or serious injury, or other threats to the physical integrity" (11). In a country like South Africa, apartheid and its attendant consequences served and still serve as mental trauma that function as deterrents to wholesome development. The use of literature to capture the experiences of individuals in a post-apartheid society like South Africa, using succinct representative imagery, is abundant in much of the literary works of South Africans and Africans in general. For instance, J.M. Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983), captures this context.

## II. LITERARY PERSPECTIVES ON APARTHEID

Apartheid remains a recurring theme in many literary texts that have emerged from South Africa. This is simply as a response to the author's unconscious compulsion not to write outside their contextual environment. Although apartheid can be said to have been long conquered, the consequences that trail its popularity are still exhibited in some parts of South Africa, although to a lesser degree. In May 2013, a report on Cable News Network observed activities in a town called Kleinfontein and its racist ideals closely tied to the apartheid era. According to Nkepile Mabuse:

More than two decades after the death of the systematic racial discrimination policy of apartheid, a community living southeast of South Africa's capital Pretoria is being accused of trying to keep its racist ideals alive. White men clad in military uniforms stamped with an old South African flag guard the gates of the controversial settlement known as Kleinfontein. All the signs within its boundaries are written in Afrikaans, the language that developed out of the Dutch dialect spoken by early colonizers and which is spoken by the town's 1,000 white inhabitants. A bust of Hendrick Verwoerd, the assassinated prime minister considered the architect of apartheid, greets visitors upon entry (1).

As recently as 2023 until current times, concerns have also been raised with regard to apartheid-related circumstances. Deborah Collier provides an instance of the Employment Equity Amendment Act (EEAA), which has recommendations for provision of job opportunities with deliberate attention towards encouraging fair distribution. The problem of apartheid encompasses many of the other issues that reflect mental suffering in South Africa, and writers that have responded to this calling, include J. M. Coetzee, Mark Behr, Zakes Mda, Ivan Vladislavic, Lesego Rampolokeng, K Sello Duiker, Etienne van Heerden, Marlene van Niekerk, etc. There is also the speculation that aside from the major problem of race and class stratification, another effect of apartheid is the trend with South African writers.

Early writing on segregational circumstances in South Africa portray restrictions tied to politics and socio-economic realities. As the apartheid regime reflected legal separation of races and right restrictions, so did literary works become a symbol of protest against such practices (Dar et al.). The concerns have revolved around generalised socio-cultural factors to accommodating medical concerns such as the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) crisis and its ties to apartheid explorations (Juhong and Wenxuan). However, in spite of the focused abundance on these perspectives, there have been limited insight into contemporary perspectives about the lasting influence of apartheid as captured in literary works.

### III. PSYCHOLOGICAL ILLUSTRATIONS OF PAIN AND NEO-APARTHEID REPRESENTATIONS IN *BOM BOY*

*Bom Boy* by Yewande Omotoso, first published in 2011, focuses on class stratification and psychological impairment, as they manifest as physical constructs that obstruct development, which stems from colonialism and uprooted backgrounds. A significant manifestation of this is observed in how such environments foster alienation and isolation. *Bom Boy* is set in South Africa but substantial traces to areas in West Africa are expounded in the narrative. The novel presents the life of Leke, a troubled young man, based in the suburbs of South Africa. He develops strange habits, such as stalking people and stealing, as well as going from one physician to the next in what appears to be an unconscious search for companionship. The text traces the protagonist's formative period to his adult years, depicting his family background along the line and subtly establishing the reason(s) for his clear difference from the couple he has come to call parents, and even other people around him. From childhood, Leke's alienation from society leads him into the development of a strange ailment that is characterised by the dangerous itching of his throat. This is presented in the opening lines of the narrative thus:

A thing had begun to grow like a tree in Leke Denton's throat. It was the same thing that grew when he was picked for the school play and it was there when he was later cut from the cast. It was there when girls glanced away as he walked down the corridors. An invisible rash. (Omotoso, *Bom Boy*, 1)

Leke, as viewed in the excerpt above, can be said to be simply exhibiting some psychological reaction to his black skin, brought upon by the more complex problem of colonialism, clearly realised by the problems of apartheid. M. A. R. Habib explicates on the nature of colonialism, albeit as imperialism, in *A History of Literary Criticism* (2005), when he posits:

Though imperialism is usually understood as a strategy whereby a state aims to extend its control forcibly beyond its own borders over other states and peoples, it should be remembered that such control is usually not just military but economic and cultural. A ruling state will often impose not only its own terms of trade, but also its own political ideals, its own cultural values, and often its own language, upon a subject state (737).

Conveniently identified as colonialism, Leke's mental grief, which is indicated as a result of his non-conformity with the above values, is also clearly analysed in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963). As Mark Sherry observes, "Fanon believes that colonial wars create specific sorts of mental distress. ... For Fanon, psychiatric impairments are a sign of the horrors of colonialism. Get rid of colonialism, and we will avoid many disability experiences, and that is unquestionably assumed to be a good thing" (14-15).

The experience of apartheid, as treated in the context of this study, is central to the life of nearly every African, consciously or unconsciously, considering the experience of colonialism. It extends beyond the borders of regions, penetrating the very heart

of every African nation. This is why as at the age of eight, Leke is already fully aware of the racist attitudes directed at him, especially with references to the jibes he becomes the target of. As seen in *Bom Boy*:

At school, he moved from class to class, a watery feeling; his hearing dulled as if his head were submerged in liquid. He could barely hear what people said, barely talk back, how would he host a party?

... "Cardboard boy" the other kids called him because of the strange crackers Jane packed in his lunchbox. Or "kid-for-hire" because one of the older boys had seen Jane and Marcus at the parent's evening and worked out that Leke was adopted (1–2).

The context of apartheid extends beyond what may be subconsciously regarded as the simple assumptions of South African confines, reaching far across continents. For instance, Oscar, Leke's real father, is a Nigerian who has come to South Africa to start his doctorate in molecular and cellular biology. The author presents the ignorance of foreigners about Nigeria and the cultures, especially considering the enthusiasm with which Nigerians absorbed foreign cultures, as seen in the expression, "Moremi's story had dotted his childhood with the consistency of birthdays. Oscar was surprised on arriving at the university to find that some of the people he shared a lab with had never heard of Moremi. Some of them didn't even know where Nigeria was" (15). The author also presents contemporary Nigeria and the seeming practice in which vain love for material things take over the simplicity of life and this vanity is sometimes mistakenly referred to as civilisation. As presented in the text, "The ignorance of his lab mates mixed with the opulence of Rhodes Memorial had brewed distaste in Oscar. Here in this country, he'd realised, they memorialised wealthy men – thieves; back home in Nigeria, simple people who sacrificed for the group" (15).

The period described above can be said to be the days before the developmental indices in Africa shifted, rendering the nation – representative of Africa – almost paralysed beyond repair. There was a time in Africa when simplicity, humility and sacrifice earned one respect (Eleojo). In recent times, however, the continent has become so puffed up with an influential population of greedy individuals who are only too eager to further twist the continent into a state of frustrating mental distress. The excerpt above also points to the isolation that fosters psychological trauma, that exists from being an outsider inside. This feeling is mutual amongst Africans who find themselves in the diaspora out of compulsion, desire or simply nature. According to the author, in a note on the Port Harcourt Literary Festival blog, "...*Bom Boy* got mined from these rambling thoughts. About social isolation, being on the outside, about wanting people (friends) but not knowing how to get them. About being foreign" (1).

This sense of outcastness is replicated in the many forums and groups that have sprung up as collectives of Africans in the diaspora and sometimes act as platforms where people come together to share experiences. *Bom Boy* places the average African in the position of centre attraction, albeit sometimes unfriendly. And this also foregrounds the second motif highlighted in this study, which is the ignorance construct. Ola Rotimi, in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977), explores the elements of psychological trauma, although in ironic terms. The author displays varying levels of literacy in the attempt to portray that illiteracy is no excuse for ignorance or outright stupidity. As such, the level of literacy of individuals within a nation is no reason for the underdevelopment of the country, since illiteracy is not readily described as mental distress in terms of the definition the word suggests.

In *Mapping Intersections: African Literature and Africa's Development*, edited by Anne Adams and Janis Mayes (1998), they observe right on point that "African development, as a concept, is not generally construed to incorporate 'the literary'" (2). In *Bom Boy*, the 'illiteracy' of characters like Elaine does not automatically leave them with the psychologically-impaired tag. Elaine works tirelessly within an academic environment as a cleaner and later as a sales attendant because of her illiteracy. She drives herself hard to embrace survival in spite of her pregnant status and her having to deal with a fiancé in jail. After Leke's father dies in prison, Elaine takes the brutal decision of giving up her son for adoption to Marcus and Jane in a bid to better his lot in life. She sacrifices her comfort in order to ensure that her son grows up to a bright future. As such, Elaine breaks the chain that could have plagued her.

The cycle of poverty is one that envelopes many African nations. As a result, ignorance and staunch refusal to embrace enlightenment of sorts, rather than illiteracy, can be termed one of the issues that reflect psychological suffering that plagues the continent. This is why it is not uncommon to find literate individuals behave or take decisions that speak volumes of ignorance. It is not unusual to find people in government more concerned about how to enlarge their harems rather than focus on development. It is also not strange to read about the tussles for leadership when the gains of acquiring these leadership positions are still largely lacking with regards to the plight of the masses (Yongo).

This ignorance is further expounded in *Bom Boy*, when the events at Leke's workplace are presented. This further represents the notion that ignorance is not usually as a result of illiteracy, as seen in the excerpt:

Leke nodded in Lewis's direction as he clocked in. The security guard, sitting on a chair by the door, pursed his lips in response – Leke was ten minutes late. The workers who were friendly with Lewis would go to lunch without clocking out and he would look away while they were leaving, as if he didn't notice. But with Leke, Lewis was always watching. It was Lewis who had lodged the hygiene complaint against him (111).

Although it may be safely assumed that the security guard may not be formally educated, his constant exposure and contact with the workers should make him know better, like Elaine's situation as a cleaner in an academic environment. However, while the security guard can be conveniently excused, the attitudes of Leke's co-workers are inexcusable. For instance, "Gene had joined the company five days before, and was still unaware of the hidden rule amongst the staff: ignore Leke" (112). Leke's attitude does not also help issues as he prefers to keep strictly to himself, a reflection of psychological suffering in itself, as seen in "From the day Gene arrived Leke had been taken aback by his friendliness, overwhelmed at times. A part of him wanted Gene to leave him alone but another part, more unfamiliar, enjoyed the contact and the attention" (119).

Leke's unfamiliarity with companionship can be attributed to the psychological torture he has suffered since childhood as a result of his skin colour. Leke is not the only one in his work environment who suffers the pain of emotive reflections. His co-workers who are educated have refused to look beyond their noses and instead embraced ignorance as a tool to portray their disgust at the difference between them and Leke when in reality, there really isn't any.

Elaine's position is also one that presents the division along class lines that is common in several contemporary South African literary works. Post-apartheid South Africa is one that is left with no choice but to cement the racist lines, but the class distinctions remain all too obvious. There is no allusion as to the presence or absence of wealth of individuals because of the stark revelation of class structures. As Jeremy Seekings postulates:

Now, in the 'new' South Africa, class inequalities are highly visible all around us. The growth of the black elite and 'middle class' is evident in advertising as in real life. At the same time, huge numbers of black people are confined to an 'underclass' of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion. Most white people have retained the advantages conferred by their class position at the end of apartheid. But, at the same time, a small number of white people are downwardly mobile. The use of aggregate data for racial 'groups' or data on the average for racial 'groups' both obscures the social stratification within racial 'groups' and the extent to which race has ceased to be the key cause of inequality (2).

In *Bom Boy*, there are references to a generational curse on Leke's lineage in which every child born to the family will die young. Oscar's attempt to 'murder' Malcolm Feathers, the man who abused Elaine, his girlfriend, can be said to be premeditated as according to a babalawo (traditional seer), for the curse to be broken, Oscar has to find an evil man and kill him. It is obvious from the events in the text that Oscar is not guilty of actually going through with murdering Malcolm, but his skin colour and the fact that he is found beside a dead Malcolm, nails him. While Oscar is said to have initially nursed the idea of murdering Malcolm even if he had no definite plan of how the deed would be carried out, the matter takes a different turn, as relayed in *Bom Boy*:

Propelled by fright, Feathers moved with a haste his body was unprepared for, he slipped on the expensive smooth porcelain tiles, the sound of his legs sliding and a heavy thud as his skull glanced off the edge of the basin and hit the floor. His body was shaking as Oscar walked into the bathroom. A shiny pool of blood spread onto the yellow floor mat and the wriggling slowed until it felt as though the only sound in the house was a clock ticking. The man's face was not yet drained of all colour but his lips were blue. Oscar went onto his knees and put his ear to Feather's mouth, averting his eyes from the grey saucers wide open and staring. A warm breath, short.

'Help,' he whispered.

As Oscar waited for the breath to grow faint and disappear, he realised that nothing had gone according to plan (230).

The events are clear and police investigations, if carried out thoroughly, would have absolved him of the crime. Besides, he had the chance to run away from the scene of the crime but his thinking faculty, far too slow in response to such situations, betrays him, furthering the context of ignorance as a propeller for mental suffering.

#### IV. CLASS STRATIFICATION AS MENTAL INJURY IN *BOM BOY*

The issue of class stratification in South Africa, regarding both black and white peoples, has its basis in the introduction to colonialism to the region. This is related to the 1652 Dutch settlement in Cape Town, South Africa. In the early days of this settlement, not all white children were allowed in school as school at the time was for "imported slaves of the Dutch East India Company" (Prinsloo). Children were encouraged to keep coming because of the tobacco and brandy that was served in school. Literacy further spread with the popularisation of religious education. However, as literacy spread to other parts, it was observed that there was genuine increased interest in the acquisition of reading and writing in schools. Yet, contrary to expectations, the output in terms of productivity declined. As Theal, quoted in Frank Molteno, observes, "...there is a very large number of natives on the frontier who attend the mission schools and are taught to read and write, and they become really unfit for other work, and that class of person is increasing, and they are doing... no good to the country" (55).

Alice Hall exemplifies the concept of psychological distress in literature using the works of three Nobel Laureates – Faulkner, J.M. Coetzee and Toni Morrison – to depict what she refers to as 'complex interconnections' found within the "ethical, esthetic and imaginative challenges" (5) as explored in the altered physical outlook. From this viewpoint, Elaine in Omotoso's *Bom Boy* is representative of the 'small number of white people who are downwardly mobile' in Seekings' words. Although she is white, her racial identity doesn't spare her the trauma that comes with being in the lower class. The class stratification and its consequence of poverty is replicated in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* in which the protagonist (Tambu) is forced to feel nothing when her brother dies because it provides an opportunity for her to go to school. This suffering is psychological because Tambu's feelings are muted against any form of pity since what is uppermost on her mind is to better her lot. *Nervous Conditions* also portrays psychological conditions as Nyasha is taken to a psychiatrist when she develops an eating disorder in an effort to be 'white-like'.

Similarly, Omotoso's *Bom Boy* exhibits salient references to psychological impairments. Leke, the protagonist, seeks company by going from one medical institution to another. His alienation from society and his general countenance is sequel to a deep mental condition as his actions cannot be regarded as normal within the society he finds himself. This is also traced to his father's personality. It is this attitude that leads to his father spending time in prison and eventual death. Tsotso, who is a colleague of Leke, has a grandmother who also exhibits signs of psychological distress in her refusal to let go of her daughter's memory. Tsotso also suffers the abandonment and mental instability in school, and is accused of defiling school property when she is caught lying naked on a piano. As such, emotive suffering does not only plague the people as a result of living conditions but as a result of society's refusal to come to terms with the fact that people are unique in their experiences of fantasy.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of Yewande Omotoso's *Bom Boy* reveals that contemporary literary works serve as powerful testaments to the enduring psychological impact of apartheid and colonialism on African societies. Through the examination of alienation, ignorance, and class stratification as literary constructs, this study demonstrates that mental distress in the novel is not merely an individual experience but a collective condition that reflects broader societal trauma. The protagonist Leke's psychological suffering, manifested through his strange ailments and social isolation, mirrors the lingering effects of systemic oppression that continue to shape post-apartheid South Africa. Characters such as Elaine and Oscar further illustrate how ignorance and class divisions—rather than race alone—perpetuate emotive suffering across generations.

Omotoso's *Bom Boy* offers an exemplary insight into contemporary explorations of apartheid experiences, as viewed through a neo-oppressive lens. Literary works such as Omotoso's foreground the context of re-documenting history through the mirrored perspectives of narrative as resistance. *Bom Boy* demonstrates that diverse insights into the motifs of alienation, ignorance, and stratification depict apartheid not just as a past political construct, but as a budding contemporary experience that continues to shape actions and reactions to how the world confronts discrimination and engenders social justice.

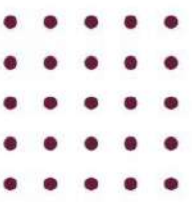
Ultimately, the novel calls for continued critical engagement with literary texts as vehicles for understanding and addressing the enduring legacy of systemic discrimination. By using fiction to establish reality, Omotoso shows that the consequences of apartheid extend beyond its political end, continuing to influence actions, reactions, and psychological well-being in contemporary African settings. The study thus affirms that dismantling these narrative constructs is essential for achieving genuine social progress and collective healing

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

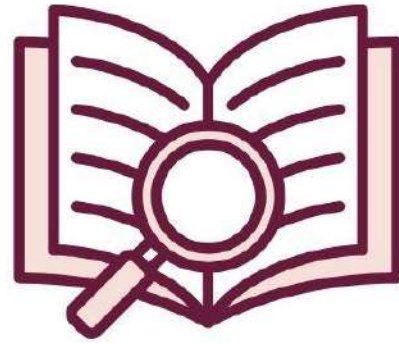
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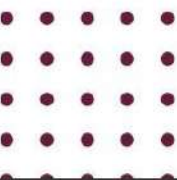
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