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The Muse of Anomy
Essays on Literature and the
Humanities in Nigeria

Femi Osofisan



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*To Biodun Jeyifo, a friend who has never failed to stand by me,
and has guided my faltering steps at all times.*

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Series Editor's Foreword

The *Carolina Academic Press African World Series*, inaugurated in 2010, offers significant new works in the field of African and Black World studies. The series provides scholarly and educational texts that can serve both as reference works and as readers in college classes.

Studies in the series are anchored in the existing humanistic and the social scientific traditions. Their goal, however, is the identification and elaboration of the strategic place of Africa and its Diaspora in a shifting global world. More specifically, the studies will address gaps and larger needs in the developing scholarship on Africa and the Black World.

The series intends to fill gaps in areas such as African politics, history, law, religion, culture, sociology, literature, philosophy, visual arts, art history, geography, language, health, and social welfare. Given the complex nature of Africa and its Diaspora, and the constantly shifting perspectives prompted by globalization, the series also meets a vital need for scholarship connecting knowledge with events and practices. Reflecting the fact that life in Africa continues to change, especially in the political arena, the series explores issues emanating from racial and ethnic identities, particularly those connected with the ongoing mobilization of ethnic minorities for inclusion and representation.

Toyin Falola
University of Texas at Austin

Introduction

Polymathic Humanism

Toyin Falola

Professor Femi Osofisan (a.k.a. Okinba Launko), distinguished scholar, playwright, dramatist, poet, theater director, critic, and novelist, is one of Africa's most influential men of letters. He worked for many years at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, where he is a Professor Emeritus, and serves today as a Distinguished Professor of Literature, Kwara State University. A prolific scholar, he has written five poetry collections, four novels, numerous essays, and has produced about sixty plays. A global scholar, his plays have been performed in various countries, notably in South Africa, United Kingdom, United States, Japan, Canada, Sri Lanka, Ghana, Lesotho, China, and France. He has played leadership roles in many academic organizations, and has edited several literary and scholarly journals. He was also director of Nigerian National Arts Theatre, the country's foremost arts and cultural center. His works and leadership are widely recognized, and he is a recipient of various prizes and honors, including *Officier de l'Ordre Nationale de Mérite, Rép. de France*; the Nigerian National Order of Merit; Fonlon-Nichols Prize for Literature and the Struggle for Human Rights; and Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters.

Due to his fame and recognition, he has been invited to give various lectures, thirteen of which form the basis of this book. This Introduction is not about Osofisan's career and cumulative scholarship, but specifically about the thirteen chapters in this book. This is a book on literary history that stretches across the entire postcolonial history of Nigeria. In many ways, it is unprecedented in my estimation that such a major figure would engage writing, other writers, and critics. And as a writer, Osofisan has been one of the most perceptive critics of African literature, and the presentation here signals a mature reflection on the development of this literature. I will present a close reading of the book on a chapter-by-chapter basis with ample quotations that capture the essential arguments of each chapter. Thus, there will be Osofisan's statement and my response. My approach is to set up a dialogue with the author where only the readers will have the last word.

In this comprehensive set of thought-provoking essays, painstakingly researched, and written over a forty-year period, the central issue is about the ebbs and flows of literary arts in Nigeria since the 1950s. In them, Osofisan engages in critical questioning of the processes of the creation of ideas in various genres, as well as in a sustained acerbic critique of the Nigerian state. There are references to novel experimental fictions, pragmatic interpretations of words and poems, and creative writing in general. By recognizing various writers and taking into consideration a wide spectrum of literary arts—novels, plays, poetry—and setting them in their historical context, Osofisan celebrates the achievements of Nigerian literature, while also highlighting its limitations.

It is indeed an ambitious and all-embracing collection of essays, sprawling a national history of literary production. Osofisan takes us on a long journey from the foundation of contemporary African literature and performance to its current state and status. By reflecting more broadly, at the risk of avoiding several specifics, Osofisan creates critical ideas on the confluence of the key factors that define a national literature and drama. He successfully traverses a wide range of authors and examples, across space and time, while linking various fiction works to the facts of events and history. It is a vast sweep, an extensive analysis of the dynamics of literature in relation to the state, all covering various aspects of scholarship and the humanities in Nigeria since the 1950s.

The author, the events, and the literary trends portrayed in the essays have grown *pari passu*; sometimes conjoined in the spaces of interaction, mainly in Ibadan, Nigeria; and sometimes in dissent and harsh dissonance, as in the author's roaring voice critiquing the voicelessness of his companions. Once in a while, the author overtakes his co-travellers, as he races to the future to make consequential suggestions. In a love-hate relationship, Ibadan/Nigeria, the space of interaction can be both good and bad; when it is good, a familial relationship shapes the narrations; when it is bad, a fatherly figure emerges, wanting to chastise without damaging or crippling. And those bad moments move Ibadan to the bigger project of Nigeria itself, a conglomerate of polygamous groups who endlessly debate love and divorce at the same time.

1

The grounding of the *oeuvre* is in the humanities. Osofisan's review of the state of scholarship in 1981, drawing from various research products and intellectual orientations, creates a catalogue of inadequacies in the opening chapter of this volume. The contributions of the humanities lie less in "practical techniques or methods" but more in the inculcation of "habits of thought and behavior" that speak to the direction that a society should follow. Using the

alumni of the university, in particular their conduct and allegiances in public life, he sees the humanities as a failure. He attributes this failure to

(a) the lack of a progressive ideology of culture in our Faculties; (b) the lack of a genuine intellectual culture, with its hallmark of radical skepticism and curiosity. (And may I add here, the lack of exemplary, visionary teachers, since we are all trapped within the “wheel-barrow syndrome”); (c) the lack of active students’ challenge and participation; and (d) this may be my own speculation, the lack of any fundamental belief in ourselves or in our capacity to “create progress.”

Osofisan then calls for a more critical and radical commitment to the humanities, as well as a constant review of the university’s purpose and methods.

This long chapter provides an entry point for reflections on the humanities in the African condition. Osofisan is right on the connections between the university and the state. He has to confront the fundamental contradictions between the growth of knowledge and ideas and that of state decline. Ideas and the recipients of those ideas must have the capabilities and skills to transform the state. He hopes for a network of intellectual exchanges that can reform the state, but such networks are difficult to create as individual scholars manifest their egos and actually relate to the state in different ways. He links the colonial era and racialization to the origins of the mind, and calls for a mental decolonization that will empower the search for more appropriate solutions. The forms of knowledge become a problem, and their origins can be traced to inherited Western intellectual traditions without appropriate means to disengage from them. In the context of the early 1980s, Osofisan turns to leftist critical traditions. As far as I can discern from this essay, he seems to be suggesting that a restrictive intellectual covenant had been created and erected on a colonial intellectual foundation, whose apostles (the indigenous scholars) occupied the gated community of the Ivory Tower, unable to change their immediate environment and to impact significantly the larger Nigerian state.

Both the colonial and postcolonial state power grew as projects that instrumentalized intellection, and one that saw power as an end in itself. It is not that a state lacks an intellectual grounding, or is devoid of access to a thinking elite, but Osofisan is looking for a new foundation that will give power more positive outcomes and an articulate translation of power into the service of the common people. This form of power, I would argue, has the capacity to strengthen the reach of the state, the institutions of governance and control, and regulate issues around patronage. In this sense, a university can become an appendage to power, allowing scholars to write and produce but denying their connections to the management of the state and their ideas to the

formulation of policies. Thus, the state has the capacity to simultaneously promote a university system, but refuses to draw legitimacy from it or consume its products.

To be sure, Osofisan is not saying that the humanities are useless, but that as constituted, they are irrelevant to a people-oriented agenda within the nation-state. Thus, even in the post-Left era, what to me is critical is the search for new ideas, policy tools, and institutions to rethink what we do. My concern is how hundreds of works can become fleeting, disconnected from everything and anything, leaving no imprint on future events. There is even a more serious problem which has nothing to do with the scholars but with the public whose members possess anti-humanities sentiments. Some of the sentiments relate to lack of connection to the job market. Others relate to social disorder and the inability of knowledge systems to handle them.

2

In Chapters 2 to 4, Osofisan identifies for praise the great literary productions of Ibadan which he treats as unique. Great Nigerian writers such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Mabel Segun, John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, T. M. Aluko, Flora Nwapa, Niyi Osundare, Isidore Okpewho, Kole Omotoso, and Harry Garuba all had their university education at Ibadan and actually began their writing careers as students of the University of Ibadan. And there were also famous people who did not attend the university but lived in the city of Ibadan, writers such as Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, the South African Ezekiel Mphahlele, the Malawian Felix Mthali, the Englishman William Boyd. Osofisan thinks that this achievement has no parallel in Africa. Only Cairo, he claims, has such a similar record. The success of Ibadan led to the publication by Robert Wren of *Those Magical Years: The Making of Nigerian Literature at Ibadan: 1948-1986*. As Wren explains, Ibadan owes its success to being the location of the first university in the country, with the student population drawn from elite schools and great teachers who encouraged African culture. Osofisan argues that Wren's reasons were not enough, as similar factors were in place in Legon, Ghana, with a different outcome. In explaining his own reasons, he attributes the unique outcome to Ibadan's long history of cosmopolitanism, active politics, and bubbling nightlife.

The strength of chapter 2 is its command of a wide range of published works of fiction by the pioneer poets, dramatists, novelists, and playwrights. Given his orientation and remit, he avoids many published materials on the writers, providing instead powerful testimonies about the writers and their tenacity as intellectual workers. The scope of the sources to compose the chapter is immense, comprising chronicles and histories, philosophical works, oral testi-

monies, rhetorical products, and literary productions in both prose and poetry. The heart of the chapter is new creative production, conducted in both English and Yoruba. He narrates a literary culture in the making, one where we see the producers but not necessarily the consumers. An oral culture and literary production were still in place, and new writers were tapping into them for ideas and energies. Two cultures were beginning to exist side-by-side, a university-based one that did not fully become elitist, and an oral one that did not fully become “popular culture,” with neither cultures growing as opposites nor as antithetical to each other. The literary tradition in the Western sense kept growing until the rise of Nollywood films began to tap more into the oral ones, producing a cataclysm whose consequences have yet to be resolved, including the increase of those who want to watch movies rather than read books. Meanwhile, as Osofisan explains, writing in Ibadan continued to thrive in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, becoming dominant, creating a major literary culture, and heralding the arrival of a new genre that is characterized as modern African writing. Osofisan’s painting of Ibadan in its first generation is exceptional. Ibadan, as a new institution of higher learning, was producing quality students and producing a new form of humanism.

3

Chapter 3 continues with the impact of the University of Ibadan on literary arts but not before overcoming the crisis of the war years, 1967–1970. The crises of the First Republic, leading to its fall in a coup, the counter coup that followed, secession, and the subsequent creation of the defunct Republic of Biafra all had serious consequences: the Igbo left other parts of Nigeria to live in their new Republic; Okigbo the poet died in the war; and Wole Soyinka was imprisoned for twenty-two months. The expatriates also left. The Mbari Club that brought together creative writers as well as the publication outlets that published new voices collapsed. The first generation of the 1950s and early 60s created a template: they wrote in English, spoke on behalf of society, and sought to create or invent an African past. There was something to build upon.

With the end of the war came a rebirth, made possible by the rise of a new generation of writers who joined the academy following their successful acquisitions of PhD degrees to teach at Ibadan and other universities. Osofisan was among this new generation, and his personal testimonies in the chapter explain the context of their rise. He asserts that a methodological approach even preceded new literary creation in terms of holding deliberations about how to move scholarship forward. They set up intellectual clubs, the Positive Review Group and the Akwei Circle, to share and circulate knowledge. As much as possible, they would create departure points from the works of the first generation, no-

tably those of the triumvirate of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Christopher Okigbo. While it was difficult for them to adopt the use of Nigerian languages because these were many, they opted to be different by choosing a form of English that lends itself to easier understanding by their readers. They would publish locally, not only to encourage the emerging publishing houses but to have greater connections with Nigerians. The necessity of change was grounded in a commitment to an ideological orientation in terms of fighting corruption and calling on the state and its politicians to put development at the center of its activities. The country was undergoing post-war changes, which Osofisan observes to include the attrition of old values, streets “bustling with energy and destructiveness,” the contradiction of abundant oil wealth with the abject poverty of the population. A new generation of writers, he reminds us, became angry, and were ready to draw from the radical literature, to which their studies in Western universities had exposed them. A commitment would be to liberate the poor from poverty, and to seek liberation from domination. Drama and poems were now set to attack power, corruption, economic mismanagement, and misrule. In creating points of departure, they would publish locally, use English in a way that connected with the public, and be ideological in terms of fighting corruption and politicians.

Osofisan celebrates the achievements of his generation, including his own work, and of such poets as Niyi Osundare and Tanure Ojaide. They produced novellas, characterized by familiar tropes and simple syntax. The idea in many of these works was to appeal to members of the lower classes. Osofisan, in a self-appraisal, firmly believes that his generation was successful, true to its mission, “which is to be the spokesmen of our generation, to articulate its wants and displeasures, its agonies and its joys.” However, I do not see that much of a gulf between the first and second generation, and they should not be cast in antithetical, Manichean relation to one another.

The transition from a first generation to the second, in spite of a three-year crisis, did not produce, I think, a decline. In adding to the thoughts in this chapter, I will say, first, an incubation period was actually set in motion in which those who were to contribute to the efflorescence of the 1970s were acquiring their higher education and getting engaged with critical literature that laid the basis of the ideological orientation of the 1970s. And both the first and second generation had no break but operated like a continuum despite the chasm of the three-year old civil war. Of course, writers have to respond to changing contexts: the first generation was responding to British colonialism and the problems of the early years of independence, and the second to the crisis of the state and development failure. Both generations are united by a commitment to humanism, and Osofisan celebrates the writers as a collective lit-

erary agency. He demonstrates affinity to those writings that speak to power and change, and he confirms the deep “Africinity” of those voices.

4

In Chapter 4, the focus is on the responses to the military regimes of the 1980s and 1990s, which ultimately united all the voices, old and new, in serious criticisms of those in power. Attacks on authoritarian military regimes united all the writers, be they poets, novelists, or playwrights. Osofisan describes a moment of military supremacy and writers’ responses to power and politics. Ken Saro-Wiwa became the ultimate literary symbol of the period, a foremost literary writer who turned his art into practical politics, demanding freedom for his Ogoni people whom he described as suffering from oppressive “internal colonization by the Nigerian state.” Saro-Wiwa was executed in 1995 by the military dictatorship of General Abacha.

As the dictatorship collapsed in the second half of the 1990s, Osofisan argues that the voices at Ibadan became muted, as if there were a decline in literary activities. The writers took a rest, but as they renewed their energies, the rejuvenation began to occur elsewhere, in Lagos. It appears to Osofisan as if the return to a democratic government in 1999 muted the muse at Ibadan. New voices were expressed in political documents by the victims of Abacha’s regime, as in Kunle Ajibade’s *Jailed for Life*. New writers also emerged. He traces the influence of Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* on this new generation of writers that included Maik Nwosu, Akin Adesokan, Okey Ndibe, and Chris Ubani. Osofisan lumps these writings into the genre of magical realism and surrealism. Female writers joined the new cast: Bina Nengi Ilagha, Akachi Ezeigbo-Adimora, Promise Okekwe and Chimamanda Adichie. All these writers, to Osofisan, were connected with Lagos and many were of Igbo origin, born in the 1960s. The nightmare of Biafra looms large in the minds of these new writers. Lagos life supplies its own shock—in the slums of Agege and Maroko—providing writers a focus on the poor and the marginalized.

Voices disappeared from Ibadan, except that of Remi Raji-Oyelade, a poet, Chuks Okoye in dance and choreography, and Ify Agwu, another dance scholar. Why did literature “migrate” from Ibadan to Lagos? He poses this question to which he supplies the following answers: the decline of talents (many universities emerged, making it difficult for Ibadan to create a new distinctive cluster of writers); the migration of scholars to other countries; the decline in the general quality of education; the excessive time allocated to religious worship; and the decline in cultural activities of the Ibadan city itself. The city became less cosmopolitan. Just as the city lost its place in the literary map, so, too, did the university become less and less important as the “vanguard of creative production.”

Osofisan definitely has nostalgia for Ibadan, seeing the shift to Lagos as unpromising:

the works which are being produced at the moment in Lagos, in response to the pressures of the city are too negative, too filled with pain and bitterness and savagery; and hence enervating, and destructive in their limited vision. As brilliant and captivating as it all is, in terms of style and the manipulation of words, this new literature falls short, in my opinion, of the humanistic ethos that our culture has always upheld, and been justly celebrated for. It is a literature of alienation, but of alienation as a kind of gratuitous *jouissance*—rather than as a road to catharsis. That is why it speaks so reiteratively of anomy, chaos, unhappiness, cruelty and barbarity, and is populated by debauched and schizoid personalities.

Osofisan wants Ibadan to reclaim its glory, and to produce a new set of writings that gives hope instead of despair. In his words:

Perhaps in the course of time it will change, but for now the horizon covered by this new literature is too bleak to offer any perspective of hope. And this is where I believe we can intervene, we from Ibadan. There is a need to counter this new literature of incurable *angst*, with another that offers a more positive perspective of life, a literature that will encourage us to struggle and not be beaten down by despair. Our literature in Ibadan has always, after all, and however horrid the situation it portrays, ended on the side of optimism, and in the affirmation of the ultimate triumph of human goodness, and compassion, and redemption over evil and anguish. It is time to help return our audience to such a creed.

The chapter ends with suggestions to renew Ibadan's leadership in the literary world: rethinking the course system, funding a new journal, starting a writer-in residence program, refurbishing the Arts Theatre, creating memory spaces of successful writers as sources of inspiration, and celebrating the lives of previous achievers to inspire a new generation.

Although Chapter 4 gives the impression that Ibadan became home to a declining intellectual culture, I myself see less degradation in overall national literary creativity. Nigerian intellectual production and humanism broadened with a new generation who responded to the context created by military rule and economic decline. It would seem that every generation always sees the one that follows as less good so it is not surprising that Osofisan deploys a moral

language to critique the work of a younger generation. Thus, the first generation is credited for producing the flowering of literary tradition; the second for producing its renaissance; and the third for its ambiguity and decadence in choices of themes and focus. Without saying so, Osofisan is making the argument that the *doppelgänger* of creativity is a radical response to the state. This directionality that shaped the paths of Soyinka and Osofisan might have appealed less to Ben Okri and Promise Okeke. The generational differences can produce a debate of their own, adding value to the essays. Both the cogency and stickiness of historical patterns are crucial, as Osofisan links a work to the era in which it is produced, but the trajectory of individual creative artists may depart remarkably or manifest in other ways along alternative paths. In contrast to imaginations predicated on state lapses, voices may disengage and seek promotion in other ideas, even in the environment, inter-personal relations, romance, and others outside the rubric of state-centrism.

It is important here to add a long reflection on the era, using this essay as a background but moving outside of it as well. If Osofisan sees this chapter as giving an overview of literature in the 1990s, pointing to differences and similarities between the first and second generation of writers, I would argue that his category of analysis links praxes (the formation of such literary clubs as Mbari, Black Orpheus, and Poetry Club) with ideologies (attacks on the military), and interwoven with mentalities (the plays and poems). I would also argue that, by relating his data to the intellectual spaces of Ibadan and Lagos, he is dealing with what I would regard as the materiality of creativity. He clearly differentiates between the product of Ibadan and Lagos, privileging that of Ibadan over Lagos, differentiating what is important in literature from what is not. The materiality of space becomes, by default, an ontological project. Sure, there is distinctiveness in the products of the materiality of space, but he goes on to do an evaluation, giving Ibadan one set of rules, and Lagos another.

The materiality of a place and space becomes expressed in words that must explain social relations, politics, and even mentalities, whether refined or not. By making a distinction between Lagos and Ibadan, an inchoate literature is divided into its chunks of characters, such that Ibadan and Lagos become stitched into the literary fabric. Thus, we understand what Nigerian literature is, how it was utilized in the 1990s, the variety of its conceptions, the distribution of talents, and the utilization of those talents.

Imaginations, as determined by spaces and places, become an intellectual discourse as well as physical “stuff” paraded on campuses and street corners, and then consumed in near and far-flung places. Literature acquires a heterogeneousness, with a constitution and construction that Osofisan spells out, both anchored to an anti-military vision.

The theory-nyms of the Lagos-Ibadan difference are ultimately, I think, about ontology and materiality, both in response to the social, cultural, and political effects of military rule. Osofisan's theory-nyms of difference speak to other larger issues. Were there no powerful literary voices in other locations? If so, is the emphasis on Ibadan-Lagos no more than a mere analytical necessity? The historian in me may see the dichotomy between an intellectual product as an "object" and the writers as "subjects." Were this object-subject sustainable, we have to "invent" a methodology to understand the hierarchic orderings of imaginative products shaped by the location of creations.

As objects and subjects, literature and humans interact, creating an assemblage of performativity. In the universe of words and actions, their meanings are performed in networks of engagements: the state as an "object" of vilification; Nigerians as suffering people; resistance to a state as "actions"; and literature as the agent of unification. As a unifier, literature is not a discrete entity: it redefines itself as the society moves in time; it supplies a flow of energy in dramatic works and other forms of performativity; it refuses to take politics and the state for granted; it forces itself to confront how change—real or imagined—becomes understood and perpetuated in texts; and it becomes both an activity and an agency.

In Osofisan's formulation, literature becomes an activity, an object that does things (as in its instrumentalization as an agency of social transformation), texts that communicate critical intentionality and transpose information across the nation. Like roads and electricity, literature becomes an *infrastructure* that is required for survival. This *infrastructure* links and cements Nigerians in agglomerations of angst, talking about their depressing conditions, announcing how they think, and evaluating their future options.

The *infrastructure* is about the materiality of the present and the materiality in the future. The conjoined interests in the present and future, manifested in texts and performance, produce determinative influences on writers who see themselves as intellectual agents that have the capacity to manufacture "objects" that can be consumed as "manifestoes." For, in this conception, literature is not for sheer entertainment, nor is it remote from society itself. Rather, it is meant to create a profound effect on society. Literature, although generated in the "Ivory Tower," does not erect boundaries between that "tower" and the people outside of it. It is a discourse that cannot be studied outside its political and cultural context. Literature becomes a cultural variability that supplies insights into politics, economy and socio-cultural dynamics of Nigeria. Texts construct ideas, treating the Nigerian state as an "object," and Nigerians as active agents responding to this "object." Both the object and the humans, literature explains and assures us, have interests and values.

Chapter 5 covers in part the place of Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe represent to Nigerian literature. Osofisan situates his essay in the failure of independence and democracy. Both independence and democracy promised great hope, but Nigerians have been disappointed. Osofisan calls for struggles to attain freedom, examining what literature can accomplish in the struggle, and how the works of Soyinka and Achebe supply some lessons. Both speak of “woe and horror, a constant parade of madmen and specialists, with no enduring heroes.” Writers must speak to the problems of the nation, “hone their words into weapons against injustice and exploitation, and even if unconsciously, make prospective auguries about the future, in order to forestall impending grief.” He is troubled that writers are ignored. Turning to Soyinka and Achebe, the two most famous writers, Osofisan notes their critique of corruption and misrule, along with the overall generation of work that is unsparing. Osofisan shifts to a different set of texts, one that celebrates love, motherhood, courage, and happiness. He uses live stories to make his point that there is another side to the country:

I believe that the time is long overdue for our writers to begin to de-emphasize the importance we give to crooks and malfeasants, in order to highlight the contributions of the positive figures and forces among us. By writing repeatedly of crooks, we tend unfortunately to give to our readers the erroneous impression that our society is composed exclusively of crooks. By unceasingly showing rectitude in deficit, and the honourable being always defeated or disgraced, we inadvertently suggest to our readers that such virtues do not pay, that they only lead to inevitable defeat and despair, and that our people are doomed to anomy.

He wants literature to celebrate the good aspects of Nigeria and Nigerians.

Osofisan is recommending a literature of hope, a way to lift the spirits of his country women and men. There is a sense of this, a sense of hope that is already everywhere—in music, Nollywood, and the persistence of religious practices, most especially in Pentecostalism. In complicating the thrust of this chapter, I will query the trustworthiness of hope. Hope in stories, as Osofisan is recommending, must be connected to lives, a hope in life itself. Yes, hope claims significance, in minds and thought processes, but it is uncertain. Hope in the self and hope in the nation are not always aligned. There can be no singular hope, either for different selves or even for the nation itself. There is the very confusion of living, the confusion of experience that can make the most

appealing story also the most irrelevant. An elevating poem is good, but its character does not stand alone, but in connection to the vicissitudes of lives. In that vicissitudes of lives, human beings are divided into social classes that tend to shape their feelings and moods. There are those who live in abundance and those who live in scarcity, and uniting them by the thread of hopeful stories, as good as it sounds, may not work in practice. “A hungry dog,” so goes a proverb, “does not play with a dog with a full stomach!” A palate can be connected to stories and hope. Good stories about good people are useful, and many are needed, but there are always connections between individuals and their aspirations with the material world. Reading stories of good lives does not necessarily make happy a poor person who is not able to put food on his table. If I live in scarcity, it is unlikely unwise to place my hope in hope, to place my palate in the palms of literary agents. As my privacy connects with the state and the materiality it enables, a literature of hope becomes both ephemeral and corporeal, making the egoism of hope—as brilliant as it stands—a disconcerting moment, very ephemeral, like the opium that religion feeds me.

In anticipation of criticism from Osofisan himself, a literature of praise and hope cannot be discounted or dismissed. His is a cautionary note on the literature of acidic criticisms. I accept, for a moment, that the feeling of praise and hope cannot be shared. Osofisan assigns personal feelings to his hopeful stories, which I cannot take away from him. Those may be the centrifugal forces of his own being, the way he knows best to counter the singularity of excessive angst. His gustatory space of pounded yam and *egusi* is not shared by my own taste buds and stomach. I quote Osofisan as saying above: we need “a more positive perspective of life, a literature that will encourage us to struggle and not be beaten down by despair.” This is hardly disputable. I suspect he has a much more nuanced and sophisticated view of optimism than the opiate brand. He may not be insisting that the writer offers a vision of hope—that would be a different demand, but that the writer should at least oscillate the focus of his or her artistry that seems permanently transfixed on the void to another composite reality, which is being distorted precisely by the transfixion on the void. Doing so he believes will “help highlight the contributions of the positive figures and forces among us.”

Thus, I take my criticisms back, since I cannot extrapolate from his hope and desire for the celebration of greatness. Praise songs, like praise poetry, are consumed in less universal ways, but synecdochically, not like a meal that unites. My own preference, based on the awareness that choice is personal, conditions my position that in situations of poverty human beings may be looking more for stories about the bad than the good. A theory of unicity of what literature should do, just as a theory of unicity of what hope should do, is difficult to formulate.

6

In Chapter 6, Osofisan focuses on yet another literary giant, JP Clark (Beked-eremo), the poet who, like Soyinka and Achebe, began his literary career at the University of Ibadan. He traces Clark's career over a thirty-year period, pointing to various changes and transformations in his career. Presented as humble in character, Clark's poetry and plays are probably not! He attracts both praise and condemnation in equal measure. To Osofisan, Clark creates poems that are musical, "boldly scintillating, composed of such pleasing labials and fricatives!" The metaphor of a woman is to enter a discussion on Africa, Mother Africa, the loss of our culture and tradition. Clark's clarion call, like that of Léopold Sédar Senghor, is to recover and preserve Africa's traditions. To Clark, Western education had made the recovery and preservation difficult, unless the people return to their communities, to an identification with their culture. As Africans struggle with the recovery process, Clark's poetry also has to engage with how they struggle with postcolonial challenges of power, public morality, and, in Nigeria's case, ethnicity and ultimately the civil war in the 1960s. Like his contemporaries, Clark has to deploy a language of expression that works, the poetics that bring alive his roots and culture in the prose and dramas that narrate the contemporary events of the nation. Clark, from the very beginning, created a "distinctive identity" through his work, a literature "rooted in our own culture and environment, fashioned as much as possible along the patterns of our traditional narrative and theatrical practices." That rootedness was broken by Nigeria's political crises and civil war, and Clark found himself experimenting with other dramatic and poetic choices. As the Nigerian conditions changed from one phase to another, so too did Clark change his poems and plays, discarding some older forms to be replaced by alternative ones and language. Osofisan praises Clark for being the "most protean, the most self-regenerating, and the most continuously experimental as much in terms of form and technique, as of theme." In the final mutation that Osofisan describes, Clark's theme is seen as "dark," set in the themes of death and dying.

My intervention here broadens Osofisan's interpretations instead of challenging them. If Osofisan sees "literature" in Clark, I want to see psychology in him. Is there an authentic African past? Clark was searching for one, and he keeps redefining his answers the more he searches. The encounter with modernity, by way of colonial intrusion, constitutes the critical context to his poetry, just as was the case of Négritude. But the failure to attain modernity created doubts, one that Clark has to engage with in his dramas and poems of the 1970s and beyond. Not only is the artist being transformed, his nation, too, is constantly undergoing changes. Clark seems to stay firmly rooted to his orig-

inal Niger Delta identity, presenting their anthropological past and ethnographic present. He is a Renaissance man of a different kind: not in the mastery of many new fields, but in the mastery of many new myths. His myths, inherited and borrowed, are repeated to exemplify, I surmise, forms of cultural touch, a nurturing contact between the artist and his land in order, I think, for one to feed the other. Thus, a series of physiological and psychological processes are displayed in words and actions that sustain Clark (self), and in land and identity (collective culture). Living among his own people, the sensations of interactions and gazes become converted to words that calibrate people's pains and pleasures. Clark's plays become inhere in Ijo's lands and bodies, the artist's words defining identities and the consciousness that shapes cultural and social connections. The dance in the drama that Clark offers are about bonding, the movement and touch, the gestures of physical contact that define peaceful nuances of friendships and relationships, even the conflict, and affinities of age and class. Femininity in the plays and poems are not necessarily speaking to women or matriarchy, but to the need to cement relations. The sexual expressions that Osofisan interprets as love for Africa may be the encoded incendiary power of female sensuality to bond, to affirm organic contacts in society, and to stress tactility's indispensability to building cultural bridges. Corporeality and femininity are united to provide a cosmological understanding of society, to avoid chaos while recognizing conflicts. In my analysis, a new meaning to Clark's work emerges, one in which I move away from literature to philosophy, and the transcendence of his people's identity as constantly peaceful if the transition of the imposed modernist state of Nigeria remains unstable. As Nigeria ruptures, Clark may be suspending the country's possibility, while taking refuge in the hidden land of his birth and in its indigenous mythologies of survival and pleasure. His self-reflexivity of constantly hiding, and then appearing like a masquerade to supply new "truths," may be an attempt to bifurcate Nigeria into traditional and modern spaces, to affirm that which is dearly traditional to him, and suspend the possibility of the "newness" of the modern nation, to use cultural gratification as an escape from the abuses of the Nigerian state.

7

And why would Clark not seek solace in the privacy of the land of his aborigines? A connecting answer is supplied by Osofisan in Chapter seven, an essay written in 1996 at a time of anguish. Saro-Wiwa, also of Niger Delta extraction, had been killed by the military for fighting for the freedom of his Ogoni people. And gone with him were his fellow fighters. The continent also lost other writers to death—Zulu Sofola, Efua Sutherland and some others. Those

tragedies do not deny us of the comedy and hope in living. Peace and war are related, while the fear of the period was also marked by the abundance of hope, the generosity of spirit, the contradictions between the evil of power and the goodness of the people. The resilient “humanizing faith” of Africans kept hope alive. It is the story of those who kept hope alive, who used literature to organize resistance, that forms the central core of Chapter Seven. As in Chapter Five, written actually many years after Chapter Seven, Osofisan urges us not to talk about our bad conditions without the good, not to talk about evil people without the honest and good ones:

For I am beginning to suspect that, by concentrating as we do, on the redolent antics of the “destroyers” among us—I am using Ayi Kwei Armah’s term—without at the same time making an equivalent acknowledgement of the role of those who fiercely oppose them, we may be merely celebrating, without knowing it, our meek acceptance of the *status quo*, our willingness to let things continue as they are, and by inference, our refusal or unwillingness to participate in any concrete efforts to alter the situation. If this is the truth, then our show of defeatism, this voyeuristic glee we display at the failures of our countries, may be nothing more in the end than the open face of an insidious surrender to evil; or worse, the code of our implicit collaboration with it.

Osofisan wants Africans and the world to read what poets and writers say about the African condition, as they capture the struggles and courage of our people, and record their resistance. Since the 1970s, a generation of new writers began the process of writing about resistance and struggles. Devoid of connections to nationalist politicians and exposed to a Marxist tradition, they believed that Africa could be transformed. They exposed the class basis of society, and exposed the exploitation by their leaders. These “prophets of hope” made strategic choices to connect their ideas with the public. Among his case studies are poets like Atukwei Okai who infused poetry with percussion; and the three most famous poets who based their styles on indigenous traditions—Tanure Ojaide, Kofi Anyidoho, and Niyi Osundare. In fiction, he celebrates such writers as Isidore Okpewho and Festus Iyayi. In drama, he speaks highly of Ola Rotimi, Bode Sowande, Tess Onwueme, and others. In drawing on these examples, Osofisan’s goal is to show how writers talk about the continent’s problem while remaining mindful of the positive aspects of life. “This is the magical inimitable force of art, its capacity to heal and empower us, and ultimately, humanize us,” he concludes.

However, this humanity is drained by the brain drain, as prominent writers leave the shores of Africa to work in other lands. Local publishing houses also inevitably fall into decline. A new kind of literature emerged outside of Africa, considered as creative and “healthy” by, and as “febrile aestheticism” by others. According to Osofisan, immigrant writers are less interested in the message, and they sacrifice “communication for rhetorical and lyrical exploration.” Disillusioned writers, Osofisan argues, write for non-Africans, but not all can be accused of having abandoned Africa. African literature, Osofisan maintains, has to accept the new reality of these writers.

I would like to characterize Chapter 7 as the literary equivalent of musical blues love, as Osofisan, with so much love in his heart, is yearning for what to do with that love, and pleading that all of us should be possessed of that same love in our hearts. Our mentality must be possessed with a burning flame of gold in our hearts. The love for Africa will create an inspiration to look for the positive, he seems to argue, and will also motivate Diasporan writers to be conscious of their role in the elevation of the continent. He displays the attachment that members of his generation in the 1970s had for Africa, the utopian hope that change was around the corner. This is an idealized and romantic presentation of the literary output of the 1970s, with a vision so clearly defined in a utopian vision of a new Africa, a shared conviction among new writers that enthusiastic poems and plays would generate a revolution. The poor were in need of assistance, which writers could provide, not in concrete provisions as food or houses, but in the enthusiastic messages of redemption; and an enthusiastic mistrust of power could cement the trust among writers. The clash of ideas would be resolved in favor of the progressives.

Osofisan would surely disagree with what follows: the enthusiasm of his blues love generated some mistrust, which crept into the preceding chapter on Clark who received criticisms for not talking about women’s disempowerment, and more so in Chapter 7 where a long cast of Diasporan writers are accused of their disconnection from the plight of Africans. This mistrust is predicated on what the vision of literature should be (defined singularly as the uplift of the nation) and what the mission of the writer should be, defined as the deployment of strategic tools to uplift the nation. Blues love, I argue, is a charming concept of desire (to change society) and of “romance” (to love society). Osofisan wants a land of plenty; state leaders want a land of scarcity.

I can imagine that Osofisan is disappointed to see the declining state of Nigeria, against the background of his visionary work of the 1970s. Bleak testaments remain the most common trope in the characterization of Nigeria in spite of his romantic affection for that which is good in us (see again his call

for us to write on goodness in Chapter 5!). Nigeria's future is unknown. The intimacy of blues love does not translate into a collective agenda to unite all the writers. Osofisan's long-term love relationship with Nigeria, to keep to my metaphor of love, remains both powerful and nostalgic, in spite of how a number of literary writers that succeed him have ignored that radical moment of the Marxist era, reducing the project of radicalism to knickknacks. One need look no further than the current Pentecostalist interpretation of a broken Nigeria's past caused by attempts at cultural revival of FESTAC, and of their futuristic imagination of a land without sinners.

8

Chapter 8 celebrates the success of two female writers—Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Promise Okekwe—at a time when the opportunities to publish have declined, when many have taken to self-publishing, when there are virtually no royalties to be made, when only a few acquire fame, when that fame is judged by external prize systems, and when what is considered good literature must be sanctioned in the West. The paradox is strikingly clear: both Adimora-Ezeigbo and Okekwe have prodigious talent and output but are scantily noticed at home, “confined to the margins of discourse.”

Osofisan focuses on the trilogies produced by these two major figures. Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy including *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996), *House of Symbols* (2001), and *Children of the Eagle* (2002); while that of Okekwe comprises *Hall of Memories* (2001), *Zita-Zita* (2002), and *Fumes and Cymbals* (2002). The format, as Osofisan points out, differs. While those of Adimora-Ezeigbo are interrelated, each a complete story by itself, those of Okekwe's is a long story broken into three books. Adimora-Ezeigbo follows a feminist tradition, questioning male-centric presentations of history and identity which she carefully replaces with female-counter narratives. She centers her stories on strong women and puts male characters at the margins. On the other hand, Okekwe's is more concerned with social injustice in general, not necessarily setting her stories within a feminist paradigm, but condemning the inadequacies and corruption of those in power.

Chapter eight may become one of the best read in the entire volume. For one thing, it is entirely devoted to female authors, usually under-represented until the rise of Chimamanda Adichie. Furthermore, both are not part of the Ibadan School on which Osofisan devotes most of his time. And there is even a third reason: thus far, together with a focus on JP Clark in Chapter 6 the case studies are rich, with rigorous attention to textual analysis, while avoiding generalizations. The microscopic attention to detail brings out the practical rele-

vance in the writings of Adimora-Ezeigbo and Okekwe, both married Igbo women, based in Lagos, extremely prolific, and award-winners. Both are equally versatile, writing short stories, plays, books of drama, poetry collections, novels, and children books. And if many other writers of the period publish at a loss, both are market-savvy, and manage to have attractively produced books.

As with most of our writers, both Adimora-Ezeigbo and Okekwe situate their works in concrete historical experiences that become converted to fiction. There is no need even to pretend or to hide the names of their characters—that which is real actually reads like fiction. The concerns for the marginalized are paramount, creating a universe of sorrows and healing balm to transcend them. Both writers want the emancipation of the poor, both men and women, even if Adimora-Ezeigbo puts more emphasis on women.

If Osofisan has raised the issue of gender in the works of these two powerful writers, I want to raise that of citizenship, a different scale of analysis, by which I mean how one citizen identifies with others living in the same geographic space defined by the same nationality. Loyalty and nationality are at play in the writings of Adimora-Ezeigbo and Okekwe, where the nation is perceived to be un-loyal to its citizens. The nation may also fight back, seeing the citizens as not also loyal to it, but the grouses of the nation, even if in an abstract form, does not find expressions in this body of works. The nation, to the loyal citizens, is an alien. This “alien” writes forcefully about alienation, how citizens become mere “subjects” of power. Power is mistrusted: a web of practices and traditions subjugate “innocent” citizens while a web of laws operates with discrimination. The characters in the works of Adimora-Ezeigbo and Okekwe are in pain, some of them even traumatized, gripped by those webs. The authors and their characters can retreat to pre-colonial identities, but only in their writings, as their location in Lagos will suffocate them, and the mesh of living in a modern state is harder to disentangle. Colonial dynamics, as we see in Adimora-Ezeigbo’s work, intersect with the dynamics of the post-colonial nationality, as Okekwe loudly proclaims. The past becomes tomorrow, intersecting with today, a continuous process in which characters and narrations become permanently open-ended. Characters float in limbo, with fault lines between rights, privileges, and power. Individuality can be affirmed, as the two writers have done, but their expressions are not necessarily indispensable to those who govern the state. Neither does the individual establish a relationship of co-dependency with the state since each can regard the other as irrelevant. The writings of the two authors are clear about the pluralistic nature of society and the nation-state. They also adopt microhistorical approaches which allow them to talk about relations at the local level, but without ignoring the large-scale national framework. In localizing citizenship, happiness and good will are located at the micro

level, and sadness is transferred to the macro level. The happy Igbo woman must crisscross with other networks to articulate visions and nations of the self and others. As much as our two talented authors try, and try they do, they cannot symbolically disentangle the happy individual from the unhappy state. Ideas and ideologies remain in conflict, which then play out in the actions and activities of citizens who remain paradoxically in co-existence with Nigeria. Both Adimora-Ezeigbo and Okekwe, pushing their talents to their limits, have to work out the dynamics of engagements created by state and society, which are perhaps harder for literature to reconcile. The people cannot live on the edge for literature itself to enjoy stability.

9

And if they cannot live on the edge, my argument is that new possibilities have to be imagined, both in private and public spaces. Could this be a reason for a heightened futuristic desire that Osofisan captures in Chapter 9, talking about sexuality in a post-military era as if traumatized citizens had been in a cage for so long? In anti-colonial struggles, moments of civil war, and military rule, who was audacious enough to talk about kisses and memorable romances? What level of un-seriousness would be associated with an *Ogunistic* pathfinder looking for new maidens in the jungles to deflower? Male gods were too restless to tolerate meek women wasting their valuable time in pleasure seeking. The Yoruba river goddesses of Yemoja and Osun knew how to keep away from warring gods. Genteel and “responsible” women appear to give birth to children and words of succor, before disappearing into private rooms. Osofisan explains the silences of sexuality: literature “should always deal with ‘important issues’; and the second, that it should maintain a climate of ethical ‘correctness.’” Discussions of sex were taboo. Missionary education was opposed to openness about sex. University education in the initial years trained students to regard themselves as moral leaders, the conscience of the nation. As Osofisan notes, “such themes as love, or loss, jealousy and ambition, would be considered trivial, except of course in contexts where these passions promoted the well being of society as a whole, to which they would then be subsumed.”

Today, the taboo is broken, as contemporary writers have no such inhibitions, whether in the work of Helon Habila or Okey Ndibe. In *Etches on Fresh Waters*, Toyin Falola and Aderonke Adesanya even deploy sexuality as the metaphor and thread to discuss events of the recent years. Osofisan summarizes the current trends in a sensuous manner:

In drama, poetry, or prose fiction, the exploration of romantic situations is now to be found in virtually every book, pursued in graphic

detail along all its various stages and manifestations, from the first crush to the final surrender, from intimacy to copulation, and from infatuation to the often-inevitable catatonia that follows a heartbreak. Poetry, perhaps not unexpectedly, provides the most flourishing instance. Everywhere we turn, we seem to hear nothing else now than the chants and hymns of cantillating Cupids or the wailing plaints of Eros. Title after title are tumbling out, in which the verses chant rapturously and without abashment of desire and endearment, of passion and lust, unleashed with their rawest, hedonistic authority. The change is startling. Love all of a sudden has lost its shyness and reticence; poetry its innocence.

Why do the writers lose their innocence and become more open? To Osofisan, there are multiple answers: “we live all of us nowadays in a new, promiscuous age, deeply penetrated and influenced by American values and the globalized media”; democracy and its association with freedom; and “the gradual loosening of the habits of male patriarchy in our societies, which has led to a tremendous increase in female literacy.” This openness, Osofisan argues, does not mean that the new writers ignore the socio-political realities of their countries. Alas! As it turns out, more love and sex do not produce a better country or culture of politics, and the love itself does not come with happiness in private spaces, thus compelling the authors to return to the older themes of struggles, suffering, and sorrow.

I would like to delink sexuality in literature from its moral underpinnings. The broadening of the literature beyond what pioneer missionaries and educated Western elite objected to is not an act of desperation to clutter the mind but an exercise in freedom: social and political statements that are made to affirm human and citizenship rights. The sexual claims, I can argue, manifest issues around cultural rights: how sexuality claims speak to the membership in literary clubs, and even the quality of life. Social citizenship cannot be divorced from speaking about private issues—how people live, and what they do when no one is looking. The body is both a space of making statements about standards of living, but also about aesthetics and emerging popular culture. The right to control and speak about one’s body is as well a cultural and political right. Patriarchy need not be the only ideology to frame the notion of respectable citizenship. Writers can use the body and sexuality to privilege womanhood, and to deny that certain practices and behaviours are not “asocials.” Pentecostalism has raised the category of asocial to that of a sin with serious damning consequences. Cupid, the naked god of love, has his own rules of holiness to cleanse the castigated sinners, Cupid’s darts to protect his follow-

ers, Cupid's inspiration to create more verses and lines, and Cupid's bows to fight a raging battle. Sexuality in literature will need all the Greek gods of Eros they can summon in the battles with Pentecostalism against the possible erosion of support for the creative minds and, perhaps, for the possibility of merging *eros* with *storge*, *storge* with *philia*, and *philia* with *agape*. Until then, let the culture wars rage on.

10

The last part of the book, comprising four essays, moves away from critical evaluation of individual writers to the larger context of literature in society. Chapter 10 starts with globalization, how technological devices connect places and people. Different parts of the world are thrown together by the impact of economy, culture and technology. The spirit of interconnectedness has actually been with us for so long, manifested in stories and proverbs of our people. In its current manifestation, globalization proclaims the supremacy of the United States and its capitalist ideology. Osofisan makes the point that globalization and the American empire are coterminous. Globalization, Osofisan argues, has not been good to our people: economies have suffered, the country became indebted, and regulations were imposed to forcefully restructure the economy. Education suffered considerable loss in revenue and attention, and Africans began to migrate abroad. Culture and identity are threatened, as Western values reign supreme. The representation of Africa in the Western world is archaic and condescending, with relentless coverage of wars, violence, disease, and poverty. Our people have also become seduced, seeking the means to leave the continent. He suggests ways in which Africa can confront the crises of globalization through the mastery of technology; the use of the Internet to take our cultures to other parts of the world; the study and presentation of our histories.

Osofisan has grounds to be disappointed with the forces and impact of globalization, and he may be right to seek the answers to curtail its dangers. There are multiple ways to endorse his remarks: There is a stark contrast between the West and Africa in development opportunities, although we are bound up in global networks. The interweaving of us and the world has produced a marginalization for us, and we have not enjoyed any stranglehold on others. Multilayered interactions rob us of our cultures and markets. Local forms of identity are under assault. Our resistance to capitalist-oriented nationalism is weak, and even compromised by our own ethnic irredentism, often promoted by our own citizens who live abroad in the wombs of capitalism. Our visions of nationhood must match our vision of progress, and our culture must be a site of intellectual energy and renewal.

But the vision, energy and renewal are under yet another assault, this time at the local level: the sweeping forces of radical Pentecostalism, very much opposed to various aspects of African culture and customs. This danger is the subject of analysis in Chapter 11. Osofisan sees the practice of Christianity and Islam as the roots of a cultural crisis, and the adherents of both religions as “the most corrosive agents.” From the inability to learn and use indigenous cultures to their rejection, Christianity becomes implicated:

The problem is no doubt our inability to distinguish between where religion ends and where culture begins; between knowledge, particularly self-knowledge, and worship; and between faith and fundamentalism. That is why most of us come to know the Bible thoroughly, and acquire the virtuosity to quote several passages of it off-head, but when it comes to the question of our own history or our own traditions, we know nothing and are content to be so ignorant.

Local lore and customs become “paganistic,” secular songs become “satanic”; panegyrics become unholy renditions; and cultural festivals are equated with evil. The land is filled with cultural zombies who cannot speak their mother tongues, sing indigenous songs, and are incurably obsessed with foreign music and movies. Osofisan concludes the chapter with a powerful plea: “we do not have to renounce our culture or deride it, in order to be Christian.”

This is a small aspect of a much bigger issue on culture encounters, cultural domination, and how local religions are crushed by the weight of Christianity. Chapter 11 touches on two fundamental issues, the first, a substantial issue of how Christianity and foreign cultures can be adopted and appropriated without damaging the indigenous; and the second, to develop alternative strategies of cultural resistance. I think that the fundamental question is how people respond to texts and their messages and the psychological assumptions that derive from them. A holy text like the Bible and secular literary texts do not generate the same reaction. The power of a holy text is such that it can overwhelm the most important secular text. The substantive issue at the heart of this chapter is at once political and psychological. It is clear that state power is unwilling to confront religion and the agents of its propagation. Without the protective power of the state, indigenous cultural values and symbols are at risk. Indeed, members of the state itself are not exempt from launching vociferous attacks and critiques of indigenous cultures. The transformation of political culture is not grounded on what can be rescued from the past, but what can be borrowed from abroad, thus undercutting indigenous institutions. There is shame

in associating with what is demeaned as paganism, and there is guilt in promoting what is treated as ungodly. Christianity, the example that Osofisan uses, has succeeded in shaming many aspects of African traditions. Alas! There are not many people out there who can accept the burden of collective humiliation and fight back. Shaming may have generated a conversation on the damages done to local cultures, but it has not produced a critical mass of self-reflections to mount a counter attack that will restore respect and dignity to our cultural inventions.

I sympathize with Osofisan in appealing to parents to socialize their children to recognize our inherited traditions. However, Pentecostalism is powerful: its leadership and practices communicate a complex understanding of society that reinforces patriarchy, affirms social status, and supports political authority. It does not lend its support to Osofisan's arguments. Indeed, social inequality is taken for granted, and the poor are expected to pray and pray for upward mobility. Pentecostalism's patriarchalism disaffirms some principles that Osofisan encourages: reading literature in addition to the Bible, performances along with fellowship, promotion of local songs and not only choruses.

There is need to say more: In a world in flux, where American hegemony is affirmed, cultural changes flow from the tides of globalization, the rise of Pentecostalism fusing with cultural losses, thereby tethering a new Africa to an unpredictable future. In Osofisan's mindset, globalization and Pentecostalism split asunder the relation of Africa to its cultures, destroying older values without appropriate compensation. Merging together as an assault, globalization and Pentecostalism have created their alternative culture, rather than reinforcing older ones. But as citizens with inviolable rights, Pentecostalists can do whatever they like with their freedom. Convincing them to return to the past, and to traditions, will be a difficult task indeed. Thus, is the call for returning to our values and traditions an unrealistic dream? In that case, let us stage a drama. Let us all pretend to be asleep and dream.

12

Chapter 12 reveals how the conditions of anomy—chaos, violence, and anarchy—supply the ideas and energy to write and think, to imagine and perform. As Osofisan elaborates:

In several instances that we know, it is pain indeed, and rarely pleasure, that provokes the artist into creative motion. It is suffering, and not satiety, anguish and not euphoria, frenzy not sobriety; that animates and powers the catalytic impulse to creation. Men are stricken, and if they are artists, they turn articulate, and through that voca-

tion, defeat the pain, and even convert it to triumph.... Throughout the moments which have yielded the greatest works in art have been those in which society has been under the stress of turbulent transitions. The creative impulse seems to be stimulated best when it is ruffled by fear or scandal, when it is violently stung to revolt against prevalent chaos, or suffering or injustice. The weight of hurt in the air is what, it seems, determines the weight and the tenor of artistic response: the greater the pain, the more profound and the more fascinating the reach and feel of art. Thus it is when it bears convincing witness to anomy, when its cargo of grief is overwhelmingly lucid, and its metaphors densely invocative of callousness and bestiality, that literature attains the summit of its lyrical power.

Let me assume that he did not compose this in a moment of pleasure but lying sleepless in a bed of horrors! But he makes his points with examples drawn from around the world, providing the linkage between serious crises and serious literature. While not inert, literature mirrors the society, and the writer injects a moral commitment to his/her ideology of presentation.

The creative muse is universal, and Osofisan applies his theory to Nigeria, showing how literary works are continuously and repeatedly connected with anomy. The pioneers—Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, and James Ene Henshaw—had to narrate experiences of cultural disruption caused by British rule and the incursion of alien religions. And from the 1960s onwards, writers portray all the failings and disturbances, the tragedies, and corruption. Writers speak to liberation and hope, seek the liberation of women, and call for the overall transformation of society.

By the late 1990s, Osofisan affirms the loss of interest in literature: members of the public are unfamiliar with the new authors, and only a few discuss their works. Did society progress sufficiently such that there was no longer any anomy to respond to? Not so, but a catalogue of other reasons: the decline in the value of the currency and the high cost of imports; poverty and hardship; the rise of alternative media; the Nollywood film industry that gives people choices that do not require reading; more time devoted in the service of God; and the migration abroad of a number of critical writers. There is still anomy, he argues, but fewer responses to it as there is a lack of compassion and the growth of cynicism. Great readers and great literature are becoming rare to find. And as long as money remains the priority of most people, Osofisan warns that we should not expect a literary renaissance.

Chapter 12 is a provocative essay that connects with the one on the impact of globalization and Pentecostalism on the growth of literature. I can under-

score a few of the statements with additional reflections. A lived experience with changing economic realities of the 1990s and beyond, while not necessarily creating pleasure that leads to indolence, has created a lack of interest in reading and writing. It is not just in literature but in all disciplines. Unencumbered by the burden of Otherness that Achebe writes about in *Things Fall Apart*, the current generation invites all the elements of globalization and popular culture even when they are culturally enslaved by them. People seek power to add to the conditions of anomy, while using that power to accumulate resources and live in style and grandiosity. The ills of modernity frighten not many people, as they actually invite and celebrate those ills, so that asking them to read poetry that jolts and shocks is out of the question. There is still a lot of reading, to be sure, but it is mainly of the Quran and the Bible, both of which supply the needed spirituality, not to understand anomy, as Osofisan insists, but to overcome it. Who speaks for the people? Certainly not literature professors and their ideas of the book. Politicians and pastors speak to the people, one making promises about improving their conditions in the world and another making assurances about a safe exit to the next world, assured passages to heaven. Both messages may be imaginary, but they produce results!

13

In the final chapter, Osofisan returns to the same issue of the decline of literature, starting with an allegory of how the vulture volunteers to take a sacrifice to heaven following a prolonged drought. Rain came, the world was set right. The vulture returned to an unwelcoming people abandoned, and rejected, finally realizing the bitter truth “that the one who carries a sacrifice never benefits from it.” The vulture became a lonely, discarded bird.

To Osofisan, the writers are the suffering vultures, used to run errands, later to be abandoned. Writers fought for freedom, human rights, and democracy. The military was chased out of power. The writers who carried the sacrifice to heaven have worked for the politicians and pastors to reap the rewards. Not that the “vulture” has always had it easy—in the early years of independence, writers had to grapple with dictators and authoritarian regimes and poor reading cultures. They struggled, finding the means to publish, the language to use. In the last twenty years, problems have been compounded by the challenges of globalization. Reading works of literature declines, Nollywood films damage theater, and live performances decline in popularity and appeal. The organic art of being able to perform has diminished:

Nowadays what we have are simply *bodies*, not performers. The basic talents which we used to take for granted among our people are, sadly,

no longer there. We used to assume that anybody who was black, and who was born in Africa, would automatically know how to sing, and dance, and play a basic percussive rhythm. But no more. And now we know that it was not the factor of our skin that made us so sensuous as Senghor erroneously claimed, but rather, the very nature of our old societies. Sadly, those old societies are gone.

A new generation is disconnected from its indigenous roots, not socialized into chanting, panegyrics, festivals and ceremonies. Worse still, they also suffer from a crisis of values: “Indeed, on the contrary, what sells nowadays, as they can observe all around them, is avarice, self-centeredness, corruption, and fraudulence.”

Hope is not lost! Writers do not lose hope: after all, in real life, they are not vultures. Cultures don’t stay still; but the borrowed ones must be the appropriate ones. Osofisan has a remedy: “We must restore the beauty of our lost heritage, particularly the values of collective care, the concern for the old, and the deprived, the belief in communal good and environmental cleanliness.”

Chapter 13 is a fitting conclusion to an excellent read. Osofisan’s vulture allegory presents the history of literature and writers as frail and fumbling, and of the readership as diminished. Undermined by stifling economic and political forces, Nigerians found alternative forms of pleasure and leisure in Nollywood films and the Internet. The turmoil of politics and violence on the streets created society-wide cynicism in political statements about change. Writers do not find themselves in the post-military era projects of authority—who controls what with what, enjoying what?

It is time to conclude this dialogue with a great writer, as I can keep talking till tomorrow. The context of some of the essays is the declining conditions in the continent and on campuses. Not every piece is bleak: authors and literature are celebrated over and over again. And there is a moral and humane purpose to Osofisan’s writings, a manifesto that scholarship and creativity must not be neutral:

Especially with our situation in Africa of unrelenting and yet preventable grief, the true scholar in my opinion has no option but to commit him- or herself to the goal of changing and modernizing our societies. Besides, in a situation where we have been brainwashed to lose confidence in ourselves and in our own worth, scholarship cannot but accept it as its goal to shatter this inflicted complex of innate inferiority and help us back firmly into self-esteem. Our agenda must

focus primarily and unrelentingly on this need to awaken our people's spirit and stimulate their capacity for progress and innovation, and help them recover the courage and illumination to constantly renew our societies and traditions. To me, it is crucial that the morality of scholarly activity returns us to the ethos of collective good and communal happiness, above selfish greed and the satiation of the individual lust.

The totality of the essays explains the intertwined history of the Nigerian state and its literary production: it offers what is promising and also frustrating about the trends and characteristics of creative writings. The book before us is a compelling and critical contribution to Nigerian/African literary criticism. Osofisan has traversed the nation's literary history and criticism from the 1960s of Soyinka, Achebe, and Okigbo; the migration of the literary production from Ibadan to Lagos; and the addition of female writers now led in the contemporary period by Chimamanda Adichie. Mixed with frustrations and aspirations for a return to traditional heritage and values, yet torn by the erosion of new media as exemplified in Nollywood, the burden of the playwright and the critic introducing him are further deepened by assaults on the minds of the people by new Pentecostalism and the pressures of globalization. In sum, Nigerian letters seem to have lost their golden age and what is left is such a book by Osofisan, reminding the reader of the possibilities of hope if we can only retrace the steps of destiny and collective intelligence in order to discern the fleeting promises of politicians and pastors telling us about an elusive tomorrow and heavenly peace at the expense of our cultural heritage.

Osofisan transcends mere descriptions to open up fresh and challenging ideas on the key literary figures and their statements. Creating a confluence of intellectual power is difficult, a point that is missed in all the essays, but one badly needed to reform the state itself. On the one hand we see the formidable power of individual artists, but on the other hand we cannot find collective intellectual power, a movement that is an oppositional architecture that can withstand corrosion and storms. Individual achievement is one thing; a collective one is another. Without a movement, ideas come and go, with no one translating them into bigger vision and projects, with no one transcending localism into universalism, with no disciples to engage in crusades and holy wars.

Osofisan's essays are capacious, with the central point of attesting to the ideas that have shaped literary art since the 1950s, the contours of the changes, and the key figures. There is an understanding of the various forms and the full array of their contents. There is clarity regarding the foundation of modern African literature, with Ibadan as the cradle of humanism, and the changes that

followed, with emphasis on memorable events, and sound conclusions on the relationship between the state and literary production. There is a strong awareness that literary art is dominated by protest, first as resistance to Western domination in politics and culture, and later about resistance to the post-colonial state. Both the colonial and postcolonial states are treated as unjust, denying the majority of the population their own share of national opportunities. Fiction becomes a heroic effort to make demands. There is strong enthusiasm, sometimes infectious, for the various writers who are celebrated and rendered in a vigorous style. The inclusion of women in Chapter Eight and attention to issues around love and affection in Chapter Nine make the book more valuable still, more so with the abundance of references to various other works.

This book is about understanding developments in literary art, but it also succeeds as a work of critical appreciation. Osofisan has to be commended for expanding the discourse on various issues, expanding a body of knowledge, and expanding the art of the discipline. He offers expansive meanings about the objectives of literary art, more so its cultural and political underpinnings. Local activism receives national recognition in Osofisan's reckoning although that which is national literature is not always clarified.

The key variable in Osofisan's *longue durée* analysis is politics: how the state and state actors shape creative production and writings. To be sure, politics, events and the state can alter institutions and cultures, thereby creating, as we see in the writings of the key figures mentioned in the book, short- and long-term processes and consequences that impact creative imaginations. The memory of those events, as in the example of how Christianity and colonialism shaped Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, lingers, but so also does our engagement with those texts long after the event has faded from everyday life and reality. Indeed, literary arts can archive those particularistic moments, and embed them in our consciousness.

Part of this book can also be read as a manifesto, with the hope and disappointments that all manifestos tend to represent. Like a manifesto, there are authoritarian and authoritative passages in various chapters, prescribing how literature should be defined and what writers should do. There is the General in the front, leading his soldiers into battle: the destination point is a developed country, a developed continent, the liberation of the poor from power, the liberation of politics from excesses and corruption. There is the unitary concern for progress. There is praise for writers, and an obsessive validation of literature as a discipline with considerable value. There is a presumption about the relevance of writers and the significance of what they say, even the salience of poems to policymaking. There are bold imaginations to chart bold new frontiers.

Manifestos want others to join a movement and chart the path to follow. That path is charted in this book. But this path portends danger: literary scholars are never united in the themes they pursue, the forms they adopt, the language and dialects they choose. They are rebels without a leader, troops out of control, individuals with a variety of social concerns, ambitious agents who operate in diverse spaces, characters who can be humble and arrogant and thus poorly suited to accept instructions. As old and new writers continue to generate literature, their chosen paths will not necessarily be similar; their end goals, aims and objectives may differ; and there will be differential public receptions.

Osofisan's exhortation for writers to "love" Nigeria and Africa for the service of building honest networks, celebrating the best in us, and working for a general uplift of us all constitutes a compelling moral center in an all-embracing manifesto of literature and the humanities that is offered in the chapters that follow. Let us march with him, beside and behind. Onward!

