

POST – COLONIALITY, TEXTUALITY, AND MEANING IN KOFI AWOONOR’S POETICS: *MORE MESSAGES* AS PARADIGM

OLUSEGUN OLU-OSAYOMI¹, BABATUNDE ADEBUA², KEHINDE IKUELOGBON³
and SHUAIB MURITALA⁴

^{1, 2, 3, 4} Department of Languages & Literary Studies, School of Education and Humanities, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State, Nigeria.

¹Email: osayomio@babcock.edu.ng; segunoosa@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0000-0001-6754-4895

Abstract

In his poetic engagement spanning almost fifty years, Kofi Awoonor has consistently interrogated postcolonial African condition. Consequently, postcolonial disillusionment and disappointment are subjects that have preoccupied many African writers and are thus extended in Kofi Awoonor’s *More Messages*. Awoonor reveals that one of the problems in postcolonial African society is the sense of intellectual inadequacy inculcated into the African colonial elite, the chicanery of politics and the betrayal or neglect of poetic heritage. This paper examines Awoonor’s *More Messages* with the purpose of revealing the predicaments of an emerging postcolonial society so prodigiously blessed by benevolent nature and yet remains so unconsciously accursed by a malevolent and decadent rule. The paper purports this type of leadership in several African societies as a consequence of colonialism and shows how the poem encapsulates the contradictions and frustrations in contemporary Ghana. It highlights various means by which Awoonor mobilizes his art and etches it on a visionary pedestal as a revolutionary imperative for the social transformation of society and the re-humanization of the people. In addition, attention is drawn to the way Awoonor usefully demonstrates the current eagerness among West African writers to sink a taproot into the soil of their own artistic traditions.

Keywords: Awoonor, *More Messages*, Poetry, Post-Colonialism, Textuality

Radical: (1) of or going to the root or origin; fundamental

(2) thorough going or extreme, esp. as regards change from accepted or traditional forms; favouring drastic political, economic or social reforms: *radical ideas; radical and anarchistic ideologues.*

Random House Dictionary of the English Language

[2nd Edition Unabridged]

INTRODUCTION

Humanism envisages a relatively stress-free society. Since the beginning of time, according to Onuora Ben Nweke (2009: 381-382), men have always worked towards bringing about harmonious human relationship: and this explains the efforts and actions of all well-intentioned individuals in every society. Apparently, creative artists deserve a place in this effort to humanize society by using their works as tools for advocating humanistic development. In this vein, all works of art can be said to signify or reflect the relationship between man and his society. As Chinua Achebe (1975:19) avers, “art is and was always in the service of man. According to Ngugi wa Thiong’O, in *The Writer and His Past* (1999:131), “of great import to

the poets and the novelists is the evolution of human culture through the ages, society in motion through time and space". From the foregoing, it is evident that works of literature by Africans from its beginning to the present have always reflected different aspects of the continent's realities and the experiences of its people.

Poetry in African literature should not be a distinctive form for it is a mode that operates within all the other forms of literature in Africa. But it asserts not just "a specificity of mode but also of cultural value lying at the centre of Africa's literary, historical, philosophical and religious existence. Poetry in Africa is, therefore, of aesthetic, religious, and/or social mode (Dasylva and Jegede 2005:99). In Africa, what can be called "current" or "present" poetry is a hybrid of poetic forms that combines both indigenous and foreign techniques. It is commonly referred to as "modern" according to Dasylva and Jegede (2005:133) for reasons of its association with literate cultures and owing to the difference between it (the written) and the oral poetry in Nigeria. Both forms of poetry thrive well in contemporary African poetry. However, both depend on each other for their existence and survival. Essentially, an authentic African poetry, is that which draws its "afflatus, sensibility and vision as well as themes, imagery, tropes and entire worldview from the quotidian realities and chequered experiences of African's historical continuum" (Tsaaior, 2005:116). The veritable substratum or provenance of this poetry was the oral traditional poetic forms of African songs, proverbs, legends, myths, and folktales. It is true that the period of the existence of Modern African poetry is not long enough because of the ever-changing face of the African polity as it has become necessary for at least a socio-political ramification, especially as it defines the changes in the informing scheme of values.

Thus, a close study of the growth of Modern African poetry will produce two distinctive features. Recently, scholars of Modern African poetry, according to Dasylva and Jegede (2005: 101) have started making reference to second-generation poets. This implies, though wrongly, that a new phase of Modern African poetry has begun. Wrongly also because if it is assumed that the so-called new generation poets include poets like Soyinka, Clark, Awoonor, Atukwe Okai, Taban Liyong and Dennis Brutus and include such relatively recent poets like Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare, Kofi Anyidoho, Odia Ofiemun, Harry Garuba and Tati-Loutard, then what happens, Dasylva and Jegede (2005:103) further asks, to the relevant writings of the former, and where do we include the new and younger writers like Olu Oguibe, Afam Akeh, Tijah sallah, Onookome Okome and Kate Bate Bisong?. To exemplify further, Soyinka's collection of poems *Mandela's Earth* (1989) first published in *TheGuardian* on 15 September 1985 remains one of the most relevant and committed to Africa's contemporary problems and poetic demand, matched in stature only by Osundare's *Midlife* (1993). How then can we exclude Soyinka from the generation? What is, however true, remarkable and significant about Dasylva's diatribe against periodization is that there is no age barrier to periodic groupings and assessment of literary writers. The yardstick for periodization in African literary history ought to, for now, be derived from the changing nature of poetry written by modern African poets since pioneer poets like Dennis Osadebay, Augustine Kunene, David Rubadiri, Jean-Joseph Rabearivelo, Gabriel Okara and others' first versified their colonial, anti-colonial and other romantic visions between the 30s and 50s of the 20th century.

The fundamentality of Dasylyva and Jegede's argument consists in the fact that in terms of classification, it is obvious that Modern African poetry of the pioneers of the early poetry of poets like Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Kofi Awoonor, Lenrie Peters, Okot p' Bitek, Tchicaya U Tam'si, Dennis Brutus, Mazisi Kunene, Arthur Nortje, Keorapets Kgositsele, etc; as well as the Negritude poetry of Sedar Senghor, David Diop, Birgo Diop, and others belong to a period which may be described as *The Narcissistic Period* of African poetry. (This period may be named after Senghor, the late Senegalese president, who fathered Negritude philosophy and poetry in Africa and brought a clear vision of African aesthetics and values to African poetry). The choice of this name, according to Dasylyva (2005:103), is informed by the persistent theme of cultural alienation, loss of identity, "Tigritudeness", and "Negritudeness" in the poems written between 1930 when Senghor wrote his first volume of poems, *Chants d'ombre* (1945), and 1967 when Soyinka, Okot p'Bitek, and Dennis Brutus had come with more self-conscious socio-post-colonial poetry.

Negritude is a cultural and intellectual philosophy devoted to the assertion and affirmation of black culture and civilization and the liberation of the black world from the cultural stranglehold and hegemony of the West. Other arch apostles of Negritude were Aime Cesaire and Leon Damas. Together with other faithful adherents in the black world, according to Tsaaior (2006:326) they advocated a puritanical cultural attitude, an Afrocentric vision concerning black culture, especially in the face of a corrupting and predatory western culture. Senghor (1965:99) elucidates the philosophy and its assumption as:

...the total sum of the values of the civilization of the African world. It is not racialism, it is culture, it is the embracing and domination of a situation in order to apprehend the cosmos by the process of coming to terms with it.

Other Negritudinal postulations of Senghor can be found in *The Mission of the Poet* (1966) and *The Foundation of "African-ite" or "Negritude"* (1971) in which he states the intrinsic fundamental disjuncture in the African and European sensibilities in the now popular "Reason is European while emotion, intuition and rhythm, African", constructing a binary racialist and culturalist world. Nevertheless, the succeeding period after the Narcissus period, according to Dasylyva and Jegede (2005:103) started evolving from 1976 onwards when most Modern African poets, especially those of them who first came to poetry through the influences of Euro-modernist poets like W.B Yeasts, Gerald Manley Hopkins, T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound finally developed new African forms of poetry through a recourse to African oral resources. More significantly is the intense poetic and visionary focus by these Modern African poets on socio-political and socio-economic changes in Africa. It suddenly became anachronistic to lament historic Africa or to talk about cultural alienation. All the poets, whether old or new or emergent, Dasylyva and Jegede (2005:12) further contends, have enough to poetize about from the flux of events going on in independent Africa including the apartheid South Africa.

It is this later light that the name of Dennis Brutus as an African poet in the context of African's eternal problem of oppression, anarchy and the deprivation of human rights will remain immortalized. His poetry of hope aligned with a fine aesthetic coordination of symbols and images of pain, death and life has made his works to succeed the very ills of apartheid his

poetry had set out to decry. It is interesting to note that the theme of Clark's *Casualties* published in issue of *BlackOrpheus* (No. 2 vol.1), UTam'si's *Le Ventre* (The Belly) published in 1964 in *Presence Africaine* Okot p' Bitek's *Songs of Prisoner and Malay* published in 1971 and Soyinka's *Idanre and Other Poems* published in 1967 all deal with, according to Dasylyva (2005:104), the theme of disenchantment, turbulence, prevalent themes and motifs in the poetry of younger generation poets like Tanure Ojaide (*Children of Iroko*, 1973), Odia Ofeimim (*ThePoetLied*, 1982), Harry Garuba (*Shadow and Dream*, 1983), Niyi Osundare (*SongsoftheMarketplace*1983, and *VillageVoices*, 1984), J.P. Tati Loutard (*La Tradition du Song*,: 1987) Kofi Anyidoho (*TheEarthChild*, 1985), Okimba Launko's (*MintedCoins*, 1987) among others. These West African poets, focused their lenses on the rich cultural heritage of their people such as in Awoonor's *Rediscovery*(1964) and Kwesi Brew in poems like "The Dirge", "The Dry Season", "The Sea Eats Our Lands", etc; though the poetics of some of the poets was given to metaphysical and philosophical abstractions.

African Religions, Culture and the Modern World

Despite the fact that Christianity is a religion of foreign provenance in Africa, its influence and impact in Africa to this day has been impressive. Owing to its manner of introduction, and as a result of its antagonistic and prejudicial tendencies towards African traditional religion, according to Okon (2001:382) the Christian religion provoked a crisis within its earliest African adherents. It estranges the natives from their indigenous religion and "planting" in them the imported Christian religion. This crisis or dilemma has been adequately depicted in African literature. In poetry perhaps, this depiction is best exemplified in the poetry of Christopher Okigbo, Kofi Awoonor and M.J.C Echeruo. These poets have shown more intense awareness of religion. Wole Soyinka who is their natural fourth according to Nwoga, (1978:117) demands different treatment as the depth of his immersion in Yoruba mythology is of a different kind from the theme this paper wishes to pursue. With Awoonor, the paper thinks, one will get a deeper picture by considering his impressed opinion within the total experience.

Culture has various definitions. Edward Sapir (1921:207 and 319) defines culture as "what a society does and thinks", it is the "socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives". Therefore, it may be suggested or inferred that it is possible to identify the cultures of any society by observing the practices and beliefs of members of the given society. This is so because such members can be said to have adapted the practices and beliefs of their society so long as they have not been judged to be "outcasts"; respect for the social norms should be considered as the rule for any human being, no matter how independent he/she may be of other members of his/her society (Kwofie, 2010:2). Ward H. Goudenough (1964:34) conception of culture justifies the foregoing interpretation of Sapir's view as consisting of "whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to members and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves". Properly defined, then, culture encompasses the intellectual or cognitive, the psychological, the material, the creative and the imaginative aspects of life.

Broadly speaking, African literature is, the product of the individual and collective experiences of Africans. It can legitimately be regarded, according to Kwofie (2010:3) as a reflection of

what Africans have done, thought and felt. It is to an extent the mirror of the practices and beliefs that determine or influence the behaviour or mode of life of Africans. Kwofie further states that geography and history may, accordingly, be seen as important determinants of culture. This is the case because the mode of life or behaviour of a people is inevitably conditioned by the environment and it takes place in space and time. To Donatus Nwoga (1978:122), Kofi Awoonor is clearer in his rejection of Christianity, and this arises, I think from his cultural nationalism, from seeing Christianity as an alien imposition to be rejected with alien ways of life. What emerges most forcefully is a sense of loss. In an interview, with Jane Wilkinson, Awoonor summarizes his burning patriotic ideals and themes as follows:

I have gone through the trauma of growth, anger, love, and the innocence and nostalgia of my personal dreams. These are beyond me now. Not anger, or love, but the sensibility that shaped and saw then as communal acts of which I am only the articulator. Now, I write out my renewed anguish about the crippling distresses of my country and my people, of death by guns, of death by disease and malnutrition, of the death of friends whose lives held so much promise, of the chicanery of politics and the men who indulge in them, of the misery of the poor in the midst of plenty. I still cling on to the hope for man, African man, black, silent and vulnerable (*Talking with African Writers: Interviews by Jane Wilkinson*, 1999:23).

Kofi Awoonor is a man of many parts. He is a poet, playwright, novelist, film producer, song writer, stage director, theatre producer, literary scholar, and social critic. Awoonor happens to have received most of his education outside Ghana—that is in the United States, and apart from that, he had always travelled wide; more so when he was an Ambassador in various countries. For this reason, therefore, he has been exposed fully to the paraphernalia of European culture and tradition and therefore has a sense of loss of contact with his cultural traditions. As a result of this, therefore, he attempts to describe the plight of the younger generation who have been educated away from the norms of their fatherland. In spite of the fact that Awoonor has received enough of Western civilization, Awoonor feels greatly committed to his culture and tradition and at the Freetown conference in April 1963, he confirmed the importance of tradition in African literature. It is because of this great commitment to his ancestral home that makes him at times disillusioned and completely depressed in some of his poems while in the others, he shows his nostalgia for his fatherland and wishes to come home in order to share such cultural values with his people. Kofi Awoonor further re-confirms the importance of tradition in post-colonial Africa. This paper uses the tool of postcolonial discourse to examine *More Messages* with the purpose of revealing the plight of the younger generation who have been educated away from the norms of their fatherland and their cultural values. The paper purports that this type of lost of contact with cultural traditions which is so pervasive in several African societies, is a direct consequence of colonialism. It proceeds to demonstrate how *More Messages* encapsulates this disillusionment and depression in contemporary Ghana.

“Post Coloniality”: Its Meaning and Dimensions

This paper has to determine what Post coloniality means in this study before delving into examining how Kofi Awoonor’s *MoreMessages* addresses post-colonial issues. This is imperative because of the various meanings and dimensions the word post-colonial has assumed in recent times and at different fora. It also has to establish the aspect of post-colonial discourse the paper intend to pursue as a result of the myriad of issues that always result from “post coloniality as a subject”. The empire-building project of European nations in peripheral spaces, according to James Tar Tsaaior (2009:42) provides the animating and galvanizing force for discourses surrounding the colonial and the post-colonial. European colonization of the African continent was comprehensively mapped and executed with the Berlin conference of 1884-1885 during which the scramble for and partition of Africa among the dominant European imperial powers was officially ratified. Thus, temporally, “the post-colonial refers to the historical moment after colonialism when colonized nations of Africa and elsewhere won political autonomy but is not limited to it. It gestures back to the actual moment of the colonial encounter” (Bill Ashcroft, *etal*, 1995).

Essentially, this is the position of Barbara Goff (2006:114) who uses the terms colonial and post-colonial” in a way that has become fairly received so that colonial refers to the actual historical period of occupation while post-colonial is temporally later”. However, she insists that the post-colonial also casts itself back to “various kinds of critical thought about and dissent from the ideologies that accompanied colonialism”. This argument of Goff, according to Tsaaior (2009:42) corroborates the temporal dilation of postcoloniality to include the time before the independence of the colonized territories suggesting a contiguity of historical experience. For while the post-colonial refers to the historical moment after the actual experience, the colonial period is complicit in and crucial to the understanding of the former. Trivedi (1999:269-272) responds to the question, “Who is the post-colonial?” by asserting that “the post-colonial is an English-speaking theoretically inclined westward-looking writer or academic of (or more likely from) a former colony which ‘gained independence’ from Britain during the last half-century”. This characterization of the post-colonial individual by Trivedi is rather too restrictive and reductionist. It refers only to the academic, thus making it too elitist. Similarly, it screens out other European imperial powers like France, Portugal, Belgium, Spain, etc. and includes only Britain. “Common wealth” would have been a better term for this kind of characterization by Trivedi (Tsaaior, 2009:43).

There is no doubt that the terrain of post-colonial studies, as conceptualizes by Mary Louise Pratt (1992, 2004) constitutes a contested and contestable site as it is defined by controversial perspectives. It is refracted as a contact zone of hybrid cultures, values, and worldviews where the colonial and the post-colonial enact their energies in asymmetrical relations of putative domination and subordination. Even the term “hybridity” is not a settled one in post-colonial discourses. This has occasioned the need for specificity in post-colonial studies and negotiating it, “one recent trend being not so much to develop post-colonial theory in general as to focus on reading individual texts, and rely on those readings to make their contribution to develop theory more widely (P. Hallward, 2001). Gayatri Spivak (2003), in a similar perspective has

also called for more specificity, careful readings, and the awareness of informing local cultures in postcolonial and comparative studies against the general approach which obfuscates rather than illuminates. In culmination of the argument about the paramount need for specific attention paid to particular cultures in postcolonial studies for the understanding of the full range and complex of meanings embedded in post-colonial texts, Felix Budelman 2006:107) observes:

(t)he long-standing concern about lack of specificity in post-colonial literary criticism. The ‘post-colonial... is a concept that goes beyond particular spaces, moments and situations. There has been increasing dissatisfaction with the blandness of some post-colonial literary criticism that is not sufficiently attuned to the specifics of cultures, literatures and texts.

The post-coloniality of a texts, according to Tsaaio (2009:43) inheres, among other things, in the complex of ideas and the aggregation of epistemologies involved in the fabrication of nation-hood and the challenges concomitant with the project. The challenges inherited from the colonial experience by the so-called emergent new nations in Africa and elsewhere in the postcolonial world have cast their shadows diachronically and continue to exert ramified implications and impacts on efforts by the post-colonial nations to come to terms with the realities of forging coherent nationhood. Tsaaio further states it is the sum-total of these issues, among which are the perpetuation of imperial domination through subterranean influences, political corruption, and failure of leadership by the indigenous elite that constitute the fulcrum of post-colonial discourses in texts.

Lois Tyson (1999) argues that ex-colonials often were left a psychological inheritance of negative self-image and alienation from their own indigenous cultures, which had been forbidden or devalued for so long that much pre-colonial culture has been lost. As Tyson posits: “the colonizers believed that only their own Anglo-European culture was civilized, sophisticated: or ... ‘Metropolitan’ (1999:366). Consequently, native people were defined as savage, backward and even undeveloped. So, while the colonizers saw themselves at the “centre” of the world, the colonized were at the “margin”. These colonized subjects were taught to believe in British superiority and their own inferiority. Many of these individuals, as Tyson puts it, tried to imitate the colonizers as much as possible in dress, speech, behavior and lifestyle; a phenomenon which post-colonial critics refer to as “mimicry”. This feeling of being caught between cultures, of belonging to neither rather than to both, of finding oneself arrested in a psychological limbo is what Homi Bhabha refers to as “unhomeliness”. The problem that produces an unstable sense of self, according to Tyson (1999:36) results not merely from some individual psychological disorder, but from the trauma of the cultural displacement with which one lives”.

There is a sense in which Kofi Awoonor’s poetics is itself eminently post-colonial. This is because of the shades or webs of meanings it yields or incarnates as well as the peculiar issues it relentlessly grapples with and participates in. As a result of the above, the paper contends that the problems of loss of contact with cultural traditions of the African political intellectual elite as represented in Kofi Awoonor’s *MoreMessages* are consequences of the internalization

of inferiority in the face of learned Western culture, which has been wrongly appropriated, imbibed, or learnt, and therefore is improperly or inappropriately applied. The paper asserts that all those who pass through the western process of socialization, according to Onuora Ben Nweke (2009:386) suffer from the intractable problem of “double consciousness” and unhomeliness. As a result, the cultural ideal, which the African elite should aspire to, and take their individual societies to, suffer a grim setback. The elite ends up cultivating what is, at best, an *anti-culture*, instead of working towards a process of human perfection which culture represents. Culture relates to the beliefs and values people have about their society, social change and the ideal society they seek and desire. Then, is it possible that the positive values or the best forms of culture are those that can be learnt from America or Europe? Rosamund Billington *et al* (1991:7) agree with this point when they observe:

the idea that humankind should seek perfection was not new, but European, British and American writers in the 18th and early 19th centuries connected this search with the new possibilities and problems of industrialism. In this context, the concept of culture was equated with the idea of civilization. Underlying this equation as we have seen was some notion that societies evolved from less civilized forms and Western industrialized societies were closer to the top of this evolutionary scale—a notion stated quite explicitly by early writers on primitive societies.

Significantly, therefore, this argument crystallises why subjects of postcolonial societies seek to be seen as “civilized” by trying to appropriate to the best of their ability “the behavioural and attitudinal traits of the so-called civilized subjects or races”. The same desire exposes their inferiority complex, which drives their actions as leaders or subjects. This concept of equating culture with the idea of civilization foregrounds Chinua Achebe’s contention in his “Colonialist Criticism” in which he states that these “educated natives” actually do not succeed in acquiring any education, and consequently constitute themselves into problems for their people:

His abortive effort at education and culture through leaving him totally unredeemed and unregenerated had nonetheless done something to him. It had deprived him of his links with his own people whom he no longer even understands and who certainly wanted none of his dissatisfaction or pretensions (John Storey, 1994:58).

The paper shall proceed to look at Awoonor’s *MoreMessages* as a representative refraction of the postcolonial state and its texts of meanings. *MoreMessages* is one of the poems in “The Promise of Hope: New and Selected Poems, 1964-2013”, a beautifully edited collection of some of Kofi Awoonor’s most arresting work spanning almost fifty years.

**Post-Colonial Issues, the Salience of African Culture and Traditions and Awoonor's
*More Messages***

More Messages

I can go placing faggots on those fires
fanning the innerwards: I can sneak
along like the crawling beetles
Seeking through dust and dirt
5 the lonely miracle of redemption
I will sit by the roadside, breaking
the palm kernel, eating of the white
with the visiting mice
throwing the chaff to the easternly wind
10 But will they let me go?
to nowhere where I can see
the sunlight fall on the green waters
and the ferrymen hurrying home
across with their heavy cargoes
15 of man flesh, child flesh and woman flesh
To sit where I can gather my thoughts
and ask what I have done so long
why could I not eat with elders
though my hands are washed clean in the salt river,
20 where they leave the paddles in the boat
to be carried by children of strangers.
Coming to that land that day
where sand strip covers childhood
and youth's memory: there was no storm
25 that did not speak to us
divining the end of our journey
promising that our palms shall prosper

and we shall not die by thirst
in the same land; where our fathers
30 lingered, ate from land and sea
drank the sweet waters of the ancient palms.
Will they let me go
and pick the curing herbs behind fallen huts
to make our cure their cure?
35 is the guile of the forest animal
the lingering desire of every marksman
returning from futile hunt
beaten by desert rain and thistles
on his shoulder the limpid have
40 and empty guns?
to hoe my own fields, plant my own corn
to wait for rain to come?
The sacrifice of years awaiting
unlit fires, who to knowledge
45 prepare the feast of the resurrection
On many rivers' shores moved
the benevolent band, awaiting
that season
The dawn second cock
50 Split by the ears of rumour,
time to wash the new corn
ready for the grinders
light the family fire of flimsy twigs, prepare
the broom to sweep unto dunghills
55 Crimes that my fathers atoned for
Some day, by some rivers!
We sang that song before

- in the thousand seasons of good harvest
and full fish following our father's footprints
60 on the long shores
They heard the thunder from the great river's waves
as the road crossing snakes brood on rotten eggs
that our feet should move to make room
for an empty empty valley.
65 What happened with cries heard under trees
that many households are empty?
The powder house is fallen
So we cannot make war
For when the bulls are alive
70 could the cows perform weed.

-Kofi Awoonor

Kofi Awoonor (formerly G. Awoonor Williams) got his inspiration from, and turned his enthusiasm to, the abundant material to be found in indigenous sources having been convinced that exciting creativity in the present can only be achieved by returning to cultural roots lying deep in the past, hence he says:

I should take my poetic sensibility... from the tradition that feeds my language”
and he also wants to sing, “the new chorus of our forgotten comrades, and the
halleluyahs of our second selves (Awoonor, *Rediscovery*).

In spite of being educated abroad and having served as a diplomat to the Ghanaian government according to Roy Omoni (1981:43-44). Kofi Awoonor is not alienated from his cultural background. He has always based most of his poems on imagery from oral vernacular poetry so as to give added effect to the feeling of loss. It is this very tradition that he turns to, in most of his poems. No wonder he said at the Freetown Conference in April 1963 that, “there is a wealth of material of tremendous degree of coherent, depth and interest in traditional practice possessing its own linguistic strength which will be of immense interest to the student of African Literature”. ‘Betray or neglect your poetic heritage’, he says, and the result will be poor art’ – with this background therefore, *More Messages* is a poetic specimen whose thematic engagement is on the celebration of the joy and inspiration of a renewed encounter with the ancestral tradition. Having travelled far to the Eastern bloc-Soviet Union, Cuba, Indonesia and China, the poet feels nostalgic for his ancestral home and wants to come back and be closer to his ancestors, whom he feels, he has betrayed by being away from them. Awoonor’s pre-occupation in *More Messages* is to describe the plight of the younger generation who have been educated away from the norms of their father or a nostalgic feeling of a die-hard traditionalist

who, being away from his ancestral home, wishes to come back to be once again, a part of that community. He has received constant ‘messages’ from his people at home to come back without any further delay; but in doing so, he needs some purification to enable him embark on his return-journey.

This realization makes Awonoor decide to get himself purified by way of self-torture either by continuously ‘placing faggots on those fires’ (line 1) or ‘seeking through dust and dirt’ (line 4) like ordinary insects or ‘sitting and breaking palm kernel’ by the road side like a madman, throwing away its chaff to the wind while eating and sharing the edible part with mice. This would be the best way of atonement (This is a way of getting a complete reunion with Nature) As if in a trance, the poet according to Omoni (1981: 25) wonders if having done this, he would be allowed to go back to his ancestral home in the Keta district of Ghana (which forms the scene of his early works) where life is made more abundant. He becomes completely rapt up in nostalgia for his native place where “ferryman” (Lines 13-14) convey the villagers and their cargoes from one side of the river to the other, having left their paddles to be taken home by the ‘children of strangers’ (lines 20-21) who are normally given menial jobs. He remembers his native land on which his ancestors had searched for their daily bread and drunk the sweet palm wine of the palms; a place where hunters return happily and light-heartedly even though they kill nothing from their hunting expedition, but come back with unloaded guns; a place where the people are near Nature-taking delight in collecting herbs for curing diseases, or hoeing and planting-hoping against hope for the arrival of rain after drought; a place where people celebrate with fanfare, the seasonal arrival of another harvest long awaited and prepared for by all the villagers (Lines 40-54). But he still doubts and wonders continuously if he will ever have the opportunity of going back to his native land which promised him when young, that he will never perish or suffer but prosper after all his journeys-why could I not eat with elders though my hands are washed in the salt river, he asks. Why this apparent distance between him and his ancestors? But he regrets, however that “the powder house has fallen” (lines 66-67) and the possibility of making war (literary war) in order to establish firmly his tradition, becomes remote. Rigid adherence to traditional and cultural norms cannot probably be preached and made effective by the relentless efforts of only one man!

The first 9 lines enumerates three types of self-inflicted punishment which would be needed for such a journey to show a sort of penance and complete repentance before the ancestors- a way of getting himself purified. Lines 11-60 talks about the activities of the people-the poet’s ancestors and his people with whom he wants to be closer and be identified- a people living on a land that is so natural and congenial to humanity. Within the lines, the poet has his doubts which are simply put in rhetorical questions in lines 10,19 and 20, 32-42 etc. Much as Awonoor would wish to adhere to the traditional African past, he still has some fears which are exemplified in lines 60-70- the last ten lines. Awonoor feels completely home-sick in *More Message*. He remembers the original place of his birth no matter the gravity of the enjoyment accorded him outside his country; and for this, he wishes to come home. It is valid to assert that Awonoor feels that his being away from his ancestral home has made him completely alienated from his cultural heritage which, according to him, is a sin for which he must atone. The poet assumes that after the atonement, he could then go back to his fatherland even though

still doubts if his ancestors would permit him to do so without being punished further-but this notwithstanding, Awoonor feels nostalgic for his place of origin and wants to go back immediately in order to get re-united with his hometown from which he has been away for some time now. His nostalgia makes him remember his childhood days in his native land where:

Sunlight fall on the green waters and the ferrymen hurrying home across with
their heavy cargoes of man flesh, child flesh and woman flesh (Lines 12 – 15).

The poet does not forget this natural situation of his native land. Similarly, in the poem, the activities of the ferrymen along the Volta River in Ghana is reminiscent here. Also, apart from the fact that these ferrymen transport people and their cargoes in their boats to and fro the river, they also leave their paddles in their boats to be carried by small children who play on sandy planes of the bank. All these make the poet more nostalgic for his native land and wishes to go back so that he might be able to ‘eat with elders’ – the original source of his inspiration, and who have also ‘lingered, ate from land and sea’; and also ‘drank the sweet waters’ (lines 30-31) of his native land to which he wants to return. Awoonor feels so much desirous to go back to his ancestral place of birth that breeds typical and courageous African marksmen and hunters, natural and devoted farmers. Omoni (1981:61) observes that he feels that there is no other place that can be as good as his place of origin where yearly sacrifices, traditional rites and customs, the feast of resurrection, the washing of new corn, the communal singing and society’s co-operative harvesting – all of which – promote oneness and peaceful co-existence among his people and serve as a pride to him. For all these elements of joy and sense of pride for his native land, he feels home-sick to go back to his native land for after all, it is ‘when the bulls are alive, could the cows perform weed’ (Lines 69-70).

Also, in *More Messages*, Awoonor easily realizes the fact that he has sinned against his ‘elders’ – this time, not the living, but the dead whose presence he feels and as a result of which he has to undergo some process of purification, complete soberness and absolute resignation to his ancestors. Even after this self-purification, he still nurses some fear if these ‘elders’ would forgive him completely and allow him to go back home as a penitent child before his parents. It is the conviction of this paper that the poet fully realizes that no amount of satisfaction given him, he would never be happy unless given the opportunity to ‘eat with elders’ because his “hands are washed clean in the salt river”. Awoonor would very well love to associate himself with those fathers the spirits of his ancestors who: Lingered, ate from land and sea drank the sweet waters of the ancient palms (Lines 30-31). Here, Omoni (1981:63) contends that the poet believes that no amount of joy Western Education could bring, it would not be complete without blending it with “our tradition because a complete rejection of our elders or our cultural heritage and traditional beliefs in our ancestral fathers, would surely make ‘the power house fall’”, hence:

So we cannot make war
For when the bulls are alive
could the cows perform weed (Lines 68-70).

The foregoing shows that the living is always incapacitated without the help of the Dead – the living are always protected by the spirits of the dead.

CONCLUSION

It is convenient to conclude that this paper carries out an exploration of Kofi Awoonor's *MoreMessages* by dwelling on the nature of post-colonial African condition in the specific context of post-coloniality, textuality, and meaning. It is revealed that one of the problems in post-colonial African society is the sense of intellectual inadequacy inculcated into the African colonial elite, the chicanery of politics and the betrayal or neglect of poetic heritage.

Also, the discussion has revealed the issue of the predicaments of an emerging post-colonial society so prodigiously blessed by benevolent nature and yet remains so unconsciously accursed by a malevolent and decadent rule. Another significant discovery of this paper is that Awoonor usefully demonstrates the current eagerness among West African writers to sink a taproot into the soil of their own artistic traditions.

As shown in the last ten lines 61-70, of the selected poem, Awoonor declares that no literary war with which to establish firmly the traditional African values, is ever effectively done if only carried out by a single individual. Collective responsibility is the only solution to achieving this goal. Indeed, Kofi Awoonor had assisted the critic in appreciating the traditional African values and culture. The Nigerian poet, Mabel Segun in one of her poems - 'Conflict' has convinced her reader to which way she should swing her literary pendulum because she is "finding the balance irksome... [and] 'I'm tired of hanging in the middle way...'" Also, a common ground had already been reached by the Francophone writers as to this concept of Negritude. Janheinz John (1961) defines the very concept in terms which make it abundantly clear: "the practical application of the extremely obvious knowledge that every artist achieves his best work when he attaches himself to his own tradition".

This has led to Césaire's song of praise for old Africa, and Senghor's constant invocation of his ancestors as would be seen in "Nuit de Sine" in his collection 'Chants d'ombres'. This also led the Francophone scholars, among which Kofi Awoonor is numbered, to rehabilitate African history and culture. Now, the Anglophone writers as well, have also discovered and accepted this obvious fact and are now pursuing their artistic calling in the light of this.

Indeed, Kofi Awoonor's theoretical pondering on the importance of tradition in African Literature is valid. The identified aspects of ancestral traditions and cultural heritage in Awoonor's *More Messages* can be said to be "typically African" because they are within the consciousness of Africans. This paper, however, understands that due to the dynamics of the contemporary world, this work cannot claim to be exhaustive of African affairs. One can only hope that it will stimulate interests in the concepts which this paper believes are vital to the survival and advancement of African culture and traditions in this age of globalization.

References

- 1) Achebe, C. 1995. "Colonial criticism" in *post-colonial reader*. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (eds.). London: Routledge, Pp 57-61.
- 2) Ashcroft, B. 1989. *The empire writes back: theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. London and New York: Routledge.
- 3) Bhabha, H. 2004. *The location of culture*. London: Routledge.
- 4) Billington, R. 1991. *Culture and society: a sociology of culture*. Hounds mill: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- 5) Boehmer, E. 1995. *Colonial and post-colonial literature*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- 6) Budelman, F. 2006. "Trojan women in Yorubaland: Femi Osofisan's *womenofowu*" in *Portrait for an eagle*. Sola A (ed.). Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies Series.
- 7) Currey, J. (ed.). 1999. *Talking with African writers: interviews by Jane, W.* Heinemann: Portsmouth (N.Y.),
- 8) Dasylva, O and Jegede, B.O. (2005). *Studies in poetry*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers (Nig.) Ltd.
- 9) Goff, B. 2006. "Antigone's boat: the colonial and postcolonial in tegonni: an African antigone" in *Portraits for an eagle*. S. Adeyemi (ed.). Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies.
- 10) Goudenough, W.H. 1964. "Cultural anthropology and linguistics" in *Language in culture and society*. Hymes, D. (ed.). New York: Happer and Row; Pp. 36-39.
- 11) Hallward, P. 2001. *Absolutely post-colonial: writing between the singular and the specific*. Winchester and New York: Winchester Press.
- 12) Jahn, J. 1961. *Muntu: An outline of neo-African culture*. London: Faber.
- 13) Kehinde, A. 2005. "Rethinking African fiction in the era of globalization: A contest of text and context". *Journal of the Nigeria English*, vol. 11 no.1.
- 14) Kwofe, E.N. 2010. "Aspects of cultural experiences in the francophone West African novel" in *Language, literature and criticism*. Emmanuel N. Kwofie and Babatunde Ayeleru (eds.). University of Ibadan: Department of European Studies.
- 15) Okon, F.A. 2001. "African worldview and techniques in Obikanran, E. *The landlord in Reconstructing the canon: Festschrift in honour of professor Charles, E Nolim*, Augustine Amanze Akpuda (ed.). Nigeria: Skillmark Media Ltd.
- 16) Omoni, R. 1981. *Literature for the certificate year*. Ilesha: Fatiregun Press Publishing Co. (Nig.) Limited.
- 17) Ngugi, w'T. 1999. *The writer and his past*. London: Heineman.
- 18) Nwoga, I.D. 1967. *West African verse: an anthology*. London: Heinemann.
- 19) Onuora, B. N. 2009. "Postcolonial anti-culture and contemporary Nigerian experience in Femi Ojo-Ade's *Deadend. Re-visioning humanistic studies*. A.E. Eruvbetine and Udu Yakubu (eds.) Lagos: African Cultural Institute.
- 20) Pratt, M. L. 1992. *Imperial eyes: travel-writing and transculturalism*. London: Routledge
- 21) Trivedi, H. 1999. The postcolonial or the transcolonial"? location and language intervention. 1: 2. Pp. 269-272.
- 22) Sapir, E. 1921. *Language*. London: Harvest Books.
- 23) Senghor, L.S 1965. *Prose and poetry reed and wake*(trans.). London: Oxford University Press.
- 24) _____ 1967, 1971. *The foundation of "Africanite" or "Negritude" and "arabite"*. M. Cook (trans.).

Paris: Presence Africane.

- 25) _____ 1966. *The mission of the poet* Thompson (trans). St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: U. W. I. Extramural Department.
- 26) Spivak, C.G. 2003. *Death of a discipline*. New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press.
- 27) Storey, J. 2018. *Cultural theory and popular culture: an introduction*. United Kingdom: Routledge.
- 28) Tsaaior, J, T. 2006. “[Post] Afrocentricity in Soyinka’s poetics” in *Wole Soyinka@70 festschrift*. Profs. Dapo Adelugba, Dan Izevbaye and J. Egbe Ifie (eds.) Nigeria: Lace Occasional Publishers and Dat & Partners Logistics Ltd.
- 29) _____. 2009. “The postcolonial state and its texts of meaning: Femi Osofisan’s dramaturgy as emerging paradigm” in *Emerging perspectives on Femi Osofisan*. Tunde Akinyemi and Toyin Falola (eds.). Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press Inc.
- 30) Tyson, L. 1999. *Critical theory: a user-friendly guide*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- 31) Urdang, L. and Stuart, B.F (eds.). 1968. *The random house dictionary of English Language*. (college edition). New York: Random House.
- 32) Williams, R. 1954. “The analysis of culture” *Cultural theory and popular culture: a reader*; John Storey (ed.). New York: Harvester Wheat-Sheaf, Pp. 56-64.