

Critical overview of mutations in some Contemporary African Poetry

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ABSTRACT

The state of contemporary African poetry today reflects the mutations it has undergone from the precolonial, colonial, to post-independence periods. Before colonization, African oral poetry (songs, rituals, incantations, etc) was peculiar and depended on the performer, the audience, and the context. Iyasere (2006:326) characterised this uniqueness as “a communal literature”. Over the years, this uniqueness has been permeated by some globalising wave of hybridity and cultural mutations giving rise to the complex contemporary African poetry we have today as exemplified in the works of Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Nol Alembong and Oscar Labang. This paper, therefore, attempts a postmodern/postcolonial criticism of these selected poets to delineate the extent to which their poetry project an African consciousness at the expense of a consumerist multicultural set-up that privileges the subjugation of the African identity. It further demonstrates the nature of postmodern African poetry and reveals that contemporary African poetry is an offshoot of shifts in time and space confounded in experimentation, influence and the sublimation of personal experiences.

Keywords: *Postmodern, Contemporary, Criticism, Poetry, African, Culture/al, Identity.*

Introduction

Iyasere (2006), Anyokwu (2013) and Ojaide (2006) have examined shifts that have occurred in African creative works from African oral tradition to modern African literature, as well as shifts that have occurred in the function of African poetry from oral tradition to the modern era. Ojaide in “Modern African Literature and Cultural Identity” asserts that just like traditional oral literature, modern African literature has remained social and communal, but it has become defensive (46). He demonstrates this shift by examining Okot P’Bitek’s “Song of Lawino” where he observes that in this poem, the western culture is denounced and the African culture honoured. According to Ojaide, African writers have become defensive to assert their cultural identity in a domineering world. He also admits that modern African writers make use of the utilitarian function of orature in their works to give it a mythic flavour (45).

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In contemporary African poetry, however, the culminating effects of globalisation has given rise to postmodern African poetics not only defensive but experimental as it attempts to dismiss the spatial peripheral constructs it has suffered from colonialism. According to Ouaisa (2015:101) Homi Bhabha in his foreword to *The Wretched of the Earth* advocates the need for African writers to counter the dehumanising effect of globalisation. He described globalization as a new form of colonialism. For Bhabha, both colonialism and globalization are characterized by dualities producing similar mechanisms of reification, marginalization and dehumanization of peoples. Colonialism spread on behalf of the “mission civilisatrice”, globalization in the name of democratization. According to Bhabha, Ouaisa quotes, “it is the reproduction of dual, unequal economies as effects of globalisation that render poorer societies more vulnerable to the ‘culture of conditionality’”. The so called, globalization, with its new forms of domination and exploitation drives masses towards a kind of chronic marginality, promoting the emergence of “violent peripheries” (ibid).

While acknowledging the effects of globalisation on African culture and identity, Anyokwu (2013) remains articulate on the idea that African poets should maintain the function of African poetry. As he identifies shifts in African poetry from the point of view of function, he maintains that the function of oral poetry has not changed in the modern era. To him, it simply developed. In the pre-colonial era, oral poetry was either arousing emotions, stirring reflections or entertaining. Today, modern poetry is serving a dual function: a social or historical purpose and providing pure delight. He further states that in order to attain these functions, the African poet must make use of what Osundare calls the concept of “looking back” (qtd. in Anyokwu). This means the poet must make use of ethno-cultural values and the traditional historical heritage.

Despite the efforts made by organizations and the government to protect the oral tradition, Akinyemi (2013) believes several verbal genres are still endangered if globalization and the rapid economic changes continue to exert pressure on smaller ethnic communities. In the critic’s opinion, in these modern times, the best an African writer can do is to make use of the oral tradition in his/ [her] art. In “The Writer in a Changing Society”, Wa Thiong’o (1972) asserts that the writer is bound to respond to the changes in a society because he is part of that changing society. This implies the writer is influenced by the changes occurring in the society and this affects his views and style.

According to the critic, such a writer may produce different types of works which may be contradictory in mood, sentiment, and degree of optimism (47). With the help of David Rubadiri's poem "Stanley meets Mutesa", he demonstrates Rubadiri's change of mood and degree of optimism as the writer moves from a period in which Africa is asserting its cultural and political identity (colonial period) to a period in which Africa is disillusioned with its ruling elite (post-colonial period). These changes in society have intensified in the postmodern era, and have affected the way African poets sublimate their experiences in a context where Africa's cultural identity is threatened by globalization. It is, therefore, crucial to evaluate the levels at which contemporary African poetry has been affected by these cultural mutations in a postcolonial/postmodern era where traditional verbal forms have undergone several shifts as illustrated in the poetry of Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Nol Alembong and Oscar Labang. To what extent have they maintained traditional African forms and how postmodernist are their poetics?

Critical overview

Postmodernism rejects global, all-encompassing world views of any and every kind whether it be Globalisation, Marxism, Christianity, Fascism, Stalinism, Capitalism, Socialism, liberal democracy, humanism, feminism, Islam, or modern science. From the postmodern perspective, each of the above, as well as others, are logocentric, transcendental, totalizing, meta-or grand narratives, master codes that rest on epistemological foundations no different from and no more substantiated than the most fanciful of belief systems. According Abeje (2020) postmodernism rejects metanarratives as manipulative and exploitative. It advocates heterogeneity and difference as liberative forces in the redefinition of cultural discourse. It therefore celebrates postcolonial studies, incoherence, discontinuity, parody and popular culture. Some major postmodern theorists like Jean Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson and psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud, Jacque Lacan, and others have advanced a lot of theorizing in this this regard. According to Lyotard (1978:81),

The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentation, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the texts he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and

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they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work.

That said, postmodernism deconstructs that debate on periphery, both on the global and local level. It destabilizes pre-established rules as highlighted in the preceding quotation. It means globalization embodies facets of meta-narratives in its discursive dualism, an advocacy for cultural formations which projects mainstream and low cultures. The need therefore to deconstruct such binaries is imperative. Consequently, adopting an individual as against Universalist construct permits an investigation of the poetry under study to evaluate prominence in the light of Souza (2011:1) who thinks that:

... postmodernity (especially the kind that follows Nietzsche in one way or another) places a different kind of sovereignty on the individual. A person should not limit himself or herself by any systems of morality, of control, of ideas of justice, truth, goodness, and beauty, which are thought to somehow lie outside of self and to be authoritative over self. Each person is to pursue his or her own set of ideas, values, and goals – and particularly, one is not to allow others to infringe upon one's freedoms and goals.

By questioning authoritative systems, the individual's subjective experiences as manifested in Rabearivelo's collected poems, Alembong's *The Passing Wind* and *Forest Echoes* and Labang's *My Country Took A Wrong Turn*, reveal to what degree their poetry adopts new forms and to what extent it wrestles against inequalities, marginalization and dehumanization.

However, contemporary African poetry wrestles against relativism and the celebration of difference in a global context where it is given limited or no space to exist because even in the postmodern construct, there is exploitation and silencing. Sardar (1999:5) in "Deconstructing Postmodernism" argues that the concept of difference and relativism propounded in postmodernism is just a charade for the West to exploit the cultural values of other nations. She states that:

Since colonialism has already drained much of the wealth of the Third World, postmodernism appropriates the last resources of the non-west: its traditions, spiritualities, cultural property, ideas and notions. While postmodernism celebrates difference it allows no space for difference to actually exist – thanks to such postmodern notions as globalization and free markets (which are free only for the West) ... Under postmodernism, distinctive cultures are hybridised, ethnicities are appropriated, sacred spiritual practices are turned into mass products, local cultures are arrogated by the global entertainment machine. The cultural subjects of difference, the non-western cultures, are venerated solely for their difference but denied the right to negotiate their own conditions of discursive control and to practice their difference as a rebellion against the hegemonic tendencies of postmodernism.

Even though postmodernism appears to abrogate homogeneity, its celebration of difference still puts contemporary African poets at crossroads of multiculturalism where there is a constant struggle and difficulty to capture one's true self. As stated in the preceding quotation, "distinctive cultures are hybridised, ethnicities are appropriated, sacred spiritual practices are turned into mass products, local cultures are arrogated by the global entertainment machine".

In this divisive tendency, therefore, some African poets become defensive because of the peripheral conditionality the African culture has been subjected to and because of the way Africans are brainwashed to think appropriated western education at the expense of their own customs and belief systems is civilisation. Ayandele E.A, according to Maduagwu (2014) states that culture as the soul of a nation, its pride, its quintessence, distinctiveness, and self-identity must be defended. In the critic's opinion, it is the nation's only badge of respectability, the core of its being, the mainspring of its spirituality, the past to merge with the present and the future; it is also the transcendental corporate achievement of a people through which continuity is transmitted from generation to generation. With the advent of globalisation, dressing, eating, dancing, and most cultural values have been affected. In Cameroon and Nigeria for example most African artists believe they can only become more relevant and famous if they mimic pop culture or R&B. Abdhrahem (2014) says Nigerian music has been neutralized with the western beats of Michael Jackson, Lionel Richie, and Craig David.

The admiration of western culture and way of life has led to the developmental crisis post-independence Africa has been facing. While Labang (2011: 65) regurgitates the frustrations of the Cameroonians today, he at the same time laments the bad faith and uncivilised manner in which some post-independence nations are run. In stanza three of "Old Gone Days" he says:

*Great the days
Great the old gone days
A word was enough regulations
From the custodian of the land.
A royal messenger's sight
Sent fever down the spin
But to-day
The brainless brat scream
None takes heed because
He stooped to sell their ancestral heritage.*

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*Great the days
Great, the old gone days.*

The speaker compares the old good days and the present. In the first four lines, he presents the values that were upheld before now and in the rest of the lines he portrays how these values have been corrupted. His continues appellation of the old days as “Great” show to what extent he is disgusted by the way post-independence leadership has appropriated western values at the detriment of their own culture and have sold their consciences. He laments the post-independence period in the hands of “brainless brats” metaphorically representing unreasonable and praise singing post-independence leaders who no longer sound relevant to their own people because they have sold their consciences and continue to auction the resources of the land to colonial masters. They have auctioned “*their ancestral heritage*”.

Labang’s poetics is eclectic in subject matter, tone and in his aesthetic renditions of contemporary realities. His subject matters are punctual and there is always a satirical underpinning even in his most zealous depiction of religious believes. In “Easter Night” and “On the Bright Night”, he demonstrates an adoration of a foreign mythology praising the Christian God and celebrating the ritual of Easter. The speaker in these poems seems to be a zealous believer who patiently waits for this time of the year to celebrate the birth of his messiah. Even though he is a great admirer of the Christian messiah, he highlights his disrespect of the Virgin Mary; a figure that is honoured by the Catholics. Instead of the Christian refrain “pray for us now”, the poet repeatedly writes “prey for us now” (75). He seems to suggest that the Mary figure has been used as a tool to prey or control the minds of the people.

Language remains a very important vehicle for a people’s cultural heritage. According to Rene Wellek, as Iyasere (2006:111) put it, “language is a creation of man, thus it is charged with the cultural heritage of a linguistic group”. The issue of language has been a long debate in postcolonial discourse. In Iyasere’s (ibid) opinion, African writers should remodel the English language to reflect the rhythms of their traditional speech patterns, and to carve into perceivable form the imaginative experience of their heritage. Modern African writers like J.P Clark, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, and Alembong have been able to refit and Africanised the English language by drawing upon vernacular speech patterns in order to project rich rhetorical devices like proverbs,

repetition, rural images and metaphors embedded in their oral tradition. In his collection *The Passing Wind*, Alembong (1991) makes great use of rural images in his poem “Married Widows”. In the first stanza he introduces the rural image of a “cock’s crow” which he compares to the daily refrains of the widows, the clicking of their weapons and the voice of reason in their minds which leads them to victory over their oppressor. In stanza six he brings in another rural image, the hooting owl, which he associates with the colonial master to describe the notion of evil. In his poem “Steve Biko and His Fist” Alembong (1991:39) abandons the western style of poetry and presents to us a poem through a life performance of storytelling. The first and second stanzas read:

*There once lived a man
He rose to the height of a baobab,
Not to harvest nuts from the tallest palms
But to clear the place of cobwebs.
And do you know what happened?*

NO TELL US

*Well, it was my father
Who told me the story
Of this man called
Steve Biko*

The poetics of incantation and storytelling are still explored in Alembong’s poetry. In this poem, he transports us to a story telling milieu in which there is a performer and an audience. In narrating the story of Steve Biko, the poet makes use of the metaphor of a divided house to depict the division that exists between the races and tribes in South Africa. He makes use of rural images like bamboo ceiling, the excrement of sick fowl, and soot to paint a clear picture of South Africans, revealing the differences that exist between them. Alembong successfully gives this poem an African colouration by presenting the poem as story-telling performance. His use of rural images and metaphor Africanise the English language.

Today, the globe is being empowered by the English language. Maduagwu (1991:8) sees it as a world language which in a millennium will reduce all other languages to the status of “mere vernaculars”. In Abdhraheem (2010:7), Yakubu notes that “about 75 % of the world’s population have access to the television and majority of the programs that are broadcasted in these channels are in English and mostly advertising the western

Critical overview of mutations in some Contemporary African Poetry culture". In contemporary African poetry, there is always an attempt for writers to move beyond this overpowering English language to exhibit cultural heritage. There are poets like Labang, who, though crave for a return to roots to be inspired by a rich heritage, derive their postmodern experiences from western culture to paint glorifying or despicable situations. Labang allusion to Greek and the Judo-Christian mythology hybridises his poetic experience and this is what makes him very relevant as a contemporary postmodern African poet. In the poem "Unboastful Bard", he talks about the myth of *Sisyphus* and *Icarus* as he praises a humble poet. In "My Country took a Wrong Turn", we find words like Coffee tables, circus stars, demon-crazy, which are typically borrowed from western culture but within this sphere, the poet tries to negotiate his identity. In "Well Aware, Noble Friends", he alludes to the western culture of popping Champaign, as he compares the stupidity of blackmailers to the energy stored in a genius. In "A Canoe of Poems: Mbella Sonne Dipoko" he mentions the Jewish folktale of Sampson and Delilah to represent the resistance that Dipoko puts up against the temptations of the world. Despite this, the poet is strongly defensive of his roots especially on issues related to the values of communal life, justice and equitable distribution of wealth; issues desperately lacking in the postcolonial Cameroonian society.

Even though Alembong (2012) makes use of agrarian images in his collection, *Forest Echoes*, he is still deeply rooted in his culture and his poetic shifts still glorify ethno-cultural values. He makes use of proverbs, folktales, and myths. In "Asumpta", he presents the life of the twenty-first century African woman. He shows the contrast between the modern woman and the traditional woman using images like "corn harvest", "jiggers", and "lice" (38) from which the supposed educated woman disassociates herself. The use of proverbs like: "is a dead goat too heavy for a thief to carry" (39) and "can you find water in a rock" (41) satirise the modern woman who has totally abandoned her traditional duties in favour of western values. According to the speaker, such a woman is unproductive in her society. With the use of song, after every stanza, the poet says:

*She learnt how to cook books
Six harvest following her birth;
Since then she has been cooking books
For twenty more corn harvests. (p.42)*

He continuously repeats the first stanza to emphasise the length of time she has been studying. Alembong's use of rural images, proverbs and repetition gives an African

flavour to his poem. Despite the attempts to negotiate space in the postmodern context of difference and relativity, Alembong and Labang still incorporate postmodern principles in their art like irony, black humour, pastiche, fiction, magical realism and the participation of the readers which make them “glocal”. They are “glocal” because they are very relevant as contemporary poets and not completely dissociated from their roots. Therefore, the conditionalities of globalisation does not neutralise their voices but rather help them to forge an emancipatory verse against mechanisms of dehumanisation put in place by post-independence leadership and advocates of globalisation.

Mutations from oral forms

The advent of colonization and trend in globalization triggered mythopoetic shifts in contemporary African poetry. Colonization as characterised by Fanon as depicted by Ouaiassa (2015) was dehumanising and oppressive and there was therefore the need for a violent praxis for the colonised to forge a common consciousness in the struggle for a national identity. The impact of colonisation was multi-fold and it is at this time that new ideologies, eating habits, dressing habits, systems of leadership and worship were introduced. Africa’s philosophy and way of life was affected. From the influence of European education, European religion, and European system of government emanated a new set of African poets who were caught in a dilemma of either abandoning their roots, embracing the European way of life or blending the two. Okpewho (1985:12) states that:

... when the old African kingdoms became subject to European colonial power, many kings sent their princes to the white man’s country to learn, partly because it seemed such a prestigious thing to do and partly because the future seemed to belong to those trained in the white man’s culture. Among the general population, the youths drifted steadily away from entertainments where they used to derive much of their cultural education. They were taught in some mission schools that following masquerades was pagan worship, and even they gradually began to look upon masquerades as dirty and unfashionable... and those like the oral poets who sustained it for a long time – no longer appealed to the younger generation. What attracted them now was European education and culture...it was from among these African students in Europe and America that many of the first or pioneer African poets emerged.

It is this change in the African way of life and system of education that brought about major shifts in the African poetics as youths drifted away from cultural education in favour European education.

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A key shift that emerged during this period is the shift from oral to written poetry. This shift from oral to written poetry is not limited to the movement from oral performance to written creation but includes aspects like the efficiency of performance and the tradition of immediate criticism that were affected during the transition. The introduction of the European system of education also meant an introduction of a writing system to most African societies. As such, the newly emerged poets were to some extent not only obliged to document their poems in English, but to write in a way that would please the colonial master.

Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo of Madagascar today Malagasy Republic is one of the poets who was strongly influenced by colonial education. Rabearivelo according to Moore (1982:16) was so much attracted to the French culture and literature that he committed suicide in 1937 when he could not travel to France. This act of his does not only expose his Eurocentric attitude but also that of other colonial poets. Rabearivelo believed everything from Europe was good and everything in Africa was bad. Thus, going to France was the only way for him to live a good life. Although these poets had so much admiration for the new medium through which they now transmitted their poetry, not all become praise singers for the white man.

Rabearivelo even at some point in his life, had realized that they (Africans) too had something to offer to the white man. He deviated from Eurocentricism and started reconstructing a new centre for himself by out rightly rejecting the colonial masters. This is portrayed in his poem entitled “she whose eyes”. In this poem, Rabearivelo (1982) presents Malagasy Republic as a motherly figure, which is fertile and very productive. Yet, he warns that if this fertile nation continues to sell its produce to the insatiable coloniser she will end up barren. With the use of imagery, he presents Malagasy as a strong ambitious and beautiful woman that is filled with natural resources. He makes use of the pronoun “she” to make this image explicit and introduces the image of ‘naked sailors’ as symbol of the colonizers. Rabearivelo (ibid: 38) makes use of these images to satirise the act of selling his nation’s resources metaphorically comparing the act to prostitution. As a prostitute loses her savour and is worn out, so will Malagasy Republic become barren if it keeps selling its resources to the colonizer. He states:

*She will put them in little heaps beside a misty gulf
And sell them to naked sailors
Whose tongues have been cut out,*

*Until the rain begins to fall.
Then she will disappear
And we shall only see
Her hair spread by the wind
Like a bunch of seaweed unravelling,
And perhaps some tasteless grains of salt.*

Although captured by the love of a western culture, Rabearivelo did not forget the primary role of a traditional poet which is to reform his community in case it deviates from its cultural values. He blends the western culture of writing poetry with the traditional role of a poet as an artist and critic of the society, to produce poetry that appeals to the newly assimilated youths.

In oral tradition, a song or ritual can only be efficient in performance. The song's ability to arouse emotions is empowered when it is performed and not when it is comprehended by our intellect through reading. Okpewho (1985) thinks that as far as the oral tradition is concerned, one cannot properly understand the songs unless we can direct our minds towards the actual performance of them. The shift from oral to written meant the loss of this rich and effective role of performance in African poetry since Africans started reading rather than performing their poems. The audience of performance has been rapidly transformed into readers who are not directly involved with the performance. It is to reduce the gravity of this loss that later poets decided to make use of features of the traditional verbal arts. Some included the use of their vernacular speech patterns and others Africanized the western style in their use of the English Language.

Alembong in his collection *The Passing Wind* makes an attempt to obtain the effects of performance on the audience in his written poetry by making allusions to African mythology and creating an atmosphere of a live performance through imagery. In his poem "Some Day for Sure", Alembong makes use of an African folktale of the tortoise and the elephant, and the African mythology of the origin of death to depict the predicament of Anglophone Cameroon. He alludes to the folktale of the elephant and the tortoise to portray the strength and the resistance that Anglophones put up against their oppressor. Using the elephant as a symbol of the oppressor, and the tortoise as a symbol of the oppressed, Alembong highlights how desperate the situation of the oppressed is, but also motivates the oppressed by attributing the qualities of the tortoise as a hard nut to crack. Again, through this image, Alembong brings to light the concept of the centre/

Critical overview of mutations in some Contemporary African Poetry margin placing the Anglophone at the periphery and the francophone at the centre, yet he depicts the former as strong and capable of asserting their identity. He further depicts the irony that exists in the myth of the origin of death and this delineation gives hope to the Anglophone Cameroonian. As Alembong (1991:20) embeds the folktale and the myth in his poem, he enables the reader to enjoy an iota of live performance as he/she sinks into the mind and recalls a performance of the tales. He captures this in the “Some Day For Sure” as:

*Oh, how snake-like the trembling cry
Twines the small of my brains!
The feeble cords of that voice
Spell the agonies of the Tortoise
Down trodden by the Elephant.
But for how long will this last
When the Tortoise's shell is hard to crack?
The journey may be too long and hard,
But was the chameleon not the first
To drum the long awaited message of death?
Where was Dog that thought
The race was his?*

Alembong's use of typical African proverbs and idioms like “the tortoise shell is hard to crack” does not only depict the African reality but also brings the reader closer to this reality. These features of oral performance give the reader the impression of participating in an actual oral performance.

According to Okpewho (1985: 5) before the introduction of the European style of poetry in African societies, professional oral poets like the *kwadwumfo* of Ghana, the *umusizi* of Rwanda and the *griots* of western Africa chanted a particular type of poetry. The performances of these poets were often limited to the chanting of praises to the king or to a powerful man in the community. In performance they recounted important events surrounding the royal family. With the introduction of the European education, the newly emerged African poets simply imitated European models and poetic forms. They wrote poetry that has been termed by Okpewho (1985:14) as “immature and politically safe”. Revolutionary tendencies emerged in African poetry when those who had studied in Europe discovered that the myth of superiority that had been embedded in them by the white man was false. From this point, they wrote more radical verses depicting the rejection and the injustice they suffered from the Europeans. Rabearivelo revolted by substituting the reality of a colonized civilisation with his own images. Through these

images, he created an isolated world full of melancholy and bitter-sweet beauty. In his poem “You there”, Rabearivelo (1982:38) examines the similarity between the colonizer and the colonized. As the colonized, the colonizer is made out of mud. He presents the image of nakedness to express how ignorant the colonizer is to the African culture. An excerpt of the poem reads:

*You there
standing naked!
You are mud and remember it –
actually you’re the child of this parturient dark
who feeds on the milkstuff of the moon,
then slowly grows into a trunk
above this low wall the dreams of flowers crawl over
and the smell of summer at a lull.*

Rabearivelo continuously refuses to approve this myth of white superiority. He presents the coloniser in the image of nakedness to expose the weaknesses of the supposed flawless coloniser. He reverses the binaries as stipulated by the west. He goes ahead to provincialize Europe by creating a centre for Africa that is like that of the colonial master. He states that: “you are mud and remember it, actually you’re the child of this parturient dark” (p.38). He draws similarities between him and the coloniser by highlighting that they are all children of this dark world. In his poem the “Invisible Rat”, he presents them as mere thieves who steal from the owner at night. The image of the rat to him symbolizes the colonial master whom he ridicules as exploitative.

The African audience has also evolved from colonisation to post-independence. The mutation has created hybrid audience and the advent of globalisation after the first and second world wars, the consumerist system influenced even the way the African perceived him/herself in the global economy. In Okpewho (1985:12) words, “many of African poets saw the European culture as naturally superior and thus they turned to be apologetic about their own race/culture”. This also implied the loss of confidence as some African poets found themselves alienated from their cultural heritage while valorising Eurocentric literary poetics. Labang (2011:79), in *My Country Took a Wrong Turn*, makes allusions to Christianity not as a corrupter of African tradition, but as a way of life of the African people. He entitles one of his poems “Easter Night” in which he glorifies Jesus Christ as he subdues death and is given supreme power to reign and judge from heaven. The last stanza of the poem reads:

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*This night
Admits hovering heavenly hymn
Is removed deaths dreadful sting
Now, He roles from heaven
To him is judgement given.*

Labang celebrates the death of Christ as a symbol of man's salvation. His capitalisation of the pronoun "He" portrays the degree of honour he renders to the God of the Jews. In no line in the poem does he mention Jesus Christ or Jews but the postmodern audience he speaks to understands and has assimilated this religion. "Easter Night" stands as a christian symbol of salvation. In his poem "Hope-Fools", Labang refers to Jewish names like Paul, Saul, and John who are symbolic martyr to highlight the loss of hope in a nation saturated with fools. Unlike his predecessors, Labang makes great use of Greek mythology than African mythology. In his poem "Unboastful Bard" he alludes to the myth of Sisyphus and Icarus to show the unending pain that the persona goes through. This use of foreign mythology places African culture/ mythology in an endangered position.

Conclusion

Contemporary African poetry is diverse and even though poets wrestle with encroaching effects of globalisation, poets like Alembong and Labang as illustrated on this paper articulate the impact of colonial hegemony which constantly alienates the masses from enjoying their cultural heritage. The conditionalities of globalisation does not neutralise their voices but rather help them to forge an emancipatory verse against mechanisms of dehumanisation put in place by post-independence leadership and advocates of globalisation. While they incorporate postmodern principles in their art like irony, black humour, pastiche, fiction, magical realism, they still do not dissociate from their roots. Alembong makes use of typical African proverbs and idioms which reveal the oral and participatory features that characterise the African cultural heritage. Even though Rabearivelo's early poetry was more Eurocentric, in his later poetry however, he reconstructed a new centre for himself as he out rightly rejected the colonial masters. In this later poetry, he warns his nationals against the continuous auctioning of its produce to the insatiable colonizer who will render them barren. Therefore, the poetics of contemporary postmodern African poets is complex and reflects mutations and struggles at different stages. From the colonial to the post-independence period, there is a divided

consciousness dominated by the dehumanising effect of globalisation. At another level, the contemporary postmodern African poet has gained consciousness of the past which is characterised more in values that have been destroyed in the postmodern period. While they castigate these realities with a poetics that is grotesques and eclectic, they remain emancipatory as they evoke past glories.

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