From the Local to the Global: A Critical Survey of Exile Experience in Recent African Poetry.

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Abstract

The question of exile in contemporary African literature remains central to the understanding of its people. Of particular interest is the place of poets of the second generation in the depiction of this phenomenon. Although the paradigm of generational configuration is admittedly flexible, this paper seeks, nonetheless, to explore the perception of a few selected poets of the second generation from Anglophone Africa in order to illustrate the multidimensional approach to the engagement of the theme. By so doing, the paper is also concerned with the construction of home through its images, on the one hand, and on the other, the dissection that lies between home and exile in countries of destination in the West. The paper also hopes to explore the frustration that goes with the experience and the dilemmatic situation in which its victims are caught. It will show at the same time how from an initial standpoint of essentially internal socio-political and economic factors in regions and countries, things have gradually moved in the past three decades or thereabouts into an exponentially actuated and leveling stage in which globalization— as seen in its present fashion— has accelerated the spate of African citizens' vulnerability to exile, especially to the West.

Exile and African Poetry in Perspective

Considered in the orthodox sense for the purpose of convenient discursive departure, exile, that result of dislocation from one's native land, occupies a conspicuous place in poetic exploration in particular and literary expression in general. This is perhaps so because human history all the world over is characterized by elements and moments of dislocation at one point or the other. The veracity of this assertion is underscored by such assertion as George Lamming's (1960: 24) when he pronounces "The exile… a universal figure… and to be in exile is to be alive." But perhaps there must be an admission of an extremely allegorical twist to Lamming's apprehension of the concept as the context from which the assertion draws inspiration revolves around the capacity of overwhelming political spheres of influence to engender estrangement. More literally, therefore, exile must be viewed as a human condition which is defined by dispersal or drift usually against the wish of an individual or community.

The fact of humanity's vulnerability to exile is evident in the various circumstances and incidents by which it is necessitated. The circumstances and incidents range from war to famine to political crisis and in some cases, a dissident stance. It thus becomes understandable why the literary contents of peoples' cultural traditions, whether oral or written, are replete with engagements of dislocation. But it is to Jewish mythology and literature both in the distant and contemporary context one may turn in the assessment of the panoptic import of exile which usually verges into the derivative and problematized experience of diaspora. The triumphs and tribulations of exile are indeed expressed and evident in the representation of Jewish people in the biblical time as nomadic. The simplicity of this view is however blurred in the Pauline hermeneutics which inverts the literal understanding of Jewish identity by introducing an allegorical twist by which as many as are converted to the Christian faith─ a theology that is complicitous with the civilizing alibi of western colonialism─ automatically become Jews (Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin 1995: 332). Nevertheless, the all-embracing, spiritualizing liberalism of this Pauline philosophy is thoroughly compromised by the historical persecutions to which genealogical Jews have often been subjected especially in the western world, so much so that, the word Jew is a metaphor for the dreaded, rootless and rejected "Other" against whom all measures of exclusion must be executed (Gorge Mosse 1995: 196). But the condition of exile also appropriates a far larger horizon than the above as in the modern world, there is also a way it defines intellectuals (Edward Said 1994). Besides, Woodhull (in Walter Mignolo 2000: 72) explains further on the global nature of this trend of intellectual exile as including the ever increasing number of those who have fallen victims of oppression in their native lands and have to escape, to those whose political dissident stance has mandated their consideration of alternative places of living. There is also a peculiar recognition of the pattern of intellectual exile which emanates from the Third World, especially former colonies, towards the West. But whether considered in the general or particular sense, the initial excitement of finding alternative places of living is often undermined by the tribulations of exile. This is because of the various forms of challenges that are identified with the condition of exile. It is what produces in the end the invention of nationalism as a way of fending off the sorrows of exile (Said 2001:176). It is also this condition that results in the invention of diaspora, especially in

the long history of Black displacement in the West, as a strategy for transforming the curse of homelessness to that of repossession. Usually, this eventuates in a reconstruction from a privileged perspective which provides incisive and critical insights into "perceptions about the modern world" (Paul Gilroy 1993:111). But despite the privileges that exile appears to offer through, say, diasporic identity formation and assertion, its challenges and low moments far outweigh what succour such perceived privileges offer. Not surprisingly, therefore, exile, as soberly reviewed by Said (2001:173) with insightful acuity, invariably becomes that strangely compelling condition whose "achievements… are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind."

Conscious of the location of exilic realities within its purview, modern African poetry from inception has found a space of engagement for this intriguing phenomenon that in every circumstance assumes a grand proportion. Poets of the first generation in their own way and style were not indifferent to the issue as they articulated it in unmistakable ways in their creativity. Perhaps it was the more compelling for them to do so since there was a peculiar sense in which exile defined the last two centuries, especially for writers and artists. This is why it is common to talk about the obsession of western writers and artists with physical involvement in the experience of exile─ from Picasso to Rimbaud to Rilke to James Baldwin and to Du Bois (Chinua Achebe 2000: 92). For English literature particularly, there was a sense in which the literary pulse and tradition were dictated and shaped at some point in time by the cast of exiles in the main, and thus making their innovations and virtuosity point "to some impoverishment in conventional English culture itself" (Terry Eagleton 1970: 9). But Achebe is quick to remind one that against the backdrop of the peripheral placement of Africa in relation to the West, the African exile's situation is contrastively different and the claim about the possibility of dual, and one may add, multiple citizenship, which is part of the contemporary attraction of the notion of exile, may be a ruse after all.

To a large extent, the evolution of modern African poetry was informed by the need to respond to an overwhelming aura of exile and displacement created around the idea of the African personality. It manifested primarily in a cultural and ontological sense as that

separation forced between Africans and their own world in the era of western colonialism. Directly, this was a result of the highly systematic agenda of western colonialism through which the African ontological space─ as was the case in the other parts of the world where Euro-American colonialism had taken root─ was thoroughly hemmed in. Explaining this situation, Said (1990: 71-72) intimates further that it was "a cultural process" which, benefiting from its "massively organized rule", turned out to be a veritable "and invigorating counterpoint to the economic and political machinery that we all concur stands at the center of imperialism." At inception, therefore, African poetry felt the need to express the cumulative suppression of the African cultural milieu and logic. By so doing it also became an attempt to articulate in textual terms the deracination forced between the people and their cultural space as against the imposition of an alien imperial culture, the indices of which were western education, religion, dressing and other indices of cultural imposition.

The earliest form of this reaction is found in Negritude poetry which in many respects captures the feelings of pain and the cultural drift suffered when colonial culture was embraced. It is also characterized by the need for the poets, as African intellectuals, to resile─ with contrite atonement─ their role in advancing the form of exile resulting from indiscriminate advocacy of western culture. For much as they embraced western culture, they still came to the realization of the feeling of marginality to which they were subjected in the end. So, more and more these Africans who had been given the impression that with the assimilationist policy of French colonization they were already French citizens, found out it was not so. Basically, it was a problem which resonated through the knowledge of the polarization existing between the white and non-white races. It produced in them at home, as it did in Paris and other French cities, a sense of Otherness. Therefore, in mustering courage to confront the problem of otherness mediated through the imperial politics of exclusion and marginalization, a cultural nationalism was established. And drawing inspiration from other Africans of diasporic stature like Martin Delany and Edward Blyden, Africans, prominent among who was Leopold Sedar Senghor, began an ontological return from exile. This was advocated in several ways─ from the celebration of blackness to the valorization of the civilization

that began with Africa through Egypt and Ethiopia. It was indeed a metaphorical or ontological form of return and at the same time therapeutic exercise in response to the bruises of exile (Stephen Howe 1999:23-47). But this is not precluding other considerations that were in tandem with physical return. It is also important to note that what started essentially as a cultural phenomenon was also to translate into an overwhelming sense of nationalism, assuming in the end a political dimension around which narratives of independence struggle were subsequently woven on the continent (Said 1990:73; 2001: 176).

Talking more specifically about Negritude, for an illustration of the import of exile, the poetry of Senghor readily comes to mind. In "Prayer to Masks" for instance, there is a passionate invocation of the African pantheon of gods and ancestors for an intervention and protection in the affairs of living mortals. It is indeed an expression of a loss of hope in the protective and just attributes of the monotheistic world of the West where various forms of marginality and exclusion had been erected against the black folk. So the poem becomes in an appropriate sense a versification of home-coming and reconciliation to a world once ignorantly spurned and neglected.

Beyond the simplicity of interpretation to which the above poems appears to lend itself, Max Dorsinville (1976:67) instructs, and quite appropriately, that the cultural dimension of exile in the poetry of Senghor as is the case with the poetry of others in this tradition can be said to be multi-layered. It ranges from the exile immiscible in the condition of acquiring colonial education in a colonial system to the psychological import of the colonized African wherever he went, to others such as the fact of being black and the placement of oneself in a culture of modernity that was more determined by the dictates of western racial bias than any other thing. Needless to say, all was designed to serve as a pretext for exploitation. But to consign these features in this qualified manner to Negritude poetry only is to miss the mark. These imports of exile in African poetry of the first generation, whether in English or French or Portuguese, got across in similar ways

because the colonial system was guided by the same operative philosophy of the Enlightenment.

Similarly, in the poetry of Portuguese-speaking writers, the preoccupation with the condition of exile among writers of this generation is remarkable; Antonio Jacinto's "Poem of Alienation" comes to mind here. The alienation of "I" foregrounds the extent of this exile which is life-long: the overwhelming superimposition of white values upon the African personality during the era of colonialism. Besides, it brings to mind the long and tortuous nationalist struggle of Angolans and the various forms of alienation to which these fighters were subjected in the hands of the Portuguese colonial government, the peak of which usually was the exclusionary measures of imprisonment and restriction to concentration camps.

From Anglophone West Africa for instance, Christopher Okigbo dwells on the same theme in *Heavensgate* where his atonement becomes vicarious as there is a sense in which it speaks for the pains of the severance of the modern African from the otherwise authentic African culture as a result of the purchase of colonialism on him in all its ramifications. With Okot p'Bitek, in East Africa, the issue assumes a grand dimension of extended metaphors as one finds in *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol*; that is, there is a contextualization of the socio-cultural tensions of exile. Wole Soyinka's popular poem, "Telephone Conversation" also touches on the theme of exile, this time in the physical sense. It presents us with a dramatic monologue in which a white landlady's only condition of renting a house to her prospective black tenant is tied to questions such as "ARE YOU LIGHT OR VERY DARK," "HOW DARK" (K.E. Senanu and T.Vincent 2003: 181). The satiric qualities of the monologue are far from obscured. Besides, the device of capitalization goes to show the emphatic place the question of race occupies in the determination of who gets what in the British commonwealth. There is however a parallel twist to the notion of exile among poets of the first generation in South Africa as it was in the main an experience engendered by the aberrations of the policy of

apartheid.[1] It is in fact for this reason that Udenta Udenta (1996: 123) asserts that during this period, it was impossible to talk about South African poetry without discussing exile. This trope is most represented by the poetry of Brutus. Overwhelmed by the "horrificient" policy of apartheid, which, in its full blown form ran between 1960 and 1994 (Mark Sanders 2002:2), it became impossible to discuss South African literature in isolation from exile. Not only were the blacks subjected to all forms of humiliation through arrest, banning and imprisonment, they were also to face other stringent and systematic alienation and disqualification from those rights considered universally fundamental to basic humanity. Considered within such socio-political milieu, exile was both internal and external. In some cases, those displaced to other countries were no more exiled than those living within. Naturally, poets were veteran prey in the mesh of apartheid; and this is what one finds glaringly in the poetry of Dennis Brutus. The situation in the country especially for those who stood up to the segregationist regime, even at their most venerable and patriotic, were still vagabonds as Brutus' "A Troubadour, I Traverse all my Land" shows. But even at that, the situation did not preclude the psyche from other forms of exile apart from the physical. Again, Brutus' 'After Exile" shows this psychological dimension to the question of exile.

But while exile means all these and more, it has to be admitted that internal exile is also an issue that cannot be overlooked because of the millions of people who are often displaced internally within their countries and continents. In most cases, the experience can be no less traumatic and Africa is no exception.

Although this study is not about the politics of periodization in African poetry, it is needful all the same to remark that the cast of Anglophone African poets under study display certain signal features that mark them apart from the generation before. For the purpose of convenience, they have been recognized in this study as in most other studies as belonging to the second generation of African poets. This is not however to throw out

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[1] It has to be admitted, nevertheless, that, like in West Africa, especially Ghana, pioneer African poetry in English in South Africa dates back to the late 19th century.

the controversies in which such paradigm of periodization is subtended. As a matter of fact, the question of periodization in Anglophone African poetry remains a problematic for which a separate study will be more appropriate. But it will suffice within the context of this study to acknowledge the fact that the generation before differs in many respects from the generation that comes immediately after and from which this study has made its selection. The socio-political background which produced poets of the first generation was thoroughly colonial and this reflected in their works both at the level of meaning and formalism. The situation produced to a large extent a contrapuntal legacy which while it reacted to the colonial condition with a nationalist fervour, was nevertheless characterized─ except in few cases─ by an ironically heavy reliance on western artistic style for its form (Ken Goodwin 1982). The succeeding generation, however, especially from the late 1960s to the 80s, had a more immediate reality to grapple with─ except in the case of South Africa where it was a long history and theme of apartheid until recently (Lewis Nkosi1988: 50). Otherwise, on a more general plane, the reality on the continent at this time was that of a postcolonial challenge, which, for the most part, called first for introspective reactions (Niyi Osundare 1996: 27). This perhaps also explains why their poetry is radically inclined to the exploration of African oral aesthetics for the purpose of alerting all to the postcolonial situation on the continent. Across the continent some of the notable ones among them are: Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide (Nigeria); Kofi Anyidoho (Ghana); Syl Cheney-Coker (Sierra Leone); Angira Jared (Kenya); Frank Chipasula, Jack Mapanje, Steve Chimombo (Malawi); Oswald Mtshali and Mongane Wally Serote (South Africa), to mention just a few.

With the drift and dimension of things in the period of their emergence, exile in their art has come to bear more of its literal import than figurative. That is, while it is possible to locate part of their thrust within the project of cultural reclamation, their poetry within the context of exile bears more "of the material forces of politics [and] economics" as they confront in the immediate sense, mementos of the dead-end of post-independence euphoria. Here is an attitude informed by the alienation constituted in the manner of the socio-political temperament of the ruling class which leaves most of the countries in an array of crisis. Invariably, the recognition of their poetry in relation to exile becomes the

more challenging as it necessarily takes into account the trend of human migration from the later part of the 20th century especially as a global phenomenon. May Joseph (1999:154) puts it succinctly:

> Migration has become a way of life in the latter part of the twentieth century. The large scale displacement of people from the rural to the urban or across nations has heightened the precariousness of arbitrary boundaries while fuelling contemporary identifications with ossified national identities. The 1970s in particular witnessed a global reconfiguration of national citizenship. As new nations contended with older ones, new geopolitical arrangements— neocolonialism, globalization, structural adjustment— shifted relations of power in less unilateral directions, creating multiple nodes of transnational interrelatedness. In the process, peoples around the world have aspired to conception of world citizenship while also asserting their particular social identities.

Locating the thrust of the second generation of African poets within this trajectory becomes necessary as a combination of factors has resulted in the articulation of their African version to what has come to be identified as the continual "restless movement of peoples and cultures" (Couze Venn 2006: 18). Yet it is also for this reason that Venn, like many theorists of postcolonialism, insists that the contemporary disposition of the world order demands a development of "a [new] critical **postcolonial** [emphasis in the original] standpoint that extends the focus and terrain of postcolonial theory (p.1). By so doing, an understanding of the works of these poets will primarily stem from the contemporary dynamics of the representation of space and movement across spaces, a tendency within postcolonial discourse which is otherwise construed as "nomadism" (Lisa Lowe1993). But before yielding to the ideal of the global expressed in the contention that "the spatial framing of historical arguments and the 'visualization' of events is not simply a neutral process independent of the events… 'out there'" (Angus Cameron and Ronen Palan 2004:59), one must first and foremost rivet on these "historical arguments" as internally-generated. Thereafter, considering what possible configuration they extract from the "events out there" will be logical. Just as the nations and regions on the continent are different, so are there different and various challenges which have in the past two or three decades induced exile, especially in the sense of the search for better fortunes thought as attainable in the First World, and identified as a tendency on the part of the "formerly

colonized people to turn to migration as an option to living difficult lives" (Martha Dorkor 2005: 27). What then are the circumstances that produce in these nations the psyche of hostility? And what in particular are the realities of exile as an intimate experience of Africans? For this reason, whatever one encounters in the works of these writers should not be seen as emanating exclusively from the authors' experiences, but should rather appropriately be gleaned as representative of the much larger community of African exiles for which they have become speakers in portraying "representations of colonialism, nationhood, postcoloniality, the typology of rulers, their powers, [and]corruptions…" (Aijaz Ahmad 1992:124), that is on the one hand. On the other, the purchase of western neo-liberalism and the structures of exclusion against Third World immigrants of various social backgrounds as they go in search of better living in the west become another fact with which to contend.

The study is not however unaware of other interpretations of exile, especially as a condition identified with some classes of people as intellectuals, writers, artists, political dissidents and the ethnically persecuted and the internally dispersed especially throughout the African continent, among others. Nevertheless, the paradigm of exile favoured in this work is that of what Martha Gimenez (2003) calls "democratization". That is, I intend to look beyond the political underpinnings of exile in order to adequately assess its impact in all its ramifications as interplay of both political and economic forces in its inducement. This ultimately liberates exile from the exclusive reach of the privileged few who luxuriate in the optional attribution of exile to themselves as writers, artists, intellectuals, political dissidents, the powerful and the affluent. Put differently, while exile must include all this in the study, it also crucially takes into cognizance its import "as an experience common to millions of displaced people" (p.5), which is the only way by which the whole arguments of the various dimensions of exile featuring in the texts under reading here can be grasped. Also taken into cognizance in the following review is the historical trend of exile since the 1980s as first, internally engendered, and subsequently, exponentially induced by the growing impact of globalization.

Exile and Military Dictatorship in West Africa: Olu Oguibe's A Gathering Fear and Kofi Anyidoho's *Earthchild*.

Although to date Oguibe's poetry is acknowledged mainly through his only collection, *A Gathering Fear* (1988), his concern for exile remains so obvious that it cannot be glossed over. The telling trope of creativity in this collection is the delicate, yet enthralling balance he keeps between images of home and those of exile. The approach is what informs Stewart Brown's (1995:59) comment that this trope goes to establish "Oguibe's sense of his own commitment to Nigeria and the pain of exile". Indeed, *A Gathering Fear* does not just emerge with the painful cadence of exile, but it rather shows first the suffocating atmosphere in which home is caught, making even the most patriotic vulnerable to the apparently attractive option of deracination. The option of exile is thus justified as the hitherto debonair atmosphere of home, which should ordinarily be taken for granted, and which has buckled helplessly from the terrors of military dictatorship. Yet the reality of exile is no less frustrating with its overwhelming forces of exclusion. In specific terms, the discourse of exile in *A Gathering Fear* must necessarily be gleaned against the background of military dictatorship in Nigeria in the period of the publication.

The commitment to home gets across clearly in "I am Bound to this Land by Blood". His attachment to home and sense of locale is what transcends the phantoms of mere romanticism for the twin substances of "land and blood". So, as his land of birth and belonging by descent, the pains and sorrows, aspirations and yearnings of the people ultimately become his bother. It explains why after hearing "the wailing of a million" and standing "in the crowd where men/ mixed their sweat and wiped blood", he afterwards, "bear[s] the mark of the masses on my brow" (11). By not subscribing to the derogation of the crowd as "faceless", Oguibe rehabilitates the image of the masses by reclaiming it from the fabrication and denigration of the state that casts it in despicable moulds to justify the suffering of the masses. It then becomes apposite to contextualize the psyche of leadership, and for this, turning to "The Triumphal Entry" will be worthwhile. This poem paints the picture of the military class that has taken over power, mustering massive moral capital of confidence from the citizenry as reliable political and administrative copartners. However, the class leaves the people thoroughly disappointed

in the end with all manner of promises that are never fulfilled. Instead, there is an aggravation of the peoples' woes.

In order to strike the right chord, Oguibe engages in what Isidore Okpewho (1982: 203) refers to as "tradition revised" as he picks on the Christian myth of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem as a pattern for the apprehension of the aura of military dictatorship among the Nigerian citizenry in the 1980s. The last stanza of the first part is particularly striking:

> The King has come on the back of a mule
> His path paved with branches and leaves
> The King has come in the dazzle of butts
> Garlands of toilet paper deck his neck
> The King has come with a split-tooth grin,
> The King comes riding on the bones of men. (24)

There is a sobering and shocking effect of the contrast that the entry of the "King" here provides against that of Christ. Void of biblical humility and benediction, the King's entry here signals the pathological psyche of the military during this time to plot death ceaselessly both within their own rank and that of the civilians. Therefore, whatever the decision the citizens reach especially in relation to exile in view of the circumstances at home, strikes one as logically justifiable since home no longer provides the needed succour. For this Soyinka (2004: 22) declares, "Ultimately, therefore, we revert squarely to the issue of leadership that [in Africa], let us face it, has been the greatest obstacle to the renaissance dream".

Succumbing to the allure of exile, the sense of alienation which the misrule of home produces, one discovers, is exceeded once the space of dislocation is inhabited. This is what one finds in "A Song of Exile" of which Oyeniyi Okunoye (2001:162) remarks is eloquent in the articulation of the dilemma in which exiles are often caught.

> I stand at the gates
> Stranger and outsider
> I have journeyed away
> From the sea into the desert

> The charm has crossed rivers
> The tongue is blunt
> The songster has journeyed
> Without his voice. (59)

At the other end of his journey is the grim reality of his status as "stranger and outsider". He becomes the lonely "Other" against whom the gate of social exclusion must be shut. And this experience of social exclusion can be thoroughly daunting.

Also set against the background of military dictatorship, but this time in Ghana, Anyidoho's *Earthchild* (1981) presents one with the shocking images of home and their capacity to instigate flight from annihilation, a thought that often undermines at the initial stage the harrowing tribulations of exile since what matters for the moment is to escape the immediate inconveniences of home. Schooled in the oral tradition of his Ewe people, Anyidoho taps the rich resources of this tradition for the adornment of his art. For the most part in this collection, there is an adoption of the dirge tradition of his people as an artistic means of explicating the drift-prone condition of a nation hemmed in by the tyrannical hand of military politicians.

While he adopts what Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1999:130) calls the use of personal voice, the experience however reaches far beyond the personal as it brings to focus the collective travail of a people in a society where the "Star-General is urinating peace on Capitol Hill" (20). The difficulty of the military to cope with the self-imposed responsibility of salvaging the nation from the shackles of international debt, austerity measures and general economic mishaps (Henry Beienin 1987: 54) is worsened by the tendency of the class to treat matters of serious national magnitude with levity and disdain. This is what is metaphorically designated as the "urinating of peace". Whoever is acquainted with the corrosive acidity of urine surely knows that such act stokes no good for the nation. As expected, all this provides an alibi for people to leave in search of a greener pasture. It explains why the parting of soul-mates is what is lamented in "Song of a Twin Brother" as the persona recollects that "many, many moons ago" his "twin brother" with whom he "shared the same mat/…parted in our dreams". If in the above poem one is left to

imagine the lot and fortune of the exiled brother, such elliptical frugality which tasks the imagination is forestalled in "To Ralph Crowder" which ends in the following lines:

> We suffer here so much
> But they say your case is worse
> And you've fought with all your blood
> Always fighting on the bleeding side
> And you cannot go on like this …
> Come Crowder Come
> But I tell you all is not well at *Home.* (112)

Again, the question of the dilemma to which the exile is tragically consigned resonates in the stanza above. The reality of exile has turned out to be far from providing succour. Ordinarily, return should be the next line of action, but the same kinsman who calls for Crowder's return cannot but alert him to the fact that "all is not well at home." The predicament of the lost twin brother and Crowder goes to demonstrate the strength of Paul Tiyambe Zeleza's (2005:12) argument that "dislocation, expatriation from home is a prosaic condition experienced by millions of people rather than an exceptional reality only for those blessed with artistic souls". The poet thus becomes a medium through which the expatriatory travails of his people are expressed.

Exile and the Malawian Stint: The Poetry of Jack Mapanje.

Basically, Mapanje's preoccupation with exile stems from two factors: the condition as imposed by the 'enlightenment' project mediated by the pursuit of higher learning in the West; and a subsequent confrontation with a civilian tyranny which makes home unbearable. His earliest musing on exile is to be found in his debut, *Of and Chameleons Gods* (1981). Although preoccupied by a series of other concerns which have since received detailed critical attention especially for their immediacy that points directly to Malawian socio-political life, the segment "Sketches from London" confirms the sense of satirical humour in the tradition of an oral poet. If writing on those issues that directly affect Malawi is an attempt at "preserving some sanity" (Leroy Vail and Landeg White 1991:284), there is a sense in which it can be argued that the prevalent circumstance in London, where he wrote the said poems while undertaking his doctoral research, was no less disorienting. And it is from this consciousness that the poems have emerged. First,

Mapanje is saddled with the task of interrogating the imposed view of colonialism with respect to the hyped superiority and civilization of empire and the white race as against the inferiority and wildness of the African whose native frontier and ontological perception must be tamed (Douglas Killam 2004: 109).

Such responsibility is necessary perhaps as a response to the kind of nationalism with which the imperial capital of London is painted in some notable colonial texts of English literature. London indeed was the peak of sophisticated civility and the entire British people the fortunate race charged with the noble role of civilizing the uncivilized colonies. It explains why shortly before he leaves for London alongside other Malawian scholars, the journey in "Handshakes and Best Wishes" is perceived as a quest to "go drink from the source". That their expectation is high as they are bound for "the source" is not in doubt. However, many incidents at the source show that rather than confirming the fullness, "the source" merely exhibits the scandalous moral and humanitarian dryness that is prevalent in British society. From a colonial perspective, River Thames is no doubt a symbol of progress and refinement: the epic proportion which it assumes in Conrad's writing underscores this assumption, which makes River Congo come to mind naturally as depicted by Conrad as lacking in navigatory treasures, and making it to stand in poor relation to the Thames. Nevertheless, the poet asks in the sub-eponymous poem, "whoever said there was a fountain here?" What follows is a scenario which brings to the fore the grandeur of cannibalism, poverty and insensitive neglect at the bank of River Thames: "Thames/ Banks: they picked up a dead woman the other day/Her lungs were found wrapped up in a World War soot /She must have been living here thirty years, they said". A revelation of this kind becomes a regular pattern that runs through the remaining part of the section as each received colonial narrative about empire is punctured and adequately dispelled. If with a singular narrative tone, the section nevertheless qualifies as truly a postcolonial critique which challenges the narratives of colonial homogenization and provides at the same time an emancipatory view introspective in its alternative stance (Venn 2006: 4).

This task of challenging grand narratives has for Mapanje become a sustained motif as can be seen in his most recent collection, *The Last of the Sweet Bananas* (2005). However, the comic tone has disappeared as the grim realities of exile stare the poet in the face owing to African exiles' strive against British exclusionary measures. This is what is illustrated in "After Celebrating our Asylum Stories at West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds." The confrontation and anger of the poet at the insincerity of the various exclusionary measures of Britain against immigrants of colour point to the impossibility of ruling out racism in the west. Nevertheless he is loud in his intervention:

> So, define her separately,
> She is not just another
> Castaway washed up your
> Rough seas like driftwood

The reason for the poor lady's right to fair play is explicated thus:

> It's the endless cyclones,
> Earthquakes, volcanoes,
> Floods mud and dust that
> Drafted him here… (203)

This opens up another possibility in the understanding of African exile; and that is the negative impact of the activities of the First World nations on the socio-political and economic life of Africans. Through the various meddling in the sovereign countries in Africa, the West through the agency of neo-colonialism has had a hand in the deluge of African exile. These Africans go to the west as "economic émigré[s]", as indicated in the poem, in hope that the so-called programmes put in place by the migration nations of the First World will be in their favour; but they end up queuing "day after/ Day" for the jobs that are not available. The First World's capitalist-industrial and post-industrial dominance has left many African nations prostrate. It is for this that Soyinka (2004: 22) maintains that while we must blame African leadership, it does not preclude the indictment of western selfish interventions that have been on the increase exponentially as a post-independence malaise with which African nations are plagued.

Apartheid and Beyond: Exile in the Poetry of Mongane Wally Serote

Serote's writing, indeed his poetry, features in the liberation struggle writing in South

Africa. And going by the necessity of locating him in the tradition of poets of the Black

Consciousness era, one begins to imagine the extent of his commitment to the struggle.

An understanding of the commitment is clarified in Peter Horn's (1994: 94) painstaking

illustration of the temperament of his poetry and personality which meld into the

experiential condition of the people with a telling symmetry:

> There is indeed dialectical relationship between the emotional experience of the poet and that of his audience; and the poet orders his material in such a way that both his own experience and that of his people become focused on the poem, allowing something we may call poetic insight, a grasp of the situation which helps us live and act. The relationship spans the entire range between an empty formalism constructing verbal hollowness and an explosive anarchism unable to contain its experience in many kinds of form.

Besides the above, his poetry as a necessary creative intervention, serves to show the

naiveté and ignorance of white liberal's solidarity which at its best during the struggle

was limited by the sentiments in which the pigmentation of their colour is subtended

(Njabulo Ndebele 1992: 25; David Bunn and Jane Taylor 1987:17). As a defining trope

of the apartheid era, exile, both physical and otherwise, but especially the physical,

showed the capacity of the state to make the nation uninhabitable for many black people.

This experience constitutes the thematic signage of *Freedom Lament and Song* (1997) in

which the expatriatory tribulations of Tebello is representative of many who in a bid to

escape the extremely inhuman condition at home fled, especially to the west only to be

consumed by other forms of challenge in the exclusionary structures of western social

imaginary. Tobello has gone as far as London after his stint with the freedom fighting

group. Obviously the hostility of home explains his eventual domiciliary in London. It

has however turned into a misadventure. For the same sense of alienation of home has

caught up with him in London. And Tebello is found "dying/ his Kentucky box was there

next to his bed". As a metaphor for the lot of many others forced into exile in the imperial

city, one finds the grim impact of loneliness telling on them to a fatal degree:

> i have been here

> looking and hearing understanding
> and speaking of the loneliness of some of my friends
> of my brothers
> of my sisters
> their loneliness in death
> when they died (23)

What follows is a list of several other victims of death whose corpses would not be accorded any befitting burial in the African sense of the word. The only consolation from this experience is the redemptive values of all the deaths which have joined other forms of sacrifice to bring about the liberation for South Africa.

It is nevertheless more interesting to look beyond apartheid for an understanding of the intriguing dynamics of exile. In other words, apartheid may have ended, but dispersal is still an abiding experience in South Africa. The assertion is against the backdrop of the contemporary place of South Africa in the global imaginary as a foremost link between Africa and the West, a relationship that implies an acceleration of the movement of people in the post-apartheid era to the West. In the reflection of Leon de Kock (2004:13), this position of the nation attests to the "paradox… of the seam" with which South Africa is characterized as a historical phenomenon. This is the concern of *History is the Home Address* (2004), a collection that is attuned to the times in that it has a way of responding to the contemporary "planetary" innovations of the world system which is expressed in globalization. Besides, it is an attempt on the part of Serote to redefine South Africa after what is acknowledged as "one of the most inspiring─ and lengthy─ struggles for revolutionary change in the twentieth century (John Foran 2005: 223). This mnemonic approach is multipartite in the sense that it stretches in this collection through an internal process of reconciliation to that of a re-union with a kind of renascent pan-Africanism to the reinvention of South Africa and indeed, the entire Africa in a mould that will enable a connection to the global trajectory on its own terms. Therefore, one can argue that while the exile experience of *Freedom Lament and Song* dwells on the symbolic and literal pattern of drift, in *History is the Home Address* a balance is achieved through the mnemonic strategies of return. While for instance there is a concession to the overarching influence of drift in the contemporary age, the necessity of identifying with

African history and indeed personality, no matter how vague the latter is, is not glossed over. By choosing to make a dramatic monologue of the entire collection, Serote confirms what Michael Chapman observes about the poetry of his generation, that is, the "the projective oral verse." He takes one through, in a quick but sober succession, important moments in African history: "there was pre-colonial time/there was slave trade /there was colonialism /there was apartheid/ and because these were there/ there was racism" (10). Similarly, he reminds one of "the lightening of bomb and its thin smoke/ which took Lumumba, Nkrumah/Mondlana, Toure, Cabral" (11), all figures of African struggle and statesmanship whose anti-imperial stances one way or the other made them run into collision course with the west. So, in the contemporary stage of what Fredrick Jameson dubs "late capitalism", it has become necessary for Africa to hold its own in relation to the west and insist on a measure of fair play and dignity that it deserves: "What must we learn from home?" The reply of the implied character is instructive:

> don't forget your address
> if you go away
> when they ask you
> where you come from
> search for the address and give it to them
> ah!
> when you return
> You must know where to go …
> History is the home address (12)

The lapidary repetition of this idea of history in the definition of contemporary Africanity runs through the collection certainly as an answer to the conundrum of contemporary vulnerability to all forms of dislocation and amnesia; this is in order that Africa can adequately take on the challenge of the present capitalist society, using from our past what Jeyifo refers to as "tropes of disalienation" (Sikhumbuzo Mngadi 1996:198).

Exploding the Ballon of Postnationallity in the Poetry of Tanure Ojaide
The globalization twist to the discourse of exile commenced in Serote's *History is the Home Address* finds continuation in Ojaide's *When it no Longer Matters where you Live* (1998). Meanwhile, it is necessary to point out that in this collection the import of the

argument is best considered from the angle of the fact that "most modern nations consist of disparate cultures which were unified by a lengthy process of violent conquest… [and] nations are always composed of different… ethnic groups" (Stuart Hall 1993: 267-8). Therefore, the inversion of the myth of the nation as an "imagined community" owing to its failure to nurture and concretize the various dreams of the disparate ethnic and regional units becomes the basis for the preoccupation with exile in this collection. Ojaide's narration of the nation is essentially from the viewpoint of the Niger Delta crisis and by so doing, he interrogates the basis for the invention and sustenance of the nation. This takes us back to how exile connects globalization in this discussion. The feverish race towards planetization otherwise known as globalization has generated and will continue to generate all manner of debates. In the observation of Angus Cameron and Ronen Palan (2004: 51), these debates and arguments are bound to elicit responses across institutional strata. Tanure Ojaide's *When it no Longer Matters where you Live* is one of such responses. The planetary innuendoes of the title coupled with the spatio-temporal suggestiveness of the para-textual illustration of the cover page─ a juxtaposition, yet contiguous placement of both ruralscape, represented by a diminutive hut, and urbanscape, represented by an imposing skyscraper with satellite dish installation─ all foreshadow the cynicism which is obvious in the collection.

It is first and foremost a response to Marshal McLuhan's (1964) enthusiastic prognosis about the capacity of information technology to transform and possibly homogenize the world. The indispensability of this technology is at the core of most of the various definitions of globalization. David Held (1998: 13) for instance views globalization as the:

> Stretching and deepening of social relations and institutions across space and time such that, on the one hand-day-to-day activities are increasingly influenced by events happening on the other side of the globe and, on the other, the practices and decisions of local groups and communities can have significant global reverberations.

As innocuous and progressive as this appears to be, the duo of Cameron and Palan (2004: 75-76) further remind one that "metaphors and other linguistic devices used to describe

social and spatial forms are never so innocent." This compels a critical look at globalization from the angle of the binarism between the First World and the Third World nations. By taking as crucially instructive the position of the former and its bias in the pontification on the morality and operation of globalization, there is no doubt that, even at its best, the justification for the practice of the conceptual agenda, despite its apparent prospects, remains suspect. Its compression of all forms of social structures into a single mould (Julian Murphet 2005:128), reveals that it is nothing but the consequence of the global epoch of imperialism which is a reconstruction of Empire political maps. The substance of this fallout especially in the Third World is evident in the fact that "in place of firm notions of identity has come an era of mass migrations, exile and transition' (Nicholas Mirzoeff 2001:1). This is what Olu Oguibe (2002: 175) refers to as the dialectic of "connectivity and the fate of the unconnected".

It is this fag-end status of the Third World and the frenetic efforts of its citizens to escape "unconnectivity" that has become the greatest catalyst to the experience of dislocation in the postmodern time, which is what is the preoccupation of *When it no Longer*… Beyond its perception as a commentary on the national image of Nigeria as home, the collection, like most other collections of Ojaide, lays out in a manner that deconstructs national culture as it articulates more resonantly the ethnic aspirations of the Niger-Delta region of the country whose unconnectivity despite its oil wealth has become world knowledge. But first the capitalist and exploitative presence of the multinationals like Shell in this part of the country must be understood in terms of the their capacity to undermine national sovereignty, making it subservient to them (Aijaz Ahmad 1992:130; Murphet 2005:129), in order that the dispossession of an ethnic or regional entity can be easily accomplished. So the nation, not infrequently embroidered in political crisis with exponential causes traceable to the western originating countries of the multinationals, cannot live up to her citizens' expectations. This is the implication of the argument that runs in "Home Song II."

While this goes on at the national level primarily because of the oil-wealth of the Niger-Delta, the same region is engulfed in abject poverty explicable only in terms of the postulation of "resource curse".[2] This is the import of "In Search of a Fresh Song" in which the poet finds that "fecal trash" with "toxic blast" has created the "afflicted neighborhood" of Igbudu Market. The natural consequence is disillusionment which induces deracination:

> The eyes blurred from exhaustion
> see no further than the next half-meal
> next week fresh exiles will take flight
> to distances without roots (51)

The vulnerability to dispersion toward the west, which verges on the susceptibility to Foucault's terminology of "hyperreality" of the western world, is not discovered until victims of capitalist dispossession end up in the world capital only to be faced with the harrowing realities of exclusion in "distances without roots". In "Immigrant Voice", one of the migrants testifies in Pidgin:

Wetin my eye don see for here pass pepper	I have been witness to peppery persecution
Make me de prepare to go sweet home	A homeward return is my salvation
If God de, make e punish them	If God exists, let Him deal with them
Wen drive me from Africa come hell	Who sanctioned my dislocation from Africa
into hell. (106)	

The grandeur that is expressed in the lines above mocks the superciliousness of "elitist" critics like Harry Garuba (1988: xxv) who assign only facetious values to the use of Pidgin in literary practice. In fact, it is for this that Ezenwa-Ohaeto (1994:45), echoing Achebe in a positional criticism, warns that such critics of western critical bias against Pidgin must "cultivate the habit of humility appropriate to their limited knowledge of pidgin". The appropriateness of the choice of pidgin in this context comes to the fore on

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[2] According to Scott Pegg, "The tendency of countries that are heavily dependent on natural resource exports to perform poorly on a variety of economic, political , and social measures is frequently attributed to the 'resource curse.' " Scott Pegg, "Can Policy Intervention Beat the Resource Curse? Evidence from the Chad-Cameroon Pipeline Project", (*African Affairs,* vol. 105, 418, 2006), 1-25 pp. 1-2.

account of the fact that "merging vernacular languages, folk arts, European avant-garde forms, and secular concerns" has become a defining feature of postcolonial literature (May Joseph 1999: 142); besides, it must be understood as the necessity of taking serious the Lyotardian injunction to "wage war on totality".

Exile, Globalization and the Battle of Cities in Odia Ofeimun's *London Letter and Other Poems*

With Ofeimun's collection, *London Letter and Other Poems* (2000), another dimension to exile is inaugurated as its consideration is from the angle of the relationship between world cities in the age of globalization. For even on a most subtle plane, globalization─ as a process and not yet a state, in all its social, economic and cultural aspirations, coupled with its trappings of contradictions─ is unequivocal about the centrality of the image of the cities to the accomplishment of its mission. Whether from London to New York, cities of the Asian Tigers to Lagos and Johannesburg, the image of the cities looms large in such a way that suggests how the conceptual agenda harks back to history, reminding us of the roles of various cities as veritable sites of operation for the previous Euro-American imperialist activities, be they in the form of colonialism or neocolonialism in the Third World. However, the current postmodern agenda does not only implicate the cities, but also critically operates in such a manner that creates a split between them; that is, the deviation between the global and non-global cities. It is from this angle Ofeimun's *London Letter and Other Poems* must be viewed as a direct response to globalization. His concern is essentially how the dynamics of the dissection between global and non-global cities are configured. Specifically, he has engaged in a juxtaposition of Lagos and London in order to explore how the internal state of impoverishment in non-global cities results in dispersal toward the global cities in the west especially. This dialectic representation is the more intriguing because of the notion of the unstated rivalry between the global and non-global cities. This is what is clearly demonstrated in the opening poem, "Lagoon":

> I let the lagoon speak for my memory
> though offended by water hyacinth
> waste and night soil…
> I still let the lagoon reclaim

> the seduction of a land moving
> with the desire of a sailing ship
> pursuing a known star. (3)

The image of the lagoon as a representative symbol of Lagos is understandable because of the crucial place it occupies in the emergence of the African modern city. The dichotomy between the two types of cities in postmodern time is implied in the desire of a land sailing in pursuit of "a known star". It is the more interesting that the known star is London. But besides the various internal socio-political problems of suffocating proportion that one encounters in the poem, it is important to remark that the non-sustainability of most African countries today, is not unconnected with:

> the effects of global economic restructuring [which] are evident in labour markets. The changes have affected employment, migration, house hold formation and housing. The results have a polarization both within cities and between. (Dilys Hill 1994:246).

The substance of this polarization is crucial in the sense that it engenders poverty in the non-global cities and creates a total sense of disillusionment, which again becomes catalytic to their thought of dispersion to global cities for good living. This is the import of the alarm raised in the poem by the critical experience of "drowning" to which "my city by the lagoon" has been subjected, despite her frantic efforts to "outshine the moon". The ultimate outcome of this is found at the end of the first segment of the poem that has concentrated in the main on Lagos: the fever of disillusionment has found a ready collusion in the desire of the borders "for exile".

In the succeeding segment, "London Letter," one encounters an initial orgy of excitement as "the exiles" arrive in London. This excitement is borne in the pidgin lines, "Na London we dey" and "Na so so enjoyment" (We are in London, and it is so much of enjoyment). It is also important to remark that their movement from their homeland was occasioned by a sense of alienation engendered by bad governance and an infrastructural system that fails to deliver on comfort; coupled with this is the need to be reconciled with the native wealth already swept to the city of London. However they have ended up in London only to discover that they are still as alienated from social comfort and financial

fulfillment. As well as unfavourable temperate weather, the racial question mediated through capitalist operations has left them more confused and traumatically alienated, having no place they can actually call theirs:

> Like *them* who sang '*Lagos, na so so enjoyment*'
> *We dey for London like we no de at all*
> Dreading the winter like the old woman in nights
> Without firewood to hold harmattans at bay
> *We dey for London like we know dey at all*
> Chewing cud in the birth of freedom as tragedy
> A used up hope mocking the human condition
> On both sides of the Atlantic: *Na so so enjoyment* (20)

The repetition of "*we dey for London like we no dey at all*" (we are in London as though we were not at all) explodes with a tone of finality the rarefied proposition of globalization. It is, after all, in the context of this work, an abuse of the concept of "freedom" of movement and migration, which is why it is perceived as a "mocking of the human condition/ on both sides of the Atlantic" and in which the migrant citizens of the Third World have been most hit.

Conclusion

As stated at the commencement of this paper, we have seen the various socio-political factors over the past two or three decades that have occasioned African dispersal to the West. The poets especially in the period before the 1990s are careful enough to demonstrate the historical peculiarity of each country and sub-region; they also show the extent to which such historical configuration is catalytic to an exilic choice. However, there is a contemporary ramifying experience, and this is what one finds in the neo-liberal ideal of globalization which, unfortunately, does more to exert influence of dislocation on Africans than it does to strike a balance─ economic, social, and political and cultural─ between Africa and the West. But most importantly, the paper has served to demystify the aristocratic hue constructed around the concept of exile as space only writers and a few other privileged ones─ personages who even at their most populous are still a negligible percentage of the society─ of the society can inhabit. This is why it is significant to note that the various exile experiences related in these works are all united by one fact, and that is the liberal notion of exile which shows how it can affect all. It is

especially so given the spate of the urge to escape various forms of hardships in their natal homes. However, such decision, which often leads them to contemplate relocation to the West hardly, proves worthwhile because of the various exclusionary measures that push them to the margins of such nations; and this ultimately points to nothing but the contemporary dilemmatic conditions of their lives.

On a general note, it is important to remark that in these works the thought of return assumes a complex and varied dimension, resulting meantime in all forms of diasporic existence. In Oguibe for instance, the fact of the guilt that attends the remembrance of escaping the horrors of home and leaving the rest of the underprivileged masses behind creates a sulking psyche aggravated by the challenge of coping with the politics of exclusion in the country of destination. For Anyidoho, and Ofeimun, return is a dilemmatic reality as it is extremely difficult to establish a difference between the realities of home and those of exile. Perhaps because the thoughts of return offer a remote possibility, there is a tenacity which verges into anger and activism in Mapanje. But with Ojaide, return, in that literal sense of the word, remains yet the only hope where the persecutions of exile become unbearable, implying some possibility of improvement in the condition at home. Lastly, in Serote return assumes an ambiguous dimension as history becomes "the home address." Providing it whenever it is demanded or required implies an assumption of taking on the challenge of diaspora where a distinct identity is affirmed as a symbol of return. But this does not also rule out the possibility of physical return, which is why both become desirable.

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