Postcoloniality and Criticism in Orature: A Globalectic Reading of Three Oral Poems

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Abstract

In this theoretical cum methodological paper, we examine how approaches grounded in postcoloniality could help enrich criticism in orature. The study is focused on how contemporary approaches, while interacting with traditional styles, could replenish both content and insights around the art. We adopt a cosmopolitan/Globalectic framework, where we argue that approaches that have sought to isolate orature presenting it as distinctive, complete with idiosyncratic names, are derivatives of the liberation project that seeks greater regard for the genre much as they border on dissent and protectionism. We therefore pursue a kind of good critical "gangsterism" in orature, what it might entail and its benefits to criticism in orature. The study espouses a syncretic approach that avoids a discontinuous and biased engagement with broad theory and criticism. Discussion is based on three purposively sampled oral songs with the help of ideas advanced by such postcolonial thinkers as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Russian formalist, Victor Shklovsky.

Key Words: *Orality, Orature, Technauriture, Cyberture, Coloniality, Postcolonialism, Decoloniality*

INTRODUCTION

The potency and adaptive nature of verbal art anywhere in terms of both content and form has been the subject of discussion by many researchers: Kabira (1983), Okpewho (1992), Bukenya and Nandwa (1992) Bukenya, Kabira and Okombo (1994), Wasamba (2015), among others. It is this potency that has sustained the artistic and aesthetic appeal of orature. In such studies, extensive effort has been made to deconstruct misconceptions about the nature and function of verbal art: the "what?" of the content of verbal art. Equal effort has been put in to show how studies in the verbal art can be brought to par with those in written literature (if not supersede it); the "how" of oral literature research. Much as the current study speaks to both approaches, it is more to the latter, rather than the former, that it mostly leans.

Earlier scholarly appraisals of verbal art tended to be sociological in nature and were inclined to portray the genre as a primordial quasi-artistic expression. The imaginative faculties of its creators were deemed not fully developed. Finnegan, while quoting Burton (1865) captures this attitude:

> The savage custom of going naked, we are told, has denuded the mind, and destroyed all decorum in the language. Poetry there is none . . . there is no metre, no rhyme, nothing that interests or soothes the feelings, or arrests the passions. (29)

It is on the basis of such demeaning biases that verbal art is mostly left out of what may be termed world literature. Lorentzon (2007) has decried a serious and unfortunate sense of eclipse and selective blindness that verbal art continues to suffer thus:

> Judging, however, by two recent books on literature, Peter Widdowson's *Literature* and J. Hillis Miller's *On Literature*, the question needs to be addressed. There is not even a subordinate clause in either book on oral literature. This is in spite of Widdowson assuring the reader that his book "is principally conceived of as a reflection on the contemporary nature, place and function, within the general cultural production, of [. . .] the domain of literature" (Widdowson 2). Is it the "contemporary" or the "general" that excludes oral literature from his reflection on literature? (2)

On this prevailing unfortunate reality, Lorentzon holds intellectuals in verbal art, within Africa and elsewhere, partly to blame; their approach does not seem to answer the questions that they ought to be answering and which would elevate both the genre and its criticism to a point of authentic artistic and critical eminence. She avers:

> So even if scholars of African literature never question orature's literariness and find the question superfluous, there seem to be a need for ventilating it . . . what is it that makes one oral utterance literary, turns it into verbal art, and another not? (2)

The present study seeks to underscore that in the answer(s) to questions on the "literariness" of orature lies the true aesthetic of verbal art. This emanates from existing evidence that these are the very questions critics of literature grapple with at all times and in all places. It then follows that intentional critical styles, as opposed to mere banalities on what should or should not be literature could reveal the real aesthetic value of verbal art. Thus, verbal art will be measured against what Lerner (2009) terms the criteria for literariness which should apply to all literatures equally without exception: What, in a verbal work of art, expresses an emotion through elevated language? What is it that helps evoke the listener's emotions? And, finally, what is it that helps express thought in a moving manner?

Postcolonial "readings" of verbal art have taken a number of different dimensions. The main thrust of postcoloniality in orature has, predominantly, been remonstrative in the sense of wanting to do away with all hegemonies and hierarchies that mostly place orature at the bottom of the pyramid. Such studies have decried the side-lining of orature and were determined to stay their course whether detractors liked it or not. This is best exemplified by the University of Nairobi's great literature debate of the mid1960's, where efforts were made to mainstream literature—orature included—from former colonies and countries of the third world. The initial decolonial attempt in orature research and criticism, therefore, entailed collecting oral literature materials and linking them to specific communities without much of a systematic critical evaluation. This was aimed at dissipating contestations that there was neither culture nor art among natives before the coming of the colonialists.

The initial resistance phase may be said to have been followed by a more committed phase that sought to bring out the aesthetics of verbal art and its potential as a discipline in the humanities/social science. In this phase of decolonizing studies in oral literature, the focus has been on laying bare the artistic credentials of orature in terms of both content and form. In this on-going phase, the literary critic has bestowed upon himself the duty to qualify orature as a legitimate member of world literatures with a singular purpose to share the collective human experience where "the world is a stage for all humanity" (Ngũgĩ, 2012). It will take the collective effort of present and future criticism intellectuals to build substantive knowledge on this front.

According to Ngũgĩ, the vision of a world literature is slowly gaining momentum and interconnection between cultures (and various genres of art) may no longer be denied. He avers:

> Although over the years there have always been talk of courses in world literature, this interest has intensified, recently seen, for instance, in the various efforts to organise courses in world literature: the publications of anthologies of world literature; and even theoretical debates on the concept in such works as *Debating World Literature,* edited by Christopher Prendergast and *What is World Literature?,* by David Damrosch, which contain stellar contributions by advocates of world literature (6).

Clearly suggested in Ngũgĩ's submission is the need to have new patterns of thought in the manner works of art from different communities and in their multiple realisations are to viewed and assessed; a certain 'union of ideals' that not only unify works of art from varied human perspectives but also give each a chance to proclaim its worth to a race united by common conditions and challenges. The envisaged reality does not necessarily exclude orature. Ngũgĩ further posits:

> Orature is not pure metaphysics or zombie that comes alive only when inhibiting the body of the written and other recorded forms. It is a dynamic living presence in all cultures . . . the art did not end yesterday; it is a living tradition (68).

The onus is then on the pluralistic-minded critic to not only amplify the potency of the art but also demonstrate its union with universal art and its ideals. It is on this background that the present study examines what a cosmopolitan aligned pattern of thought may achieve in such an endeavour. It therefore, seeks to examine the prospects of a non-biased metropolitan/globalectic pedagogy in oral literature research, its components and benefits thereof, and to entrench post-colonialism in orature studies. The specific questions for which we seek answers are: first, what would decoloniality in orature criticism entail? Second, what may be the components of a metropolitan approach of orature criticism? And, finally, what practical benefits would accrue from such a methodology?

CONCEPTUALIZING COSMOPOLITANISM

As an idea denoting "being a citizen of the world" cosmopolitanism may be traced back to Diagenes of Sinope (c. 412B.C.) the founder of the Cynic movement in Ancient Greece. It is said that "when he was asked where he came from, he replied, 'I am a citizen of the world [*kosmopolitês*]'" [(Diogenes Laertius VI 63) in Kleingeld and Brown (2019]. According to the two authors, "the word 'cosmopolitan', which derives from the Greek word *kosmopolitēs* ('citizen of the world'), has been used to describe a wide variety of important views in moral and socio-political philosophy" (1). They then sum up the ideology as follows:

> The nebulous core shared by all cosmopolitan views is the idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, are (or can and should be) citizens in a single community (1).

Engrained in the above view is a sense on commonness and the "natural ties of humanity". Indeed, philosophical cosmopolitanism holds that all humans share certain fundamental characteristics which imply a sense of unification for humankind as a whole. It is from such notions that cosmopolitanism concretized in the 18th Century to mean one main thing:

> 'Cosmopolitanism' and 'world citizenship' were often used not as labels for determinate philosophical theories, but rather to indicate an attitude of open-mindedness and impartiality. A cosmopolitan was someone who was not subservient to a particular religious or political authority, someone who was not biased by particular loyalties or cultural prejudice. Furthermore, the term was sometimes used to indicate a person who led an urbane life-style, or who was fond of traveling, cherished a network of international contacts, or felt at home everywhere (4).

Further, from the foregoing characterization, there emerged four main categories of cosmopolitanism: moral, political, economic and cultural. Of the four, it is cultural cosmopolitanism that has attracted wider debate and also relates more to literary studies. It then occurs that the cultural cosmopolitan has to balance between cultural diversity and cultural identity. In other words, open-mindedness goes with balance. The ultimate goal is to ensure that the right to belong does not become oblivious to the things that make all communities human. Kleingeld and Brown (2019) further aver:

> Cosmopolitanism can acknowledge the importance of (at least some kinds of) cultural attachments for the good of human life (at least within certain limits), while denying that this implies that a person's cultural identity should be defined by any bounded or homogeneous subset of the cultural resources available in the world (5).

Ultimately, therefore, appropriating cosmopolitan values in the study of literature would mean paying equal attention to all genres, existing or emerging, known or unknown, without prejudice or preconceived notions. Cosmopolitanism and its tenets of open-mindedness, impartiality, and cultural equality and interconnectedness is therefore presented as capable of checking isolationism and boosting recognition of marginalised discourses and disciplines. Kwame Anthony Appiah's definition of cosmopolitanism (quoted in Witt 2006) makes the scope of the cosmopolitan thought quite distinctive:

> People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences. Because there are so many human possibilities worth exploring, we neither expect nor desire that every person or every society should converge on a single mode of life. Whatever our obligations are to others (or theirs to us) they often have the right to go their own way. As we will see, there are times when these two ideals—universal concern and respect for legitimate difference—clash. There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution, but of the challenge (646).

Cosmopolitanism as an ideology, then, becomes a tool not of universalising everything everywhere (that would be either naïve or extremely brave) but rather an attempt at getting a picture taken through wider lenses; an attempt at unifying diversity. A challenge to find models that could achieve the widest representation possible.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The critical context of the present work is drawn from the ideas of leading postcolonial thinkers such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Russian Formalist Victor Shklovsky. Appiah's ideas on cosmopolitanism interconnect quite amicably with postcolonial and postmodernist ideals. In Modernism, Appiah sees an attempt to universalize Eurocentric standards of commodification while postcolonialism and postmodernism signify a deconstruction of such standards towards an emergence of "culture – and history – transcending standards" of appreciating anything impersonally. Appiah (1991) conceives postcoloniality and its shortcomings thus:

> Postcoloniality is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery. In the West they are known through the Africa they offer; their compatriots know them both through the West they present to Africa and through an Africa they have invented for the world, for each other, and for Africa (348).

It is in the above sense that Appiah opines that the *post-* in postmodernism carries more "space-clearing gesture" than the *post-* in postcolonialism in terms of going beyond coloniality. It is in this argument that we see a possibility of finding common grounds after an elimination of preconceived notions and focusing solely on aesthetic merits within authentic contexts.

Appiah clearly comes from the position that a transnational approach to cultural artefacts is possible. He avers:

> I do not (this will come as no surprise) have a definition of the postmodern to put in the place of Jameson's or Lyotard's, but there is now a rough consensus about the structure of the modern/postmodern dichotomy in the many domains—from architecture to poetry to philosophy to rock music to the movies—in which it has been invoked. In each of these domains there is an antecedent practice that laid claim to a certain exclusivity of insight, and in each of them "postmodernism" is a name for the rejection of that claim to exclusivity, a rejection that is almost always more playful, though not necessarily less serious, than the practice it aims to replace. That this will not do as a definition of post-modernism follows from the fact that in each domain this rejection of exclusivity assumes a particular shape, one that reflects the specificities of its setting (341-342).

Appiah, however, also feels that commodification, which he treats as synonymous with modernism remains the single most belligerent impediment to the realisation of the transnational approach in cultural and literary studies. He avers:

> It is an important question why this distancing of the ancestors should have become so central a feature of our cultural lives. The answer surely has to do with the sense in which art is increasingly commodified. To sell oneself and one's products as art in the market-place, one must, above all, clear a space in which one is distinguished from other producers and products – and one does this by the construction and the marking of differences. To create a market for bottled water, for example, it was necessary, first, to establish that subtle (even untestable) differences in mineral content and source of carbonation were essential modes of distinction (342).

From the foregoing, it may then be argued that for western literary forms to sell, especially in modern capitalist times, a way of belittling non-western or non-written forms had to be devised.

Closely related to Appiah's cosmopolitan approach is Ngũgĩ's theory of Globalectics. Ngugi goes ahead to define Globalectics as follows:

> Globalectics is derived from the shape of the globe. On its service, there is no one centre; any point is equally a centre. As for the internal centre of the globe, all points on the surface are equidistant to it—like the spokes of the bicycle wheel that meet the hub. Globalectics combines the global and the dialectical to describe a mutually affecting dialogue or multi-logue, in the phenomena of nature and nurture in a global space that is rapidly transcending that of the artificially bounded, as nation and region. The global is that which humans in spaceships or on the international space station see: the dialectical is the internal dynamics that they do not see. Globalectics embraces wholeness, interconnectedness, equality of potentiality of parts, tension and motion. It is a way of thinking and relating to the world, particularly in the era of globalism and globalisation (7).

While grounded in globalization and postcolonialism, Ngũgĩ acknowledges inspiration from a number of other thinkers, including Appiah. First, there are Wellek and Warren's "comparativity" in their *Theory of Literature* "where they decry lack of contact between the students of different languages, stressing the 'grotesque consequences when literary problems are discussed only with regard to views expressed in the particular language'" (1). Ngũgĩ compares Wellek and Warren's ideas with those of Aimẽ Cẽsaire's *Discourse on Colonialism,* Where the latter writes "that whatever its own genius may be, a civilization that withdraws unto itself atrophies"; that for civilizations, "exchange is oxygen".

The said interaction and exchange between cultures is what Ngũgĩ terms interpenetration of cultures and world literatures. This interpenetration may indeed be extended to the manner of reading literatures. Ngũgĩ sees value in such an approach thus:

> The quality of contribution, whatever the quantity and diversity of sources, depends on how literature is read. James Baldwin talked of how he stopped hating Shakespeare the moment he was able to appropriate Shakespeare from the straightjackets of English imperial nationalism and place him in a more catholic space. Like Baldwin and, in the spirit of Wellek, I believe in the liberation of literature from the straightjackets of nationalism. Hence the use of the term *Globalectics.* (7)

Liberation of literature from the discriminatory ways of looking at it may indeed pass as a postcolonial or decolonizing project. One other influencer of Ngũgĩ's Globalectics is the German poet and dramatist, Goethe, who Ngũgĩ endorses as one of the earliest to envision a possible world literature which "could be fostered only by untrammelled intercourse among all contemporaries, bearing in mind what we have inherited from the past (37). Indeed, the role of the contemporary intellectual/critic in coming up with liberated and unrestricted methodologies is, here, quite apparent, Ngũgĩ further opines:

> [Goethe] wrote that there was no such a thing as patriotic art or science: both belong, like all good things, to the whole world…national literature is now rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand and everyone must strive to hasten its approach (37).

In Goethe's view, as quoted by Ngũgĩ, the epoch was now even more tangible in the backdrop of a "greater ease of communication" and translation on which he is said to have greatly staked:

> Translation was the major means of mutual enrichment and he described it as giving new life, in a foreign language, to a text that had lost lustre in the original because of over-familiarity through over-usage (37).

According to Ngũgĩ, Goethe was expressing a subjective desire that could be hastened by actions of the intellectuals, such as their use of translation. The present study has identified translation as one of the methods that can help globalise the study of the spoken art. In addition, Ngũgĩ views advances in ICT as yet another enabler of world literature, the spoken art included:

> The Invisible world dreamt up by HG Wells in his *Invisible Man* is here. This virtual world is producing the third order of Adam, cyberture, after nurture and nature, which is able to cross the barriers of time and space in seconds. Most affected is the movement of ideas (40).

Oral literature (signifying that which was conceived and was intended to be shared orally but is now arrested in letters) and cyberorality/techno-orality/technauriture all go to show the dynamic and resilient nature of orature. Ngũgĩ also counts Marx and Engels among the farsighted luminaries:

> Marx and Engels could have been describing today, but more accurately, when they wrote that the international dependence of their time in material production was also reflected in intellectual production, concluding à la Goethe, that 'the intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature' (40).

From the foregoing, Ngũgĩ seems emboldened to take a stand:

> World literature is here: unfortunately, it has not meant the end of a national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness. On the contrary, it has been viewed with such one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness. Since first articulated by Goethe, the term has intrigued scholars and has been revisited many times to break down the one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness of its viewing to release its true worldliness. . . world literature must include what is already formed in the world as well as what is now formed by the world, at once a coalition, a cohesion and a coalescence of literatures in world languages into global consciousness. It is a process (40-41).

From the foregoing, we may deduce a call for a constant revolution on what is to be termed literature and ways of exploring it in an ever changing context. Ngũgĩ views the post-colonial thus:

> At present, the post-colonial is the closet to that Goethian and Marxian conception of world literature because it is a product of different streams and influences from different points of the globe, a diversity of sources, which it reflects in turn. The post-colonial is inherently outward looking, inherently international in its very constitution in terms of themes, language and the intellectual formation of the writers. It would be quite productive to look at world literature, though not exclusively, through post-coloniality (41).

Ngũgĩ, nonetheless, sees an impediment to this ideal situation:

> One of the obstacles to a Globalectic reading is the tendency to look at literature and the languages of its birth in terms of hierarchy, the notion that some languages and cultures are inherently of a higher order than others. This is the current relationship between languages, what elsewhere I have called linguistic feudalism, with an aristocracy of languages at the top and menial barbaric languages at the bottom…. Aesthetic feudalism, arising from placing languages in a hierarchy, is best seen in the relationship between oral and written languages, where the oral, even when viewed as being "more" authentic or closer to the natural, is treated as the bondsman to the writing master. With orality taken as the source for the written and orature as the raw material for literature, both were certainly placed on a lower rung in the ladder of achievement and civilization (53).

Ngũgĩ views such feudalism in the study of oral literature a loss to the discipline of literary criticism. Like Appiah, Ngũgĩ, believes that the demarcation between oral and written literature is not only a recent self-serving phenomenon but also 'much ado about nothing'. He affirms:

> It has not always been the case that orality or speech was regarded with less esteem than the written, the basis for expelling some cultures from history and complex thoughts, consigning them to a place in hell. In Plato's *Phaedrus,* speech is seen as the living and the animate, the proper residence for the science and the dialectic, as opposed to the written which "trundles about everywhere in the same way"—a phantom. And for Aristotle, words spoken were signs of the soul while words written were merely signs of words spoken. There is of course the subversive irony against Socrates' claims on behalf of speech in that his dialogues, including the argument between him and Phaedrus, have continually remained animate through the ages because of writing (53).

The global lenses, then, seem to work best when tampered with the individual differences like in the case of written and oral genres. Interconnection is paramount but only in the absence of one seeking to rule the other. Therefore, from Ngũgĩ's Globalectics and conception of post-colonial, we draw a number of guiding principles: the idea of comparativity, the notion of exchange, interconnectedness and interpenetrations among cultures, the idea of translation as the language of languages and, finally, the idea of riches of poor theory.

In addition to the preceding theoretical constructs, we also make use of Shklovsky's ideas on art as technique to examine formal and thematic interconnectedness between sampled works. Like Lerner, Shklovsky's theory provides a basis for employing close analysis as well as establishing the significance of literary technique. As he puts it, automatization of response to works of art leads to a situation where a number of features end up being taken for granted. Adequate attention to artistic technique should lead the reader/audience to a fuller appreciation of a work of art.

REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

This section explores a number of literary studies related to orality and literature in a cosmopolitan setup. The ultimate goal is to establish the apparent universality that characterise oral literature as a sub-genre of literature. In examining the relationship between orality and literature, Okpewho (1992) notes that:

> The word folklore implies much more than just literature and some quarters underplay the literary aspects of what folks do. Folklore is the entire body of culture of a group of people. It includes their customs, traditions, legends, history and art. Thus we can say that folklore is a hypernym with the following hyponyms: customs, tradition, legend, epic, history and

> art. Oral literature is not mentioned here as one of the hyponyms because it is subsumed in art, that is, it is one of the hyponyms of art. To put it more succinctly, art is a hypernym of the following hyponyms: music, painting, sculpting, literature and perhaps architecture. Literature (Poetry) according to Aristotle is the only form of art whose manner of representation is language alone (4).

It is imperative to mention that this study, in examining the literariness of oral art, equally underscores the centrality of the cultural dynamics that give birth to these literary pieces.

In her later works, Finnegan (1992:27) still captures the dynamism that is associated with oral literary performance. For example, in her study of Limba oral art, she argues that "one of the striking elements of much Limba oral art was in fact the scope for verbal variation on different occasions and among different exponents and the creative qualities brought to it by the immediacy of situation based performance." She reiterates that among the Limba, there is evidence that neither literacy, nor an acquaintance with written literature necessarily interfere with oral composition and performance. This is virtually true of many oral genres. Finnegan's study adds credence to this study in the ability of oral art to withstand the changing times. Indeed, it is this dynamism and universality in orality that forms the core of our argument.

Orality is not the same as oral literature, even though oral literature is subsumed in orality. The former is a complex whole that includes things that are literary and things that are not but are verbally expressed. Paul Bandia (2018:125) has given credence to this by stating that orality has shed its negative image as primitive, unwritten, non-literate and exotic and grown into a major field of scientific interest and the focus of interdisciplinary research. This paper also agrees with Walter Ong (1982) in his categorisation of orality according to the different contexts that produced them. He terms orality of cultures untouched by literacy as primary orality while orality that has come in contact with high technology as secondary orality.

An important question on the ongoing scholarly debate is what constitutes oral literature. If we define it exclusively as literature of the illiterate folks, we risk relegating this form of literature to the preliterate past. It could be argued that in those cultures where we hitherto found illiterate folk, we can now find greater percentage of the population of those folk to be literate. Then do we now say that since this literature, which should be oral, is coming from literate folks they should not be termed oral literature because of its old kinship with illiteracy? Or should the language define that which is oral literature and that which is not? Will a text become oral literature because it is written in Kiswahili, Zulu or Hausa? Or any language that is not European? These questions find answers in the cosmopolitan approach that this study adopts.

Okpewho (1992) has earlier pointed out that those who started the study of oral literature were not literary scholars so their interest was not centred on the literariness of the oral art forms. For instance, the chants, sung poems, masquerade performances, folktales and proverbs or other veiled forms of language meant no more to them than a sociological tool through which the folk were entertained. The biased focus of their research informed the many non-literary elements introduced into oral literature. One such element is oral history which has been unbundled into legend, myth and ethnology. Even though those insights helped the informed knowledge in the discipline, the researchers have come to realise, after a thorough critical study that the cores of oral literature have been strangely twisted. This is mainly because we have allowed those who are not literary scholars to theorise on oral literature and designate the objects of the discipline hence the infiltration of so many non-literary elements in the field.

From the above discussion, it may be noted that folklore, oral heritage, oral tradition and orality are not the same as oral literature/orature and, thus, may not be used interchangeably. However, oral literature is subsumed in each of these terms. In view of this, Okpewho notes that the major breakthrough in the field of oral literature started when African scholars began to undertake research into the oral tradition of their own people. This study is therefore predicated on Okpewho's argument by examining three oral poems from a cultural perspective. It is hoped that through this approach, the objective of capturing the question of cosmopolitanism in oral literature will be realised.

METHOD AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

On method, the study espouses a syncretic approach that avoids a discontinuous and biased engagement with literary material as espoused in the three theories that form the basis of the present study: Globalectics, postcolonialism and formalism. The method forms an important link between theory and actual analysis of oral texts. Discussion is based on three purposively sampled oral poems from two Bantu communities from the western region of Kenya: Abagusii (Gusii) community as well as Nyore sub-tribe of the Luyha community. Orality here signifies works that are created with the masses in mind and envisioned to be delivered to and consumed by them in the most sociable, inclusive and inexpensive means possible: in their own languages and, liberally, by the word of mouth. The two Gusii songs were collected in their original languages, transcribed, translated and analyzed in focused groups. The Nyore poem, *Omwesi*, was originally composed in Nyore before being translated and published in English by the poet herself, Leo Abukutsa, as *The Moon*. The fact that the poem was originally composed in the local language speaks to its public appeal and ownership (orality). Equally, we settled on the poem because of, like a few others in its category (translations), the manner in which it resonates with one of the Globalectic tenets—translation—as well as by the mere fact that the poem made it to page one of one of the most acclaimed poetry anthologies in Kenya in recent years—*Boundless Voices*. The other cosmopolitan/Globalectic tenets that the selected poems are aimed at illustrating include: the idea of the riches of poor theory, the guiding principle for our fieldwork; the notion of exchange, interconnectedness and interpenetrations among cultures, which guides us to look for interconnection between texts in terms of matter and form; and comparativity, both in the sense of methodology and figurative technique.

On fieldwork, we—in the spirit riches of poor theory—went to the field without any preconceptions whatsoever about the aesthetics and/or the nature and function of oral poetry of the communities in question. Whenever we came across poets recommended to us, our opening questions always were: will you sing us your favourite songs? Which one(s) do you like most? What is it about? Why do you like it? Our assumption was that answers to these questions could spell out the poetic standards poets and members of the communities (the audience) collectively recognise and to which they hold such works of art. And, in this manner, we noted that regardless of who the original composer was, the performer made a song theirs through the meanings they gave them. The decision to explore the three poems that are the basis of the present study was greatly influenced by the general excitement the songs generated in performers and audiences alike. We never settled on the songs beforehand. The positioning of the poem *The Moon (Omwesi)* in *Boundless Voices* points to the aesthetic significance and approval of the poem. Analysis of the poems was "in the field" by focused groups. This approach, inspired by the notion of riches of poor theory where our understanding and conclusions were built from nil prior considerations

and/or ideological overtones. For instance, it was at the sessions that it was observed that the common matter of the three poems focuses on power issues (aesthetics) between women and men. Abagusii and Abanyore refer to power and its contestations to as *oborai bwa'bang'ina* and *obunyali bwa abakhaye* respectively. Here are the three songs:

Song 1

Mogaka otachi meino	**The elder that can't sing**
Mogaka otachi meino	The elder that can't sing
Agende mwa Kwamboka obiranya	Should visit Kwamboka Obiranya
Asibore emeino ne'bitonga	And carry basketfuls of songs
Achie kona gotera mwaye	He could sing back at home
Aaa eee	*Aaa eee*
Aaa eee	*Aaa eee*
Oyio no mogaka otachi meino eee	That is the old man that cannot sing, eee
Oyio no mogaka otachi meino eee	That is the old man that cannot sing, eee
Obe aa eee Obe aa eee	*Obe aa eee Obe aa eee*
Auma aaka ng'umbu,	Auma (a man's name) get to the other ridge,
Kende tikeri roche,	There is no danger in the valley,
'Esasati ekona kwoga	That noise comes from reeds,
Ing'o bono okoibora aba?	Who gives birth to your kind?
Oyio no mogaka otachi meino eee	That is the old man that cannot sing, eee
Oyio no mogaka otachi meino eee	That is the old man that cannot sing, eee
Obe aa eee Obe aa eee	*Obe aa eee Obe aa eee*

Song 2

Ng'ererie obokombe	**Give me a hoe**
Ng'ererie obokombe	Give me a hoe
Nekebago egesera	With a beautiful handle
Koabusera omogondo	So I sweep the garden
Omogondo onyakieni kebariri	The garden of the woman with a light skin
Omokungu siomiasiomia	The woman that loiters
Ng'ai akomanya bwarugeirwe	How do you know who has cooked
Gose mboke gose mbwa mwana	If it is too little or enough for the baby?
Mokungu siko moino	Woman of our neighbourhood
Kae Bosibori	Give Bosibori
Ensio yaye	Her grinding stone
Nero yoka abwate	it is the only one she has
Achie goserera mwaye	She needs to grind flour for her people

Song 3

The Moon	***Omwesi***
The moon is good, when it comes	*Omwesi nomulayi, nikwitsa*
My dear it is good	*Owasianje nomulayi*
It makes those who were	*Kuloba yabo bali*

Planning to slaughter erase the idea	*Bapanga okhwira bebile*
It is good; you think it is a joke!	*Numulayi; opara nobeyi!!!!!*
One starts panicking when it delays	*Omundu achakaanga okhuenda nikucheleba*
Oh will it come	*Bane nakwitse*
The moon is good it makes those	*Omwesi nomulayi kuloba yabo*
Who were planning to slaughter	*Abapanga okwira*
Give up the idea	*Bebile liparo ilio*
Those who were planning to slaughter	*Yabo abapanga okwira*
With a saw and a *panga* give up the idea	*Nende omusumeno nomba olupanga bebila liparo ilio*

{This is an English translation by the poet of an original composition in Nyore (Luyha)}.

To appreciate emotions and messages contained in the three poems, a close examination was done. Among the Abagusii, this undertaking is referred to as *ogoitona/okoringori/ogosasa* while the Nyore refer to it as *okhuenga mkari*–a version of poetic exegesis/hermeneutics or close reading. Among the Nyore, it was observed, during discussion, that song 1 is built on a metaphor of a man/a suitor that is not able to sing good praise songs that can attract a worthy bride; the song, therefore has a semiotic appeal (*omorabaro-emereng'anio*). It is a satirical song that comes with a playful sense (*ogotera kobwate ogochecheria ne'chigosori*). It seeks to draw men's attention to the things that define real men and to which women are attracted (*emeng'uso amo ne'mebayeno*). The poet seeks to bring about liberation and tranquillity amongst men and women (*obotoereru, obosibore/oboonhoreria).* The main message (*ekerenga*) is that there is nothing wrong with men seeking to please "their women" or women delighting in such overtures and gestures. In fact, they are encouraged to not only take delight in such manly advances but also reciprocate. But it must begin with the man.

The song, therefore, has feminist/womanist (*oboiseke/obukungu/obong'ina*) tendencies. Men are being notified that women too can spot high-quality men: men that are firm but fair; confident, knowledgeable, courageous and adventurous; generous, especially to the weak; and spirited and strong-willed. These things are like song to a woman's ears hence the title *Omogaka Otachi Meino*. Chants (*Omoino)* being a man's genre may indeed be put to good use to amuse deserving womenfolk. They, therefore, must not only master them but also use them to their advantage. A mastery and good use of *emeino* is a key indication that the man is ready to take care of the homely business. Men that have not mastered such qualities are encouraged to listen to such experienced women as *Kwamboka obiranya.* Select elderly women like Kwamboka are recognised as having gathered adequate experience in matters affection and are unrestrained both in speech and passing judgement. The song goes:

Mogaka otachi meino	That elder that can't sing
Agende mwa Kwamboka obiranya	He can visit Kwamboka Obiranya
Asibore emeino ne'bitonga	And carry basketfuls of songs

By extension, there is a suggestion that women expect better and can tell the difference between the noble and the unscrupulous when it comes to the faculties of affection and romance. The addressees (*baria barengire/abarengwa)* of the song—young men that are coming of age—are being sent to a traditional Karma Sutra/ femme sèduisante (elderly woman of charm and allure – Kwamboka Obiranya) for free tutorials on attraction and intimacy.

Song 2 (*Ng'ererie obokombe* — 'Give me a hoe' is a love chant (*omoino bwo'bwanchani*). Chants are predominantly a man's genre because they are vocalised in deep baritone voices and at a much slower melodic motions than ordinary songs. Chanters also rely extensively on propping, robust gesticulation, elaborate costuming and force of delivery – resulting in greater emotional intensity.

*Ng'ererie obokombe — '*Give me a hoe' is, therefore, an emotional expression of a man's intense admiration of a woman he finds beautiful and alluring. He talks of his strong desire to woo her and possess her for good. There is therefore a suggestion of sexual desire or lust (*okomerera amate/ ogwancha/ ogotonera/ ogosanera)*. He has every intention to win the woman that torments his heart. He seeks a hoe with a long handle (which refers to vitality and virility) with which to "sweep" her garden as a way of winning and retaining her approval. He knows that such women need a "strong arm" and he is willing to go to whatever length to attest his love.

Ng'ererie obokombe	Give me a hoe
Nekebago egesera	With a beautiful handle
koabusera omogondo	So I sweep the garden
Omogondo onyakieni kebariri	The garden of the woman with a light skin

By the second stanza, the speaker's admiration sounds frantic and weary. He is alarmed by the woman's warm outgoing nature and unsettled demeanour. She is too mobile and therefore likely to attract trouble:

Omokungu siomiasiomia	The woman that loiters
Ng'ai akomanya bwarugeirwe	How do you know who has cooked
Gose mboke gose mbwa mwana	If it is too little or enough for the baby?

The liberal mind-set of the beautiful woman repulses him. It appears that the man, disappointed that he is not appreciated enough and with no assurances coming from the woman he so deeply loves, resorts to blackmail and coercion. If this fails too, then he is ready to give up.

Song 3 puts pastoral images of the Nyore to exemplar use. To begin with, the moon is an image (*esimanyisio* in Nyore and *oereng'anio* in Ekegusii) that symbolizes representation of terrestrial powers and reproduction. The moon (*Umwesi* among the Nyore and *Omotienyi* among Abagusii) is believed to determine—or at least to signify—menstrual cycles. 'Nature is more powerful than all men and patriarchal structures put together' seems to be the message, since she can come to women's aid and can put on hold whatever plans a man may have.

Omwesi, therefore — just like *Mogaka otachi meino*—is a satirical song (*sieng'eng'e* in Nyore and *ogotera kwo'gochecheria* in Ekegusii) that expresses the limits men can go with female bodies; nobody should assume that they own a woman's body. The theme (*lichomo* in Nyore and *ekerenga* in Ekegusii) running through the song is that the female body is ultimately a woman's and they know what's good or bad for it more than anyone else: indeed, all the good and bad cycles of their bodies are their own and, perhaps, nature's (*esialo*). It has a feminist/womanist (*esibusilo* in Nyore and *oboiseke/obukungu/obong'ina* in Ekegusii) aesthetic (*ing'ono* in Nyore and *oboari* in Ekegusii) that allocates women agency (*esauti* in Nyore and *eriogi* in Ekegusii). The powerful recurring imagery (*esimanyisio* in Nyore and *ekemanyererio* in Ekegusii) of slaughter, away from its coital association, connotes the perpetual and universal power tussle between man and woman. The imagery clearly symbolises (*esifwananisio* in Nyore and *ekemanyererio* in Ekegusii) the perpetual power tussle. Who is king now, the man that was burning with desire and was looking for a place to discharge it or the woman who has appropriated nature to stop him in his tracks?

CONCLUSION

He has attempted to show the link between metropolitan/Globalectic approaches and decolonising criticism in orature and literature, in general. We have endeavoured to demonstrate that a metropolitan/Globalectic approach embraces an open mind-set that abhors discontinuity, bias and discrimination; a system that seeks to treat culture as a conglomerate of both universal and unique features. The various components that underlie this system have been identified as the notion of riches of poor theory, interconnectedness**,** and comparativity enabled by translation.

The notion of the riches of poor theory emphasises the age-old evidence-based approach in literary criticism and the avoidance of any prejudices, detachment and nationalistic jingoism. This resonates with the concept of analysis by close reading. As regards orature, the concept of close reading is found in meticulous fieldwork and analysis by focused groups, which ensures that every conclusion arrived at is supported by evidence and taken through proper rigours of analysis. The main benefit of such an approach is objectivity. An effective framework of analysis could unmistakeably capture the presence or lack of artistic and aesthetic elements in what is being presented in a work of art.

The evidence-based approach and the findings thereof help reveal the interconnected nature of literatures and artists as they seek to move their audiences emotionally and intellectually. This would also make it possible for critics to compare literatures not only in terms of styles, genres and philosophical concerns but also in terms of issues that communities are grappling with at specific points in time and especially in a changing world such as ours.

Finally, the study concludes that translation is an effective means of removing barriers between languages, the cultural information they carry and the artistic styles available to and as devised by artists that employ the language. With such an approach of appraising orature then it becomes possible to not only view literature through universally tried parameters, but also to highlight common features and concerns and validate and account for unique elements.

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