

# Critical Engagements on African Literature



# Critical Engagements on African Literature:

*An Offering to Professor  
Isidore Diala*

Edited by

Abba A. Abba

and Benedictus C. Nwachukwu

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This festschrift is offered in sweet memories of the late Professor Ben Obumselu, Diala's adored former teacher now ascended unto African literary ancestor-hood. May this fill the vacuum of his missing voice in our sacrificial offering to his son, Diala;

**and also**

for our spouses: Chinyere Abba and Chioma Nwachukwu  
for their undying love and warm kisses whose fragrances trail like  
immortal cadences.



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## FOREWORD

If the poet is the “hero” of traditional criticism, the scholar has become the “hero” of an increasingly popular modern genre, the festschrift. The contributors to this festschrift for a worthy fellow scholar and, to some of the contributors, their former student or teacher did not disappoint in the homage or tribute to a literary scholar who has fulfilled his early promise. It is surely a reflection of the cycle that sustains Nature’s continuity that Diala should today be the recipient of this tribute, having himself paid a handsome tribute to his former teacher, Ben Obumselu, late and not able to contribute to this festschrift. Diala describes Obumselu as “a legend to his students” who from “the very first initial contact [was surrounded by] an aura of enchantment.” The classic expectation accompanying a successful teacher is that he would replenish his specialisation by reproducing himself. Having been taught by Obumselu at Ibadan, I considered myself qualified to recognise his successful product in Diala, who had come to Ibadan as my doctoral student. As an external examiner for Imo State University (as it then was named) at its take-off site in Okigwe where Obumselu was teaching, I had examined Diala’s undergraduate work; so, I had no doubt that I was going to supervise an outstanding doctoral student who had chosen, of all literature topics then on offer, the Afrikaner novelist André Brink. It was thus clear from that choice of topic that Obumselu—who had the charisma of the intellectual, with his wide-ranging knowledge of literature, his penetrating ideas, and his insight into cultures in interaction—had made a deep and lasting impression on Diala. That influence did not later develop into inhibiting anxiety, for he has grown into intellectual independence, exploring new topics and developing his ideas.

A festschrift is one of those opportunities for reviewing the wider significance of the work of an important scholar. This contribution offers me an opportunity to consider briefly the place of Diala’s work in the tradition of scholarship and criticism and its implications for the relation of literature to culture and society. I believe that his work draws attention to three issues that are relevant to literature and criticism: the meaning of the emergence of national literatures for the old ideal of “African literature”; the scholar-as-poet’s approach to professional loyalty; and the future of the existing infrastructure that sustains a literary culture from production to distribution and consumption—specifically regarding contemporary threat of

communication technology to traditional forms of material production and distribution.

The cosmopolitan scope of Diala's scholarship has some relevance for literature studies. The old continent-wide character of the literary curriculum and its canon appears to be thinning out and contracting towards regional and provincial groupings. The immediate cause is, of course, the fewer international conferences and seminars that are essential for the exchange of ideas and practices among teachers from different parts of the continent, along with the virtual collapse of the international publishing of new as well as canonical writers. Although access to international journals remains within easy reach through the Internet, the same cannot be said of the majority of creative works. Breaking out of the economic excuse of institutional or provincial inbreeding is a useful antidote. The cosmopolitan scope of Diala's scholarship, reflected in the range of topics chosen by the contributors to this volume, is a salutary resistance to the increasing narrowing of African literature studies to national writers. He has, of course, profited from the periods of study leave and sabbaticals spent away from his university, aided by fellowships and grants.

Like journalism, the profession of teaching and research offers a natural home for the creative writer, although some creative writers may not feel that creative writing can or should be taught. The writer as teacher is faced with the challenge of keeping two balls in the air at the same time—that is, both the objectivity of research and the allied but very different demands of the creative imagination. In the past, a significant number of writers—Soyinka, Clark, Ofeimun—chose to give up the security of regular employment—like teaching—for the challenging independence of private life as creative writer and public intellectual. Although Diala has chosen the alternative option of remaining a teacher and scholar-critic devoted to creative writing, like a long list of prize-winning writer-teachers before him, such as Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, and other writers who are currently teachers, he has won two different and very competitive prizes: the ANA poetry prize and the NLNG prize for criticism. For this, he was chosen to serve on an NLNG adjudication panel, thus satisfying the demands of a number of writers that a creative writer be included on the panel of judges for literature. He himself has always been aware of the risk involved in his career choice, which “demands an absolute devotion” to scholarship. But he seeks to reconcile the resulting tension by arguing that “... in my engagement in criticism as in my creative writing, I am ultimately a supplicant at the same altar.”

This case raises wider issues for our literary culture and the wider society. First, with reference to the nineteen-sixties and seventies, when

writers were able to retire prematurely from paid employment to devote their time to full-time creative writing, the present age appears to be returning to the mode of patronage because of the declining opportunities for self-employment and, consequently, independent creativity. Economic indicators have influenced the recent introduction of entrepreneurial training in universities; but that will only be meaningful if economic opportunities are also created. The film industry is a major exception because of its direct access to the independent resource of audiences that, because they are public, are not subject to the manipulation and control of formal institutions and official structures. While the film industry thrives, the theatre has been affected by the development of video and television technology, and literature suffers from the decline of the reading public and the book trade under the rise of the internet and the consequent emergence of the social media. Diala's scholarly projection of the achievement of Esiaba Irobi in a major scholarly work—virtually a creative resurrection for the late playwright—should normally have resulted in the cultivation of a wider reading public, given a boost to Irobi's theatre audience, and, it is reasonable to expect, Irobi's incorporation into the literature canon. As it is now, the plays of this award-winning dramatist are not even available yet in many bookshops outside the publishers' distribution range and not widely known to the shrinking Nigerian reading public and theatre audience, for reasons hinted at in the preface to the book. The prestige and publicity value of literature prizes, which have emerged in Nigeria only since the turn of the century, have given a significant boost to the status of literary creativity and helped to arrest the decline; but there is no evidence that this has translated into book sales. Rather, even undergraduates—the future reading public that is already with us—are increasingly turning to e-book sites rather than bookshops for access to prescribed books. Nigerian publishers and booksellers can expect a transformation of the traditional book-based literary culture into one that has its source and being in information technology, especially since one State government has taken the initiative of developing for its secondary school system a tablet containing all the prescribed texts for all subjects.

A second issue is the status of literature and the subtle change in the social status and significance of the idea of a *professional* as a specialist whose technical training and skill helps to construct and sustain societies. The religious roots of the concept, with its basis in the temperament, faith, and complete dedication to what the devotee professes, is gradually being displaced by the concept of training and specialisation, with the academies and institutes of technology as sources for acquiring such knowledge and skills. If, today, a scientist, an architect, a lawyer, or an accountant is a

professional, is a creative writer a professional, or a seminarian, who has to profess his faith before admission into the priesthood? It is a reflection of our age that modern professionals, who qualify after being accredited and certified by their guilds, may not think that a writer or a literary critic is a professional. This semantic shift is hardly perceptible, but the effect of specialisation on literature is growing. It has a bearing, for example, on the difference between two equally gifted *professionals*: Femi Osofisan in his role as creative writer, and Biodun Jeyifo, social theorist and *professional* scholar-critic. The professionalisation of the critic may be a result of the increasing specialisation of knowledge that brought science into being and endowed it with a special social prestige. But the roots of the distinction go as far back as Plato, who not only argued that “the arts of measuring and numbering and weighing come to the rescue of the human understanding—[and] there is the beauty of them,” but also set up a three-tier hierarchy of knowledge by distinguishing the use of a product from which (in his opinion) true knowledge comes, from its making and its representation. Although Plato meant to devalue the creative arts by relegating them to the level of mere representation, history has proved that the knowledge of the artist, which comes from the process of making, imbues the poet’s critical opinions with enduring value for reader as well as critic. The critical opinions of those who also create are important to culture not only because, as extensions of their creative writing, they are life-enhancing for their readers—as Leavis once argued in another context, but also for shaping the identities, social vision, and worldview of individuals. It is in this light and in his status of creative writer-as-critic that I see Diala’s work. But he has also shown that he is one of the inheritors and successors of distinguished teachers and intellectual mentors, beginning with Obumselu and including Echeruo and Irele, as well as their younger contemporary, Jeyifo, to whom, as a labourer in the same intellectual vineyard, Diala is related by his intellectual integrity, if not in other ways. I (and, I believe, other contributors to this festschrift) hope that Diala will continue to relate to this metaphor for a long time to come.

**Dan Izevbaye**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We had thought of the right time to tell the world how privileged we were to have had Professor Isidore Diala as our teacher. Insightfully, Ben was the first to come up with the idea of a festschrift, which we found truly befitting. I am truly grateful to Ben for this, and much more grateful to Prof. Diala for finding us worthy to midwife this project in his honour, especially as I am aware that some high-ranking professors in different places had offered to do this, but he preferred the modest gift of his former students. Such is the measure of the enduring humility of a great teacher who prefers to trail behind to guide his students. For those of us that met him for the first time in 1995 as first-year undergraduates at Imo State University, Owerri, Diala left a strangely undying impression. Among the entire academic staff in the department of English, Diala, whose voice and command of words—Igbo or English—came off like well-crafted poetry, typically stood out. And for many students in the department and even for those who merely took part in his GST 101 class, Diala was a model and a muse. He handled his classes with extravagant doses of mirth, smiles, candour, excellence, selflessness, and authority. No wonder he quickly and easily rose to dwarf every one of his peers, not only in his obvious giant size but also in his teaching career. He became a global scholar, traversing nations and continents and bringing home basketfuls of intellectual wealth that still feed us in our wide-ranging postgraduate and teaching experience. Diala, our humble teacher, has continued to provide mentorship and guide to us. We are also grateful to Prof. Diala's amiable wife, Mrs Chinenye Diala; their children- Oluebube, Chijioke, Chinonso, Tochukwu for their support and care to all that means much to Diala, and especially for their ever-ready banquet for every guest.

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Tanure Ojaide, Anthony Afejuku, Gbemisola Adeoti, Chuks Okoye, Remi Oriaku, Polycap Anyanwu, Jasper Onuekwusi, J.O.J Nwachukwu-Agbada, Hein Willemse, and Ogaga Okuyade; our Editorial Adviser, Prof. Amechi Akwanya. How do we curve our lips to express our undying thanks to Professor Dan Izevbaye for finding time out of his numerous engagements to write the foreword to this festschrift? Although destabilised by Obumselu's demise at the time of our request, Izevbaye's love for his beloved Diala is too deep to gloat over. We are thankful to him.

The Vice-Chancellor of Edwin Clark University, Professor T.O. Olagbemiro, and the staff and students of the Department of English and Literary Studies of the university share in our gratitude for offering the serene environment to carry out part of this project. Importantly too, many thanks go to the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for the postdoctoral research fellowship grant and the opportunity to complete the work at the Institute for Asian and African Studies, Humboldt University, Berlin. So much gratitude is due to my host, Prof. Dr Susan Gerhmann; the coordinator of African Theatre, Dr Perpetual Mforbe; my research colleagues who shared an office with me: Prof. Dr. Appollos Amougui (from the University of Yaounde, Cameroun), his wife who visited with many African dishes and treats; Dr Aliou Pouye (from University of Senegal, Dakar); HU Doctoral Researchers, Obala Musumba (Kenya) who unlocked the secrets of the complex web of Berlin beauty and anxieties for me, and Yusuf Baga (Nigeria) for the wonderful African meal he offered me; my friends Obiora Nweke, Iyke, Ken B who made Berlin a home for me, and E. C. Udogu, Eze Onyehikanne for his timeless love.

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We are indeed deeply indebted to the members of our cherished families - Chichi, Richmond, Valerian, Valencia and Vanessa Abba as well as Chioma Nwachukwu - for peaceful homes that guarantee fruitful labour.

Above all, all glory be to God.

# INTRODUCTION

## ABBA A. ABBA

In an interview with Henry Akubuiro published in the “Literary Review” of *The Sun Newspapers* of 1 November 2014, Professor Isidore Diala described himself as a suppliant at the altar of literature. This self-reflective assertion is so revealing of a man who spends much of his time in the smithy of literary exploration. This proclamation undoubtedly illuminates the present festschrift. Assembling a festschrift in his honour is as challenging as it is uplifting. It is challenging because, over the years, Diala has through the labyrinths of his outstanding intellectual inquiry constructed for himself an intimidating and prodigious scholarly profile with which so many would want to identify.

A professor of literature at the Imo State University, Owerri, as well as Visiting Professor/Georg Forster Senior Research Fellow, Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Diala has spent varying periods of research fellowships at the Nordic African Institute in Uppsala, Sweden, the University of Cambridge, and the University of London. To his former teachers, whom he reverently mentions in his daily life, especially Professors Ben Obumselu, Dan Izevbaye, Afam Ebeogu, Isidore Okpewho, Niyi Osundare, Polycarp Anyanwu, J.O.J Nwachukwu-Agbada, Chinyere Nwahunanya, Albert Ashaolu, and the late Professors David Cook and Sam Asien, Diala is an unusual academic breed and could comfortably occupy the first position in the pantheon of all their former students. In one of my conversations with him, Obumselu noted that, as the biblical voice says, Diala remains a son with whom he would forever be well pleased. For not only has Diala justified the burden of trust he bore for him, but he has also become more iconic than his intellectual patron could imagine. It is so painful to note that Ben Obumselu, who was to write the foreword to this festschrift, died in March this year without being able to do so. But the degree of enthusiasm with which he received the news of the Diala festschrift, his disjointed excitement, mixed with his silent guffaws and regretful sighs that express his horror at the inability to put down his thoughts in honour of his beloved son, reveals the tragic matrix of the human condition. We deeply mourn him even as he lives on in our hearts and the

bosom of our literary tradition.

Izevbaye, Diala's doctoral supervisor at the University of Ibadan, asserts that Diala has fulfilled his early promise, and Nwahunanya, flaunting the privilege of being Diala's former teacher, remarks that he is proud to be associated with anything that would project Diala's profile as an academic. He added that Diala's achievements have indeed been stupendous, for which reason he is happy that we, his former students, appreciate his contributions in our trajectory of growth. Professors Ernest Emenyonu and Ben Obumselu once described him as one of the most cerebral literary critics of this generation. Affirming that families play pivotal roles in determining what individuals become in life, Diala himself traces the source of his genius to his adored parents:

Being born to teachers was indeed a boon, given that I was to choose—or was I instead chosen for?—the austere but exhilarating life of the academic. My father, Damian, was not only a teacher but also an avid collector and reader of books on a wide range of subjects, especially fiction and drama. He passed on early. But he created the enabling environment in which I developed early in life a passion for books and for education, a passion that has been decisive in the life that I've led. (In an Interview with Akubuiro)

His mother equally was so committed towards the making of the great scholar. We read this in Diala's own words:

In the same vein, my mother, Bernadette . . . was my teacher in the nursery, in primary one, two and three. Her commitment to her vocation was passionate, and parents, including her colleagues, often lobbied to have their wards in her class. She was also an ardent teller of folktales at home and school, and her classes were famous for being exemplary in morning recitations. She taught me the first poems I knew and made me learn early to associate good poetry with musicality and the memorability of phrases. From her, too, in moonlight sessions at home, I learnt a considerable corpus of folktales. She occasionally challenged me to tell tales of my own . . . (In an Interview with Akubuiro)

In his earliest attempts at literary creation, Diala noted that he was merely responding to his mother's exhortations to appropriate her stories as models for his own original tales. This accounts for the echoes of her tales and songs that are discernible in his poetry and drama. Upholding the immortality of those whose cadences and intuitions are replicated and endorsed in the

resonant routines of daily existence, he contends that “literature is surely a medium through which we can lay claims to immortality as it is the embodiment of collective memory, but it is also a source of immortality as the discerning listener or reader can recognise the spectres of our beloved dead flitting through the columns of the verbal artefact” (Interview with Akubuiro).

Diala emerged the first winner of the NLNG Literary Criticism Award with his article entitled “Colonial Mimicry and Postcolonial Remembering in Isidore Okpewho’s ‘Call Me by My Rightful Name.’” Published in *The Journal of Modern Literature*, the well-researched work provides a thought-provoking discourse on Okpewho’s sustained and fruitful devotion to oral African literature. Diala locates the novelist’s truly fascinating insight into the possibility of tracing the African roots of the African American by the use of a distinctive African chant, the oriki. If Okpewho seeks to illuminate the African worldview in which reincarnation and spirit possession are central in the conception of life and death, he equally presents a suprarational African mode of knowing and naming reality both to supplement and interrogate a rationalist and scientific European code of cognition. Examining Okpewho’s realisation of that epistemological aim and artistic vision in a work of fiction, Diala had argued that Okpewho’s chosen mode of narration in the novel differs from the realistic form of his earlier three novels. Diala’s essay, typically, was the best among seven submissions for the contest. Reacting to the award in the same interview with Akubuiro, Diala notes:

It is self-evident that our longings for public acclaim, like our dread of public censure, invariably regulates our strivings in society. The reward for excellence is thus an eternal necessity as it is a society’s means of authenticating standards and challenging its citizens to become the best they possibly can.

In the field of creative writing also, he has paid his dues. His play, *The Pyre*, was the joint winner of the Association of Nigerian Writers’ Drama Prize in 1992, while his poetry volume, *The Lure of Ash*, was the winner of the Association of Nigerian Writers’/Cadbury Poetry Prize in 1998. He is also the author of the seminal critical work on late Esiaba Irobi entitled *Esiaba Irobi’s Drama and the Postcolony: Theory and Practice of Postcolonial Performance*, among other critical works.

Diala, undoubtedly then, is the pride of every good teacher, and justifiably so since every successful teacher aspires to be able to “replenish his specialization by reproducing himself” (Izevbaye). He has reproduced himself in varying modes, especially through the unusual mentorship and

guide that he has provided for us as his former students. The word “former” is applied with some caution since we are still learning at his feet even as we are dispersed in all parts of the world. To all of us, his students, present and former, Diala is a phenomenon. Not only has he made us realise that literature is truly a worthwhile academic discipline, but he has also with his humility, kindness, and humour sought to incite us to think further and deeper and in a different way in our intellectual pursuits. Devoted, humane, and a strong motivator of his students, he embodies those distinctive attributes that a great teacher bequeaths to his students, especially those whose dream is of the academic vocation. Indeed, for us, he has through his titanically striving scholarly spirit exemplified that “luminal signpost” through which we behold the irresistible beauty of excellence and hard work. Diala turned fifty on 23 November 2014 and the least we can do for him is to mark that golden milestone in the form that would appeal to him most: a festschrift. The essays in this collection have been selected out of a whole lot that was collected and subjected to a rigorous peer-review process. Many good essays that were submitted could not secure a place in the collection due to the limited number of available spaces, for which we apologise to the authors. The selected essays embrace not only the full range of subject coverage within the discipline of African literature but also the growing wide range of approaches, traditional and modern, that can be brought to bear upon the field.

In “Diala’s *Lure of Ash* and the History of a Nation,” Cajetan Iheka contends that Isidore Diala’s collection of poetry, *Lure of Ash*, embodies the aggression and pain that confront the individual/s in a blighted nation. Examining Diala’s collection with a focus on its portrayal of ash as a literary trope, his paper argues specifically that ash functions in Diala’s poetry as sign for the birth of the Nigerian nation, its colossal failures and ruin, as well as the symbol of the possibility of national rebirth. Sola Ogunbayo’s “A Post-Jungian Reading of Isidore Diala’s *The Lure of Ash*” argues that the artistic deployment of identifiable mythical patterns that foreground humanistic issues is not limited to Nigerian poets of the older generation such as Christopher Okigbo, Wole Soyinka, and Tanure Ojaide. In Diala’s *The Lure of Ash*, we observe a resurgence of sublime verses that handle serious matters, using the archetype of ash. Ogunbayo approaches ash as Diala’s mythic tool for deciphering the stages of growth of individual and institution. Adopting the post-Jungian idea of Lawrence Alschuler that perceives the human society as going through an individuation process, he examines how Diala perpetually interrogates existential experiences like dictatorship, power-mongering, social restiveness, love, political violence, civil unrest, religious alienation, illusion, death, and rebirth. Diala balances

his poetic vision by engaging ash to mythically capture causes and effects, actions and inactions, and varying national concerns. Thus, does the poet envision the growth of his society as passing through the tripartite phases of self-immolation, self-assertion, and self-assessment. These stages are pivotal in understanding the protean nature of humanity from the mythical viewpoint.

In “Hermeneutical Dialectics in Isidore Diala’s *The Pyre*,” Mishael Nwaiwu contends that Diala’s *The Pyre* is set on two Igbo axioms: the mythological belief that any victim of thunderstorm must be guilty of heinous sin, called *nlu* in Igbo language, which might be hidden sin and the Igbo notion that a wife’s testimony of the husband is the most accurate. In the play, Nneoma, the widow of Amakwere, sees herself as a widow of an exceptionally good man with a sound reputation and impeccable character, yet this man Amakwere becomes a victim of a thunderstorm. As the tradition requires, every property of the thunderstorm victim Amakwere belongs to Amadioha, the god of thunder, and every human relative of this victim is expected to sever every cord or relationship that links them to the thunderstorm victim.

In “The Dramatic Legacy of Sonny Oti,” J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada opens his exploration by bemoaning the easy manner critics in our clime turn their backs on our literary titans once they are no more. Whoever hears anything said about Pol Ndu, John Munonye, Cyprian Ekwensi, Flora Nwapa, Zulu Sofola, Ola Rotimi, Ada Ugah, Ezenwa-Ohaeto, Festus Iyayi, etc.? Even Achebe seems to have started experiencing peevish stillness! Could it then follow that in the Nigerian literary circle one dies with one’s creative output? Critics remember only those writers who are still around, perhaps those who can still recognise our faces and probably pat us on the back for doing the “good job” of examining their works. Once the person is dead, the echo gradually recedes, replaced by unsparing muteness. In his case, Sonny Oti does not deserve the silence that has befallen his artistic legacy, because he was a multi generic performer of the Nigerian arts: intellectual, motivational speaker, musician, dramatist, actor, cultural historian, musical evangelist, composer, play director, comedian, impresario, and theatre teacher. While alive, he performed each of these roles with consummate commitment. Apart from Ojo Bakare’s effort to bring together some other six academics culminating in the publication of *Sonny Oti on Stage* in 1999, nothing else has been said of this *artiste par excellence*, except perhaps in the essay this writer penned on him that was published in 2001 in the now-defunct *Post Express*. In other climes, the serious criticism of one’s works begins behind the literary figure, when his/her demise allows for a dispassionate consideration of the literary bequest.

Hein Willemse's paper contributes to the burgeoning scholarly interest in life writing as literature. Writing in "The Coloured Subject in Four Post-1994 Auto/biographies: Exploratory Notes on the Affirmation, Denial, and Ambivalence of a Contested Social Identity in South Africa," Willemse notes that the autobiography is primarily regarded as a genre of self-representation in which an author constructs his or her life and identity, retrospectively, from selected and mediated memories. Discussing four relatively recent auto/biographies: Dick van der Ross's *A Blow to the Hoop . . . The Story of My Life and Times* (2010) and William Pick's *A Slave Has Overcome* (2007) and two biographies, Chris van Wyk's *Now Listen Here: The Life and Times of Bill Jardine* (2003) and Alan Wieder's *Teacher and Comrade: Richard Dudley and the Fight for Democracy in South Africa* (2008), Hein identifies the authorial subjects as powerless individuals who occupy the position of social marginality, caught up with the struggles for personal or broader sociopolitical recognition. Willemse argues that such inspirational texts often tend to downplay areas of internal political and social division such as the notion of "Coloured identity," often interpreted as an intermediate identity between "African black" and "white" South Africans. For him, these autobiographical texts provide a brief opportunity to examine the presentation of "race," ethnicity, and liminality, the latter of which has remained relatively underexplored in South Africa. Framing the paper's debate initially from the textual moment where the subject has to respond to his racialised naming even while rejecting it, Willemse thereafter provides a brief background to the Coloured-identity paradigm, and follows with an equally brief indication of the ways in which the select auto/biographers have chosen to construct their roots or those of their subjects.

Tanure Ojaide reappraises the development of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's poetry from the beginning to her latest publication by examining the thematic and technical explorations and shifts in her various collections. He further establishes her achievements as a poet of great significance in contemporary Nigerian, albeit African, poetry. For Ojaide, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is a writer whose reputation as an accomplished poet has been overshadowed by her novels and short stories. He argues that though she came in late, she began her poetry-writing career with a splash, as her first collection of poetry, *Heart Songs*, won the Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry Prize in 2009. This initial success was followed by the publication in 2010 of *Waiting for Dawn*, which deals with the parlous state of Nigeria and the inequities of globalisation. In 2013, she published *Dancing Masks*, a collection with bold poetic experiments. Hence, Adimora-Ezeigbo's body of work in poetry deserves both serious critical interrogation and promotion

for its poetic quality and vision.

Chinyere Nwahunanya's "The Prison Novels of Ken Saro-Wiwa" focuses on prison literature that is deployed by incarcerated writers all over the world as a form of muted protest. Beyond being a stakeholder in Niger Delta issues and a renowned activist and human rights crusader while he was alive, the Nigerian writer Kenule Beesom Saro-Wiwa (Ken Saro-Wiwa) belongs to the critical mass of Niger Delta writers for whom the question of human rights and social justice occupied a front burner position in their consciousness and determined their social vision. These issues are joined in his protests against environmental pillage and degradation of his Ogoni homeland in the course of oil exploration and extraction, and against the utter neglect of the people arising from what in some quarters was considered their voicelessness. When voices of agitation began to be heard from the people, inspired by men like Saro-Wiwa, they started as muted complaints and mourning, producing "lachrymal literature"; then the voices became more resonant, assumed a strong protest tone, and finally became defiant and confrontational. Saro-Wiwa belongs squarely in the later tradition of Niger Delta protest and confrontation, which is now a dominant trend in Nigerian literature; but in his three "prison novels," he directly engages and openly satirises the Nigerian state, especially its inept and corrupt military leaders and their allies who have pillaged and pauperised her, and expresses dissatisfaction with how the affairs of the Niger Delta, especially Ogoni land, have been handled by successive administrations, especially the military, in Nigeria. The subject of Nwahunanya's paper is how Saro-Wiwa expresses his revulsion, through the evolution of a unique form of prison literature in the course of his protest writing.

Damian Opata, in his paper entitled "The Inscriptions of the Vulture in Proverbial Lore and Implications of Their Appropriations in Contemporary Social Discourse in Nigeria," demonstrates how his exposure to Christianity and the Igbo traditional religion opened him up to radically different perspectives about the Igbo worldview, especially as it concerns the vulture. The vulture is one of the symbolic forms adopted by Adada Nwabueze (a female ancestral deity in Lejja Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria), whenever she wants to manifest herself to her people. Opata notes that Adada Nwabueze is also the mythical mother, fertility deity, and guardian spirit of the town. She could also appear in the form of an eagle, a snake, or sometimes a young lady or a mature woman. This engaging paper insists that the vulture is not a despicable bird in the manner in which it is increasingly portrayed in fiction and popular discourse, but that the vulture lives an organised community life where respect and authority are clearly demanded, a major reason "Udele" is adopted by some

Igbo people as a titular name.

James Tar Tsaaior's "In Praise of Resistance and Counterhegemony: Isidore Okpewho and the Alternative Discourse in African (Oral) Literature" suggests that scholarly negotiations of African (oral) literature in the wake of the colonial and imperial encounter were championed by Western scholars who were mainly missionaries, administrators, anthropologists, ethnologists, linguists, and other allied professionals. These Western men of culture possessed enormous epistemological capital but lacked the requisite training and cultural knowledge and literacy to sufficiently appreciate the aesthetic distillates and literary sophistication of African oral forms. The yawning gap represented by this hegemonic Eurocentric discourse was only bridged with the emergence of indigenous scholar-critics who were steeped in the traditions and cultures of their societies. It is to this generation of scholars that Okpewho eminently belongs. Tar Tsaaior's paper appraises the unique and monumental contributions of Okpewho and this generation of scholars to African oral literary scholarship in their counterhegemonic engagements with the condescending and paternalistic attitudes of metropolitan scholars whose misrepresentations and prejudices consigned African oral literature to the eaves of prehistory. It argues that the Okpewho generation was on a "rescue" mission and piously mobilised its creative and intellectual energies in the (re)mapping of the beleaguered oral traditional terrain, and staked and redelineated it as a field of study in its own right and as a veritable literary endeavour. His books, especially *The Epic in Africa*, *Myth in Africa*, and *African Oral Literature*, have instituted an ongoing discursive skirmish whose resistance against imperial textual bodies like Ruth Finnegan's *Oral Literature in Africa* is foundational and salutary. The paper concludes that the counterhegemonic temperament of this emergent generation constituted an alternative discourse and vision in the cultural decolonisation process and identified African oral expressive forms as veritable literature in consonance with Euro-American universal tastes and canonical standards.

Sule Emmanuel Egya's "Exile and the Trope of Dispersal in Recent Nigerian Poetry" conceives of new anglophone Nigerian poets as those who started writing poetry since the 1980s, such as Uche Nduka, Amatoritsero Ede, Afam Akeh, and Unoma Azuah, among others. Incidentally, the 1980s and the 1990s were decades of intense military repression in Nigeria. The new poetry expectedly stages the sociopolitical condition of Nigeria at the time. This is because the poets were not only victims of repressive military regimes, but also most of them chose to go into exile during the long period of tyranny. One of the peculiarities of their poetry is how it dramatises exile: first, as a mental condition under a

repressive regime and, second, as a condition of the mass exodus of poets, writers, and intellectuals out of Nigeria. The article traces the historical realities that inform this phenomenon of exile and reads closely some poems that thematise both mental and physical exiles. It concludes that the emerging discourse of migration and multiculturalism in African writing today is closely tied up with the strains of creativity in the face of tyranny.

Enajite Eseoghene Ojaruega in “Exile, Migration, and Homecoming in Nigerian and South African Fictional Narratives” draws attention to the fact that while globalisation has intensified migration from the developing countries to the developed world of North America and Europe mainly for economic reasons, exile has for long taken Africans from their native countries to other nations in Africa and elsewhere in the world. The latter phenomenon was strong during military regimes of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s in some African countries. In South Africa, the harshness of the apartheid regime made many Blacks leave the country either to join military or political organisations against apartheid or seek respite from the inhuman condition in the country. As military regimes and autocratic rule ended in the rest of Africa, so did the collapse of apartheid, and that resulted in the return of exiles to their countries. Ojaruega’s paper compares the return of exiles to Nigeria and South Africa as reflected in select African fictional narratives. The fundamental questions which her paper seeks to answer include how the returnees are received by their local communities; whether the characters are alienated, and how they reintegrate themselves into the “new” societies they come back to. With specific attention to two South African texts—Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* (2002) and Mandla Langa’s *The Naked Song and Other Stories* (1996)—and two Nigerian texts—Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* (2006) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* (2013)—Ojaruega’s paper surveys exilic protagonists who return and face problems of alienation, identity, and difficult ways of reintegrating into their respective communities. In its concluding thesis, the paper notes that for these exiles, homecoming breeds the same angst that led them into exile in the first place, but through endurance, they finally reintegrate and make meaningful contributions to their native homelands.

John Otu’s “African Poets’ Engagement with Poetic Truth” attempts an affirmation of the truism that African poets and their poetry have come of age in robust forms and themes. He notes that it has almost become hackneyed in enlightened circles. However, from the outset of modern African poetry, the story was not always this cheerful. At the dawn of this period when a handful of African poets, such as U Tam’si, Okara, Okigbo, Awoonor, Clark-Bekederemo, Soyinka, Echeruo, etc., began writing

what was considered serious poetry as against the practice by their precursors, popularly then called Pioneer poets, which was characterised by “soft” poems anchored in the unsubtle poetics of political engagement and propaganda, most critics were unanimous in their verdict that African poets were yet to achieve distinction of style and diction in their poetry. Prominent but level-headed voices in this vein included Nwoga, Egudu, Moore, and Beier. Nwoga’s words on this score are benignly scathing:

What these modern poets have in common appears to be a certain rather pervasive love of distant and exotic erudition, a concept of the WORD as image and meaning which has led to the disregard of the normal, logical, syntactical structure of communication, and a dissociation of the poetic sensibility from the physical social group which has resulted in the enigma of private symbolism. The total of these characteristics is a poetry which is difficult to the point of repulsing the ordinary perceptive reader of poetry for entertainment, but which, however, presents some shattering flashes of insights when the perception behind it comes through. (ALT 6: 34)

Some other critics, like Chinweizu and his colleagues in *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature*, were more acerbic in their denunciation of the kind of recondite poetry written by most of these poets.

In “Individuation in Nnedi-Okorafor Mbachu’s *Zahrah the Windseeker*,” Chibuzo Onunkwo examines the concept of individuation as employed by C.G. Jung and the archetypes associated with it in *Zahrah the Windseeker*. Relying on Jung’s interpretation of individuation as a natural process of transformation that takes place in the life of an individual, with each stage of individuation associated with an archetype that is characterised by specific features, his paper interrogates certain aspects of the novel to determine to what extent the novel’s artistic ideation conforms to Jung’s theory of individuation. His investigation concludes that Nnedi-Okorafor Mbachu’s *Zahrah the Windseeker* is not only a speculative fiction but a textual paradigm of Jung’s psychotherapeutic theory of individuation.

In “Discursive Representations of Social Meaning in Ben Okri’s Abiku Fiction,” Ikenna Kamalu offers an appraisal of varying modes and strategies of communicating social meanings. The strategies enable them to represent individual and group identities, ideologies, attitudes, biases, feelings, prejudices, and social relations. In Okri’s novels on abiku, the spirit child, namely *The Famished Road* (TFR), *Songs of Enchantment* (SOE), and *Infinite Riches* (IR), he adopts gossip/rumour and communal/cosmic conversational structure as strategies of communicating the social and political situations of his Nigerian society. The gossip/rumour strategies are

narrative forms of supplying additional information the central narrator does not have access to, while the dialogic/conversational structure represents the African communal perspective and the intercourse between the natural and the supernatural.

Similarly, in “Semiocitzing the Travails of the Igbo Woman: A Text-Linguistic Reading of Selected Poems by Catherine Acholonu,” Kenneth Chukwu and Chris Onyema argue that one major attribute of literary writing is its embodiment of a people’s culture and worldview. In performing this function, literary writing makes use of language as its major resource, both literally and nonliterally. The nonliteral aspect tasks the decoding ability of a reader who is expected to contextualise the events, characters, and linguistic choices in the text. The attempt is to unravel both the surface and the allegorical messages. The paper, therefore, focuses on the semiocitzation of the travails of the woman in the Igbo culture using Catherine Acholonu’s poems entitled “the way” and “The Spring’s Last Drop” as illustration. The paper examines how the poet adopts the techniques of semiotics in portraying the place of the woman within the context of the Igbo culture. Adopting text linguistics as its theoretical framework, the paper sees the poem as a text that could be examined as an expressive medium through which the poet communicates her literary message(s), concluding that communication, especially from the semiotic perspective, is context-bound so much so that it cannot be distanced from the perception modes of the society or locale that produces the idea(s).

Joseph-Kenneth Nzeremin “A Semiotic Study of Christopher Okigbo’s *Labyrinths* with *Path of Thunder*” argues that Christopher Okigbo’s poetry has generated a lot of interest among scholars of literature, stylistics, as well as linguistics. This is because Okigbo did not only adhere to the language of poetry in his vocation as a poet but also used linguistic features to drive home his message and at the same time make his poems unique. Nzerem’s paper focuses on the use of semiotics in Okigbo’s *Labyrinths with Path of Thunder* to show how Okigbo uses signs, metaphors, symbols, and images to develop his themes of religion, colonial exploitation, and postcolonial crises in Nigeria. The paper also shows the relationship between semiotics and communication by stating how the meanings of images, symbols, signs, and other semiotic features in Okigbo’s poetry lead to effective poetic communication.

In “Unmasking the Undertone of Gender Inequality in Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*,” Nkiru Onyemachi focuses on *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe’s fifth novel, and demonstrates how it has gained constructive criticisms from various literary scholars mostly in the representation and recognition of the female gender. Before the publication

of this novel, other novels written by Achebe had been widely criticised based on poor representation of female characters as both physically and intellectually weak, especially in decision making and other important aspects that define their individuality.

Oyeh Otuh and Obumneme Anasi, in their essay entitled “Oil Politics and Violence in Postcolonial Niger Delta Drama,” examine oil politics and violence in selected Niger Delta plays such as Ola Rotimi’s *Ovoramwen Nogbaisi and Akassa You Mi*, Miesoinuma Minima’s *King Jaja or the Tragedy of a Nationalist* and *Odum Egege*, Esiaba Irobi’s *Hangmen Also Die*, and Isaac Attah Ogezi’s *Under a Darkling Sky*, comparing the images of the Niger Delta of the palm oil (and slave trade) era with those of the crude oil period (postindependence, 1960s-1990s, to be precise). Focusing on Niger Delta drama of the twenty-first century, the militancy era, the paper seeks to demonstrate that palm oil politics in Niger Delta drama is largely in form of anti-colonial (communal) agitation, local communities versus imperial powers, or trade and diplomacy between local chiefs and their European powers, but crude oil politics in twenty-first-century Niger Delta is divisive, anti-communal, and characterised by militancy whose violence hardly discriminates between foreign oppressors and community members. The violence of this militancy may have initially targeted external enemies, but it has turned inwards. Oil, with its politics of corruption and exclusion, has made the Niger Delta almost the most volatile region in twenty-first-century Nigeria, second only to the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East. In its postcolonial imagination, the paper focuses on oil politics, discontent, and militancy in twenty-first-century Niger Delta drama in Ahmed Yerima’s *Hard Ground*, Eni Joiogho Umuko’s *The Scent of Crude Oil*, Oyeh Otu’s *Shanty Town*, Uzo Nwamara’s *Dance of the Delta*, and Chika Onu’s *Dombraye*, and reveals that the miscarriage of militant agitations that results in criminality and general insecurity hinders progress and development in the region.

In “Fictional Illustrations of Sociopolitical Restlessness and Temperaments in Nigeria,” Psalms Chinaka attempts a sociological reappraisal of some sociopolitical events in selected Nigerian fictions, such as Chimeka Garrick’s *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, Sumaila Umaisha’s *Hoodlums*, and Chimamanda Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The paper argues that the long history of incompetent leadership in Nigeria’s political history has in many ways engendered a predatory and acquisitive system in which individuals, multinationals, religious sects, social groups, financial institutions, and above all the apprenticing governments (military or civilian) turn out to be opportunists at every sociopolitical upheaval. As a result of these phenomena, there is foreseeably more chameleonic violence

that will threaten the existence of Nigeria's sovereignty, with the opportunistic militants themselves always asking for more financial crumbs at the expense of the masses. The essay therefore conclusively reveals that as long as these leaders continue to make the wrong choices, the sovereignty of Nigeria is bound to collapse someday. The bad choices of these leaders will continue to produce many hydra-headed ethnonationalistic groups that will base their objectives on the actualisation of sovereign ethnically based nation-states. Presently, some of the existing ones include MASSOB (Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra), MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta), the OPC (Odu'a People's Congress), and the Boko Haram militants or terrorists. The implication is that Nigeria's existence will always be threatened.

Augustine Uche Emela's paper is an investigation into the attitudes and responses of twenty-first-century playwrights to the subject of war. He, however, limits the scope to the study to Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* and Sam Ukala's *Iredi War*. He investigates the historical events that informed the writing of these two drama texts and thereafter establishes their relevance to contemporary society. Noting the various ways in which war has been represented in African drama, Emela's paper concludes that war, although theatrical, is essentially dehumanising.

In "Orara as a Symbol of Feminine Beauty and Meekness in Select Novels of Igbo Female Writers," Perp' St. Remy argues that the similitude that exists in the depiction of the major characters of pioneer Nigerian female writers (who are, incidentally, Igbo) tasks the mind as it reflects on a possible cause of this semblance. Her paper locates a double-pronged characteristic that is shared by all the major characters in the works under study—one of beauty and gentle spirit. These features have a symbolic significance (*Orara*) in an Igbo subculture (Mbaise). *Orara*, a snake, is one of the symbols in Mbare representing feminine beauty and meekness in repressed strength—traits that womanism upholds. Text analysis, oral tradition, and interviews provide points that aid the study of the relationship between these concepts—female characters, *Orara*, and womanism. It is deduced that the identical characterisation in the works of Igbo female writers—Nwapa's *Efuru* and *Idu*; Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Bride Price*; and Okoye's *Behind the Clouds* and *Chimere*—has its root in the writers' recreation of the real experiences of the ordinary woman in the Igbo society whose natural reactions to her plight gravitates more to the womanist rather than the feminist angle, producing traits that are similar to those of *Orara*. And while womanism is not new to the study of the works of Igbo female writers, it has not been studied against a significant symbol in the Igbo tradition. *Orara* is thus seen as the ideological locus for

womanism and may be put under further scrutiny to establish it as the muse of Igbo female writers.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*, though inspired by the historical experience of Kenya, with the nature of politics in the Free Republic of Aburiria under the eternal but finally transient regime of the Ruler, depicts the realities of many countries on the continent, from Uganda to Nigeria, from Zaire to Burkina Faso. In "The Temper of Discontent in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*," Benedictus Nwachukwu attempts a close reading of the novel as a fictional representation of the menace of dictatorship and tyranny in the politics and governance of African nations in the postindependence era. On trial in the novel is the concept of leadership in managing the affairs of a people as exemplified in the Free Republic of Aburiria, which is neither free nor republican in reality. Leaders here are described as "Ogre," "Scorpions," and "devils." This paper shows not only the framework of tyranny but also the relentless resistance by the people and their fierce struggle for democratic governance. Results reveal that dictatorship and tyranny mediate to form social discontent. The study's findings raise important questions concerning the social security of the people.

Abba A. Abba's paper titled "Interrogating the Counterdiscursive Ideation in Achebe's Postcolonial Writing" interrogates the extent to which Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* could be said to be a counterdiscourse to a Western ideological portrayal of the African and his culture. The paper argues that while many critical reflections contend that Achebe, one of Africa's most prominent novelists, is a true pan-Africanist given his strong aversion to a Western reductive view of Africa, a few critics observe that there is a sense of anti-Africanism in the depiction of his African protagonists in some of his postcolonial novels. It is the paper's contention that *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe's highly celebrated masterpiece corroborates a Western ideological view of Africans as savages. Deploying a deconstructive evaluation of the novel in comparison with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, the paper posits that postcolonial African literature should, while resisting the tyranny of hegemonic models, welcome historically grounded and theoretically suggestive models that acknowledge objective artistic representations and the beauty of local experiences with their multilayered intersections with other world cultures. In its provocative appeal, the paper adds fresh insights to the unending debate that puts some of the premises of postcolonialism itself into question.

In his paper titled "Subaltern Communication: Ecological Dis/Contents and Discourse Stratagems in Ojaide's *Waiting*," Chris Onyema