

**Modernity and Identity: The National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos (NGMAL)
and the Politics of Nation Making**

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates the dynamics, debates, and contexts of the performances of the National Gallery of Modern art Lagos (NGMAL) in the postcolonial nation-making process of Nigeria. It is a cultural and historical investigation into the assignation of modern art in Nigeria as a means for the communication of national identity politics. It highlights the role of modern art and artists in the negotiations of national identity politics in Nigeria from the 1920s through activism in the nation during the colonial era, to the independence and the postcolonial negotiations of the Nigerian nation.

It examines the dialogues between agents that guided developments, influenced revolutions, and negotiated the forms and operations of modern art in Nigeria against a background of socio-political change. It reveals the influence of the theories of Pan-Africanism and the *négritude* movement as key factors in the analysis of the acts of nation making through Nigerian art by Nigerian artists and the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos. This research has been necessitated by the fact that this type of research on national art institutions is rare, and very little research has been done in this area in Africa.

The thesis illuminates several associated factors, such as trends in art production, the transition of Nigerian art from traditional to the modern, political changes in the nation, effects of the Nigerian Civil War, regional as well as geographical negotiations of the Nigerian national identity, and so on. It reveals the dynamic nature of the Nigerian identity which has been shaped by its constant negotiation. Thus, the thesis illuminates the circumstances and associated agents that continually organise and reconfigure the country's identity through its art, art practices, canons and discourses.

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Introduction

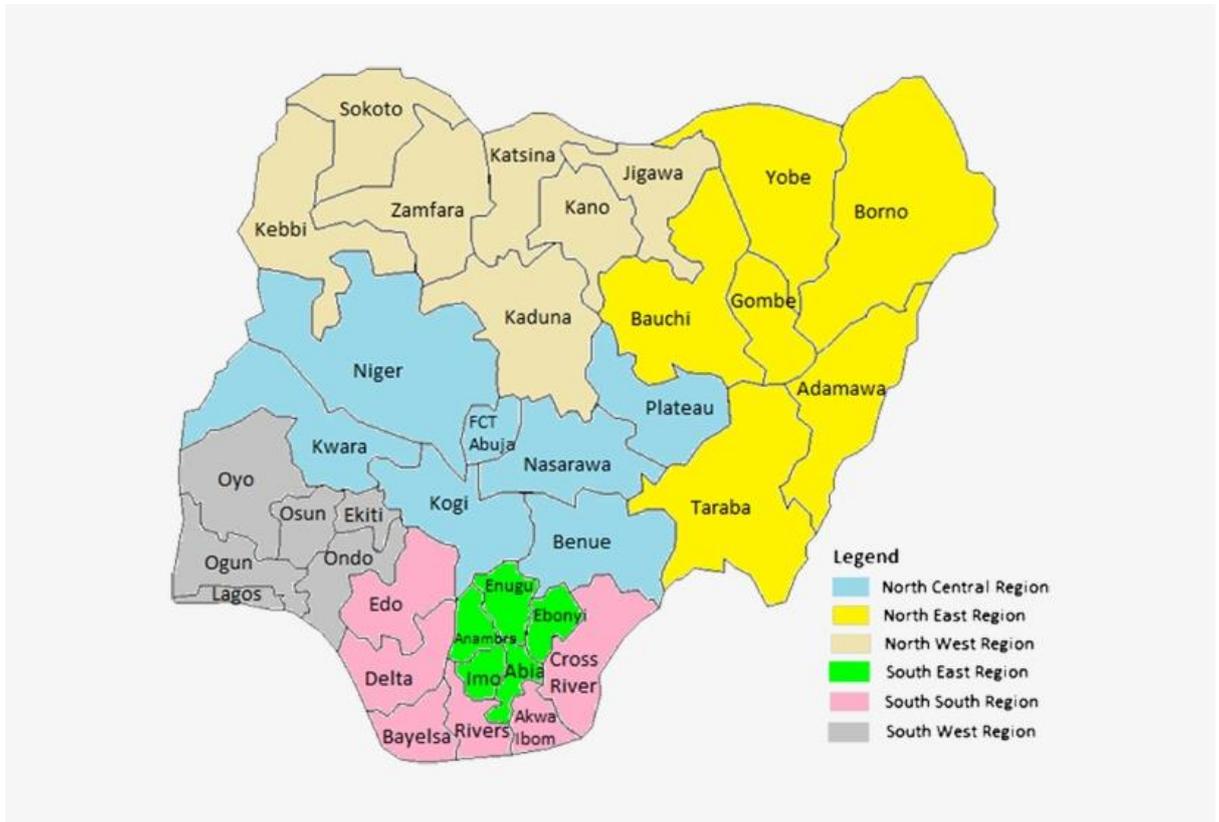


Plate 1. The map of Nigeria depicting the 36 states in their geopolitical zones¹

Nigeria today consists of six geo-political zones which were further carved out of the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria that were amalgamated on 1st January 1914 by Sir Fredrick Lugard (1858-1945), the British colonial governor of Nigeria at the time.² The creation of the six geopolitical zones was due to agitation by the different ethnic nationalities within the country after the 1960 independence of Nigeria. This study will focus on the population of artists who practised through the period of the amalgamation of the regions to

¹ Google images, Available from:

https://www.google.com/search?q=The+map+of+Nigeria&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiW9q3MOPDjAhUKYcAKHTOIDugQ_AUIESgC&biw=1366&bih=655#imgrc=v3EA1GDOfC-iRM

² Emmanuel Oladipo Ojo, 'Nigeria, 1914-2014: From Creation to Cremation?', in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 23, 2014, pp.67-91

the dawn of independence in 1960 and on into the 1990s, and which had its identity shaped by the colonial education and culture.³ These artists have also been influenced by the experience of a turbulent struggle for the attainment of independence and a period of nation building after the independence from colonial rule. Since Nigeria's engagement with modern art currently spans about a hundred years, one will agree that a sound objective evaluation of the country's encounter with art modernism is much required at this point. This evaluation should not consider this art purely as paintings and sculptures from the Western sense of these things, but rather examine the overall strategies employed in creating them.

From its earliest historical times, Nigeria (the lands encompassed by the modern state) has had an innovative and persistent visual culture which acts in its capacity as the crucial foundation on which modern art in Nigerian has developed, and to which it lends a hand in its creative expressions.⁴ The development of Nigerian modern art can only be appreciated with the knowledge of its connection to traditional Nigerian arts,⁵ as this is the essential foundation on which modern art in Nigeria is built.

Although there was a blossoming of new art in Africa through European sponsorship around the 1950s, there arose a later decolonising stage which was conducted by African intellectuals when most African countries were engaged in their independence struggles.⁶ These reveal the relationship of this art to the ideals of Pan-Africanism, négritude and the thoughts of a range of traditional African and Western sensibilities in the idioms of the art. It

³ Cornelius O. Adepegba, *Nigerian art; its traditions and modern tendencies*, Ibadan: Jodad, 1995; Clementine Deliss, '7+7+1: Seven stories, seven stages, one exhibition', in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1995; & Chike Aniakor, 'Modern sensibilities and the African in contemporary African art', in Chike Aniakor et, al. (Eds.) *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, 3(1&2) Lagos: National Gallery of Art, Nigeria, 2001

⁴ Oluwole Famule, 'Contemporary art of Nigeria and its post-Independence impact', 2016

⁵ Timothy Asobebe, *Contemporary Nigerian arts and artists*, Nigeria: Upper standard, 2003

⁶ Sidney Kasfir, *Contemporary African art*, London: Thames & Hudson Inc, 1999

must also be noted that there is the tendency for authors to analyse Nigerian modern art broadly under the appellation of African art. This is due to a general perception of Africa, prevalent amongst authors based outside the continent, that imagines it as a single, culturally homogenous entity, without considering the rich and complex multiplicity of countries, races, cultures and tribes of which it consists.

Many European historians working in this area consider the development of modern art in Africa within a straightforward and continuous process which connects modern African art to the establishment of art teaching in colonial schools or in workshops by European artist-teachers.⁷ This argument is situated within the narrative that the art made by Africans after this European style of art education is a product of colonialism and colonialist notions: going by the idea that formal art teaching began under the watch of colonial regimes.⁸

Art historian Okeke-Agulu offers an alternative reading. He argues that black intellectuals across the world reacted to the impact of colonialism on the African continent in various fields including religion, politics, literature, sociology, and art. They commenced on the mission of conceptualising an ideal modern Africa which was to be primarily characterised by their own need for self-assertion and their ideas of political and cultural sovereignty. He assesses their actions as being positioned at variance with the plans and intentions of colonial regimes and their supporters even when their activities were not vehemently anti-colonial.⁹

⁷ Adepegba, 1995; Kasfir, 1999; Odiboh Freeborn, 'The Crisis of Appropriating Identity for African Art and Artists: The Abayomi Barber School Responsorial Paradigm', Ann Arbor, (ed.) *Journal of African Studies*, 2 (1), Michigan: University of Michigan Library, 2005; & Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, Duke University Press, 2015

⁸ Aniakor, 2001, 86

⁹ Okeke-Agulu, 2015, 7

While European art history repeatedly drew upon the spiritual resources and iconography of Christianity, and indeed could be imagined to barely exist without it, the colonial encounter in Nigeria delegitimised local religion and belief: the fundamental resources and purposes of pre-colonial Nigerian art.¹⁰ The case was argued for the contemporaneity of traditional Nigerian art by Nigerian art historian Cornelius Oyeleke Adepegba, the painter and art critic, Krydz Ikwuemesi, and professor of history of art and architecture, Sylvester Ogbechie. They contend that traditional Nigerian arts, in their contemporary mode of production, draw upon a continuity with the past as the basis of their existence while addressing local circumstances within the understanding of local modernity. Their contemporaneity is ascertained by their continuous production into the present.¹¹

African art is expected to consist only of traditional sculptures and craft objects when it is portrayed outside the continent of Africa. Adepegba laments the conscious exclusion and silence of other ancient forms of art which include rock arts as well as the misrepresentation of the contemporary art of Africa. He situates both the traditional and modern arts in Nigeria in an uninterrupted continuity.¹² Clementine Deliss, an associate curator at the KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin has scrutinised the criteria for judging contemporary art practice in Africa and analyses this as a contest between European sponsored versions of

¹⁰ Ulli Beier, 'Beginning of a Christian art in Nigeria', in *Art in Nigeria 1960*, Ministry of Home Affairs Ibadan, Ibadan: Cambridge University Press, 1960, pp. 14-15; & Cornelius O. Adepegba, *Nigerian art; its traditions and modern tendencies*, Ibadan: Jodad, 1995

¹¹ Cornelius O. Adepegba, *Nigerian art; its traditions and modern tendencies*, Ibadan: Jodad, 1995; Krydz C. Ikwuemesi, 'Modern Nigerian art: a discursive sketch', *Vanguard newspaper*, August 19, 2010; & Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, 'Carl Einstein's "Negerplastik" and the Invention of African Art', Part of the conference "Deep Time and Crisis, c. 1930" English original version Lecture, May 26, 2018, (Online video) Available from: <https://www.hkw.de/en/app/mediathek/video/63536>

¹² Adepegba, 1995

modern art in Africa and the version espoused by African artists trained in the art academies across the continent who express a postcolonial articulation of African art.¹³

Deliss charges Western sponsors of early modern African art as being responsible for the kind of untutored/primitive expression which has come to be associated with the international discourse of modern art in Africa. In concurrence, the Nigerian artist and art historian Chike Aniakor relates the modern sensibilities in African art to complex values, which originate from disparate sources namely: native, traditional, modern and exotic.¹⁴ This, Deliss finds, has brought about the disqualification of the analysis of cultural productions coming out of Africa as acutely intellectual, agitational and in debate with the myriad of cultural collaborators from Africa and other regions of the world such as Europe and the USA.¹⁵

Deliss associates this Western construct of 'Africanness' as being connected with folk or religious events rather than the unequivocal self-conscious art practice which saturated the African cultural scene between World War II and 1970. This Western curiosity, she argues, led to the canonisation of a particular notion of African art. This instigated the exclusion of works, that failed to conform to this categorisation, from the market.¹⁶ Consequently, without the financial support of the state and the tourist-oriented market, many African artists have found it very difficult to broker their existence in the midst of local and international artistic agendas.¹⁷

To position this study properly, there is a need to unpack the interconnected constructs of the concepts of modern art, modernity, modernism, and contemporary art as

¹³ Deliss, 1995, 15

¹⁴ Aniakor, 2001

¹⁵ Deliss, 1995, 15

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Catherine Lampert, 'Forward', in *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa*, London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1995, 11

they relate to the Nigerian experience. The parameters required for investigating the multiple modernisms that make up this thesis are embedded in the examination and reassessment of each of these concepts. For clarity, I have organised my study around these sites of negotiation, in relation to Harney's argument that modernist histories usually function in complex, complementary, and contradictory manners.¹⁸

The concept of the modern and contemporary have been positioned within the purview of words that are used as markers of relationships between things that are associated with time by the Emeritus Professor of African Art in the University of London, John Picton. He connects the performances of these words to the documenting and exhibiting of African art. This he finds, consistently reveals the need to trace their complicated, often abstruse past and present relationships to art making, which involves a severance as well as a continuity.¹⁹ The associate professor of Art History at the University of Toronto, Elizabeth Harney and Canadian art historian, Ruth Phillips connect the widespread imperial histories and the multicoloured processes that associate local visual and material forms with emerging modernist subjectivities in an effort to re-theorise the concept of modernism and modernity, and their historical relationship to contemporary art practices.²⁰

Modern art

Kathleen Kuiper, senior editor, Art and Culture, Encyclopaedia Britannica defines modern art as comprised of painting, sculpture, architecture, and graphics as characteristics of the art

¹⁸ Elizabeth Harney, & Ruth B. Phillips, (Eds.), *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Ingenuity and Colonialism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, 5

¹⁹ John Picton, 'Modernism and Modernity in African Art', in, Gitti Salami, Monica Blackmun Visona (eds). *A Companion to Modern Art*, Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2013

²⁰ Elizabeth Harney, 'Inside Modernity: Indigeneity, Coloniality, Modernisms', in, Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips (Eds.), *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Ingenuity and Colonialism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, 1

produced during the later parts of the 19th Century, the 20th and 21st Century. She holds that modern art involves a diverse range of movements, theories, and attitudes whose modernism or act of innovation resides particularly in a tendency to reject traditional, historical or academic forms in an effort to create an art which highlights the changed social, economic and intellectual conditions.²¹ Modern Nigerian art, however, is a combination of the African essence/encounters and Africa's desire for new challenges.²² In Africa, the act of innovation does not preclude that past, but often embraces it.

Ogbechie contends that in Africa, as in Europe, the emergence of easel painting signalled major shifts in visual representation and articulation of new social, cultural, and contextual spaces through images. He situates modern art in Africa in the context of the era in which it was produced as a defence of the modernist tendencies of African artists. He argues that even though the painting of certain cultural scenes may currently appear parochial, in the period when they were produced, they represented a focus on African cultural identity that was quite new in modern art. This contrasted with the Euro-modernist appropriation of African conventions of representation. Ogbechie asserts that, in relation to the abstract orientation of most indigenous African art, the Albertian schematic of figurative representation was the principal signifier of pioneer modern African artists who adopted figuration as a decisive break from their own indigenous traditions.²³

²¹ The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 'Modern Art' *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Encyclopaedia Britannica, inc. Revised by Kuiper, Kathleen, 12 April 2012, (online) Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/modern-art-to-1945-2080464> [Accessed: 12 February 2020]

²² Adepegba, 1995 & Ikwuemesi, 2010

²³ Sylvester Okwundu Ogbechie, Ben Enwonwu: the making of an African Modernist, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2008, 4

Pat Oyelola disentangles Nigerian modern art from the Euro-American style of modern art because of the strong influence of the ethnicity of the artist on their works. She argues that the mingling of these artists with preindustrial society and its relics of polytheism, emphasis on interpersonal relationships controlled by a hierarchy based on age, and a vigorous oral culture that is full of metaphors and allusions of the past from their childhood have produced very strong influences on their art. This has created very distinct characteristics in their works, which differentiate their expressions from the works of their Western counterparts.²⁴

Aniakor locates the modern in African art within the context of its national values and consciousness which are the moulders of the ideas that art addresses and celebrates.²⁵ He holds that the frame for modern artistic expressions in Africa is deeply rooted in an African physical, metaphysical, and ontological landscape. He highlights the production of the modern, and the idea of modernity in the works of African artists as the expression of innovation in art.²⁶ It is therefore imperative that these experiences of the modern era are recognised as contingent and volatile, produced through specific historical encounters, and in constant need of rereading.²⁷ Debates on the modern art of Africa cannot be merely understood from a semantic perspective, but its conceptual relevance must be the core factor for its appreciation.²⁸

²⁴ Pat Oyelola, 'Internationalism and Ethnicity in Modern Nigerian Art', in, *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, 2(1&2) Jan. 1997 - Dec. 1998, pp. 20-32, 23

²⁵ Aniakor, 2001, 85

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 86

²⁷ Elizabeth Harney, 'Preface', in, Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips (Eds.), *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Ingenuity and Colonialism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, xvii

²⁸ Aniakor, 2001, 85

Modernity

This is a product of the processes, systems, and ideologies of modernisation produced between 1850 and 1950.²⁹ The interactions of art between tradition and innovation make manifest the creation of artistic modernity.³⁰ Harney encourages the readings of modernity as conceived by artists living in post-colonial states, to be understood not as a phenomenon of diffusionism but as one that arose through encounter and exchange. These artists remapped existing practices, revived, reimagined, and jettisoned inherited forms to meet the demands of the present and the future.³¹

Modernity is explicated by Sharon Snyder, a contributor to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, as self-definition of a generation about its own technological innovation, governance, and socioeconomics. She states that, to participate in modernity is to conceive of one's society as engaging in organisational and knowledge advances that make one's immediate predecessors appear antiquated or, at least, surpassed. Snyder connects modernity with individual subjectivity, scientific explanation and rationalisation, a decline in emphasis on religious worldviews, the rise of nation-states, and communication.³²

Modernism

According to the Tate, modernism refers to a global movement in society and culture in pursuance of a new alignment with the experience and ideals of modern industrial life after the commencement of the twentieth century. Artists around the world adopted the use of

²⁹ Harney, 2018, 5

³⁰ John Paul Getty Museum, 'Defining Modernity: European Drawings, 1800–1900', June 5–September 9, 2007 (Online) Available from: https://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/defining_modernity/ [Accessed: 19 February, 2019].

³¹ Harney, 2018, 5

³² Sharon L. Snyder, 'Modernity', in, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., May 20, 2016 (Online) Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/modernity> [Accessed: February 19, 2020]

new techniques, materials, and imagery to create artworks which spoke to their projections of the realities and hopes of modern societies. The Tate holds that modernism, in general, was associated with ideal visions of human life and society and a belief in progress.³³

Modernism describes a range of cultural inventions through which people express their experiences of living in modernity.³⁴ In relating the concept of modernism to the African experience, Aniakor assesses Western modernism as monolithic with its absolute belief in reason as the primary definer of the cosmos and the universalisation of human values as distinct from its hermeneutical revision. Like Ikwuemesi and Harney,³⁵ he is of the view that art modernism in Africa stems out of the colonial experience. He argues that the monolithic view of reason (Western foundation) forced the basis of Western views of those other societies upon them, as they were regarded as nonrational, intuitive and superstitious.³⁶

Aniakor, however, finds that the contact of European artist like Braque, Picasso, Derain and others with African art brought about a reverse revolution in the art of the West, which saw the impact of artistic Africanism on European art at the commencement of the twentieth century. He argues that this scenario produced the concept of modern art sensibility in the notion of modernity in Western art, a label which had also become important in art discourse of post-colonial Africa which is described as either modern or contemporary.³⁷

³³ TATE, Art terms: Modernism, (online) Available from: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/m/modernism>, [Accessed: 13 February 2020]

³⁴ Harney, 2018, 5

³⁵ Ikwuemesi, 2010 & Harney, 2018

³⁶ Aniakor, 2001, 87

³⁷ Ibid.

Contemporary art

The present is largely dominated by the past in the scrutiny of contemporary African art.³⁸ The expression of external experiences outside Africa is a rare occurrence in contemporary African art.³⁹ Contemporary Nigerian art works are aesthetic expressions, which combine trado-modern forms with socio-cultural and political themes that support the aims of the society.⁴⁰ Contemporary Nigerian art can be understood as art works being currently produced in Nigeria. The contemporary Nigerian art scene includes every Nigerian artist practising now and those who have died since 1960 irrespective of their medium of expression or mode of training.⁴¹ This scope also includes Nigerian artist who are practicing traditional art today, as discussed in the section titled *Negotiating the Contemporaneity of Traditional Nigerian art* in Chapter Two.

Nigerian art and national identity

Analysing the rise of nationalism in African art, Aniakor sets the African landscape as a vast geographical and cultural space where divergent national experiences occur from place to place. These regional distinctions, he attributes to colonially based trepidations and experiences, as the French colonial assimilation policy was quite unlike the British colonial indirect rule system. He reasons that the awareness of the individuality of the colonial experience of African artists and their acknowledgement of change as the outcome of the rise

³⁸ Adepegba, 1995, 88, & Aniakor, 2001, 89

³⁹ Adepegba, 1995, 88

⁴⁰ Kunle Filani, 'Form and content as a basis for the classification of contemporary Nigerian art', in, Chike C. Aniakor, et.al. (Eds.), *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, 2(1&2) Lagos: National Gallery of Art, Jan. 1997 - Dec. 1998, pp. 33-44, 34

⁴¹ Chike C. Aniakor, 'The Contemporary Nigerian Artist Tradition', in, Chike C. Aniakor, et.al. (Eds.), *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, 2(1&2) Lagos: National Gallery of Art, Jan. 1997 - Dec. 1998, pp. 10-19, 12, 15

of nationalism generated the creative consciousness in African artists. He therefore deduces that this process nationalised their creative experiences.⁴²

The African landscape is a significant geographical and cultural space where national experience differs from place to place. There are regional peculiarities as well as colonially based encounters and concerns, which are evidenced in the individualism displayed by many African artists. A reflection of the creative consciousness in their art which appears to be borne out of their understanding of change occasioned by the rise of nationalism.⁴³ The Emory University African art historian Sidney Kasfir locates modern African art in an ever-changing continuum. She holds that since Africa has a long history, with 'innumerable before and afters in this history',⁴⁴ it would be rather naïve to situate the practice of modern art as a derivative of the contact of Europe with Africa. The opinion that no other such periods existed in African art history would be ignorant.⁴⁵

A survey of Nigerian contemporary art cannot be meaningful without first a survey of the African personality which was generated in the minds of the African artist from the second to the sixth decade of the 20th Century. Man, throughout history has always sought for his own identity and the reason for human existence, individual or collective.⁴⁶ Based on this, many popular movements in Africa in an attempt at readjustment have embarked on a search for new values.⁴⁷

⁴² Aniakor, 2001, pp.85-7, 98-9

⁴³ Aniakor, 2001, pp.98-99

⁴⁴ Sidney Littlefield Kasfir, 'African art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow,' *African Arts*, 25 (2), UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center: Apr., 1992, pp. 40-53, 96-97, 43

⁴⁵ Kasfir, 1992, 43, & Adepegba, 1995, 78

⁴⁶ Sereba Agiobu-Kemmer, 'A Survey of Modern Art' in, Chimurenga (ed.), *FESTAC '77: The 2nd World Festival of Black Art and Culture. Nigeria. Lagos, Kaduna, 15th January -12 February 1977*, Cologne: Afterall, 2019

⁴⁷ Abiola Irele, 'Négritude or Black Cultural Nationalism', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 3 (3) 1965, pp. 321-48, 323

In the analysis of the concept of negotiating the idea of identity through art and other cultural practices, Maria Eriksson Baaz of the Department of Government, Uppsala University questions the authenticity of African art in relation to cultural production in Africa. In a statement ascribed to Ulli Beier, she describes the tragic phenomenon in Africa where the rituals that inspired the artists are dying out.⁴⁸ She contends that cultural identity should transcend time, place, or history. Baaz holds that Identity is located in direct relation to the idea of negotiations and power, as its construction is within the enunciation of difference.⁴⁹

Aniakor finds that the question of identity was most important for the development of the postcolonial creative agenda for African artists. To affirm the significance of their tradition to postcolonial demands, the artists assert their rights to develop their inheritance so as to define the nature of national and individual consciousness. He argues that the construct of identity in African art should have less to do with the medium of expression and be more concerned with the African parameters which articulate the national values and consciousness of the people.⁵⁰

The independence agitations were born out of deep-seated nationalist feelings in Nigerian artists. These nationalist ideas have been defined by the political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson as an imagined political community, which is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. Anderson argues that the nation is imagined because despite the impossibility of everyone in even the smallest nation's ability to know of, meet, or even hear of their fellow members, yet the image of their communion exists in their

⁴⁸ Maria Eriksson Baaz, Introduction—'African Identity and the Postcolonial', in, Maria Eriksson Baaz and Mai Palmberg (Eds.) *Same and Other: Negotiating African Identity in Cultural Production*, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2001, 5

⁴⁹ Ibid., 5,6

⁵⁰ Aniakor, 2001, 88

individual minds. He states that communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.⁵¹

This thesis reveals the shared as well as the distinctive aspects of the construction of the Nigerian national identity through art. It seeks geographic and cultural breadth, yet this thesis does not pretend to have covered every act of art modernism created by Nigerian artist since the country's existence as one nation.

Introducing the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos

The process of rendering art for nation making requires a conscious practise of imagining and creating a nation to suit specific ideals.⁵² To reflect the idea of the nation being an imaginary construct, Nigerian artists delineated a new understanding of their relationship with the post-colony. They were no longer constrained by the issue of whether they spoke the artistic language of Europe or that of their ancestors or whether they aligned themselves with the monovalent pulls of Blackness, Africa, the nation, or the ethnos.⁵³ All of these multiple stimuli were deployed in their address of the task of nation building through art.

In the years immediately after Nigeria's independence, the redefinition of the Nigerian identity was paramount to the Nigerian. The long years of colonialism had somewhat eroded much of the value system which had hitherto been in place. The series of Pan-African festivals, the First World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar, Senegal, April 1–24, 1966; the first Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers, in July, 1969; and the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC '77) in Lagos Nigeria, from January 15, 1977 to February

⁵¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983, 49

⁵² Aliya Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, *Central Asia in art: from Soviet orientalism to the new republics*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2016, 21

⁵³ Okeke-Agulu, 2015, 15

12, 1977 were geared at rediscovering the lost traditions of Black folks as tools for the reassertion of the pride and identity of the African. The following chapters of this thesis are guided by the ideals of these Pan-African festivals.

According to Simon Knell, a Professor of Contemporary Museology at the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK, the notion of the uniformity of national galleries as a genre of museums is in part illusion. He narrates them as being influenced by the transitory nature of time, and variations in culture and context. Thereby situating what qualifies them as national within the specificity of the mutating events of their socio-cultural, economic, and geopolitical milieu. This positions the national gallery as possessing the capacities of institutions which provide avenues for identity constructions for specific societies.⁵⁴

The National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos (NGMAL) was formed in November 1979 by the Federal Department of Culture at the National Theatre complex in Lagos,⁵⁵ with its initial holdings derived from the national art exhibition of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977 (FESTAC 77). The rest of the works which could not be exhibited in the NGMAL were kept in the University of Lagos Library. These works formed the foundation of the University of Lagos Museum collection.⁵⁶ The NGMAL and the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) jointly held the annual national art exhibition until the turn of the millennium when the SNA started to source alternate collaborators for the event.

⁵⁴ Simon Knell, *National galleries: the art of making nations*, 2016, 12

⁵⁵ Simon O. Ikpakronyi, 'The development of galleries, national studios of art, structures and functions: National Gallery of Art – Nigeria in focus', Dike, Chike, & Oyelola, Patricia, (Eds.) *The Development of the National Gallery of Art and the National Studios of Art in Nigeria*, Nigeria: National Gallery of Art Nigeria, 2002, 6

⁵⁶ Ikpakronyi, 2002, 6, & Interview with Simon Ikpakronyi and Olumuyiwwa Spencer on 19 September 2020, at Abayomi Barber studio, Ijoko-Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria.

About the Author

My background as a son of an artist whose works are exhibited in the collection in question, the fact that I am also a practising artist myself and my involvement with the National Gallery of Art in Nigeria as a member of its curatorial staff between 2002 and 2008 puts the proper contextualisation of the collection as a front-burner on my mind. I should, however, be clear about my relationship to this subject. I have no present-day obligations to the NGMAL and am not predisposed to assert its achievements or find criticism.

However, I feel this lived experience of Nigerian art culture, which through my father goes back to the very beginnings of the period I am discussing, gives me a deep sense of the potential importance of this institution and its record as a site of national artistic representation, narration, display, and collection. This provides me with the privilege to approach this topic as a participant whilst seeking intellectual detachment. This latter is aided by the international travels I have undertaken to see national and other galleries in Europe and the USA.

My interest is not only in the history of modern art in Nigeria, but also in considering the art of the colonial period in terms of its power relationships and its unwritten nationality policies for Nigeria. This is what has informed the reason why my thesis looks at the subject through the prism of nationalism while also examining the forging of modern art in Nigeria at a time of great social upheavals: colonialism, the struggle for independence and the task of nation-making. It is a wide-ranging synopsis of the subject and insightfully sets the modern Nigerian art legacy in context. It looks at cultural exchange within Nigeria and the association of Nigerian modern art with the wider African art and global art discuss. It mainly focuses on the relationship of art and the negotiations of a Nigerian identity: how the dynamics of art

nationalism were constructed in Nigeria, and how this leads to collection, canonisation and institutionalisation or non-institutionalisation of national art in Nigeria.

Aim

This research aims to explore the avenues through which modern art in Nigeria has been used in the re-shaping of the Nigerian mind, with the purpose of locating the construction of Nigeria's national identity through its art.

Objectives

This research:

- Examines the negotiations of national identity and canonisation of modern art in Nigeria by the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos (NGMAL).
- Considers how modern art in Nigeria has been used to help citizens locate themselves in relation to the national story through the collection of the NGMAL.
- Scrutinises the development of Nigerian modern art in connection to traditional Nigerian arts, as this is the essential foundation on which modern art in Nigeria is built.
- Examines how modern art in Nigeria has been used as an essential part of both local and national socio-economic frameworks for addressing the recent past and present through the related discourses of Pan-Africanism and the *négritude* movement as key discourses to finding the national perspective in Nigerian art.
- Examines how the Pan-Africanism movement and the *négritude* movement have been deployed for the rehabilitation of Africa and African diasporic identity and dignity.

Literature Review: Connecting narratives to national identity constructions in Nigeria

There are three main areas of literature that provided the context and direction for my research which I have classified under the following subheadings: art in the national debate; the négritude philosophy and its Pan-African implications on African art; and art institutions as cultural performances of national orientation.

Art in the national debate

The nation is described by Anderson as being constantly considered as a deep, horizontal comradeship irrespective of the discrimination and manipulation that may prevail in each. He analyses the concept of the nation as an imaginary construct which unifies the different entities who relate to that manufactured identity. Despite the existence of different strata in the society, those within the nation share a common bond that gives all the members of the society a sense of equality. Anderson however reasons that such a bond is an imaginary one.⁵⁷

Nigeria's nationalism as it is understood today, unfolded under the influence of Herbert Macaulay who is considered its founder in the 1920s.⁵⁸ In their study of Nigeria's journey towards independence, Ubaku, et.al. define nationalism as a term deployed in the definition of two phenomena: First, the attitude which members of a nation have when they care about their national identity; and second, the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to sustain self-determination.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Anderson, 1983, 50

⁵⁸ Joseph Akinbi, 'Political leadership and challenges of national integration and development in Nigeria: the way forward', *Journal of arts and humanities*, 4 (3), 2015

⁵⁹ Ubaku, et.al., 'Impact of nationalist movement on the actualisation of Nigerian Independence, 1914-1960', in, *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research*, 2 (1), 2014, 55

In his scrutiny of the idea of art in the national debate, Olu Oguibe a professor of art and African American studies narrates the change in pace of the development of visual art in Africa as the continent conducted nationalist struggles at the dawn of the twentieth century. He holds that the political activism did not engage in a direct confrontation with the structures of colonialism; nor did it contain the clichéd images or symbols, but it assumed the artistic forms of imperial culture.⁶⁰ Oguibe narrates the resistance to colonialism in Africa through art as being expressed via two trajectories: One was to continue with the indigenous forms which colonialism condemned and sought to obliterate. The other was to possess the contested territory by mastering the forms and techniques of western artistic expression to erase the ideological principles resident in its exclusivity.⁶¹

In the analysis of the argument from the Nigerian modern art perspective, Okeke-Agulu and Picton evaluate the activities of the artists of the Zaria Art Society from the former College of Art Science and Technology in Zaria, Nigeria. They identified the group's acts of nation-making through the art by examining the works of Uche Okeke (1933–2016), and Demas Nwoko (b. 1935). The diverse stylistic and ideational features of the artists' works were examined as proponents of the idea of natural synthesis. This was an effort by the Zaria Art Society to develop a nationalist art ideology constructed on the country's rich artistic legacy.⁶² These activities of students' revolt against the British-oriented art curriculum in Zaria

⁶⁰ Olu Oguibe, 'Reverse appropriation as nationalism in modern African art', Rasheed Araeen et. al. (Eds.) *The third text reader on art, culture and theory*, London: Continuum, 2002, pp. 35-46

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Chika Okeke-Agulu, & John Picton, 'Nationalism and the Rhetoric of Modernism in Nigeria: The Art of Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, 1960-1968', *African Arts*, 39 (1), 2006

were prompted by Leopold Sedar Senghor's Negritude, which critically influenced the post-independence character to Nigerian art modernism.⁶³

Agulu and Picton further enunciate the distinctions between the artistic production of the artists involved to espouse their individuality in the expression of alternate ways through which nationalism could be expressed through art. Uche Okeke's style of appropriating his Igbo Uli style of body and wall painting was discussed as mono-ethnic, while Demas Nwoko's art is narrated as experimenting with art from across the cultures and regions in Nigeria. This therefore reveals distinct processes of regional negotiations in the nation-making process of Nigerian modern art.⁶⁴

Probing the debates of art in the nationalist discourse, Aliya Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen in the book *Central Asia in art: from Soviet orientalism to the new republics* evaluates the multifaceted, but concise, picture of both cultural and more evidently, economic and political dialogue between the centre and the periphery of Soviet art. She challenges the ideals of socialist realism in the critical realm by querying the use of oil painting as an integral political tool for altering people's perceptions in an arena where national and state interests are played out. She highlights evidence of this within circumstances that relate to economic reforms of drastic proportions, cultural clashes, forced mass migration, and linguistic experimentations. Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen compares Western expectations of contemporary Central Asian art to the official USSR art of the 1930s, accenting its lack of

⁶³ Ikwemesi, 2010

⁶⁴ Okeke-Agulu, & Picton, 2006

connection or relevance to everyday reality of the Central Asians. She argues that the image that they form becomes the main source of an imaginary truth for its beholder.⁶⁵

Looking at the development of modern art beyond the Western hegemony, art historian, Elaine O'Brien projects the use of the nation as the frame for art historiography because it holds a central place in the political and cultural unconsciousness of most modern artists. She maintains that when the idea of the nation is effectively determined it has an overriding effect on the shape of modern identity, politics, and official culture. O'Brien outlines the unifying strategy behind the creation of modernism as the transformative act of appropriation which includes all cross-cultural artistic exchange.⁶⁶ While the art historian Claudia Mesch in *Art and politics: a small History of art for Social Change since 1945* provides a concise history of political art which brings to the fore the contributions of important, marginalised artists. She expresses the need for art for societal reorientation.⁶⁷ In this regard, the works of these authors are very similar to the context of my research, as they provide very useful guidelines for my research.

The Négritude Philosophy and its Pan-African Implications on African Art

As a cultural movement, the négritude philosophy was launched in 1930s Paris by French-speaking Black graduate students from France's colonies in Africa and the Caribbean.⁶⁸ Its main purpose was to put the denigrating myths and stereotypes linked to Black people to rest by acknowledging their culture, history, and achievements. It was also aimed at reclaiming

⁶⁵ Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen 2016, 10

⁶⁶ Elaine O'Brien, 'General Introduction: The location of Modern Art', in, *Modern art in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, USA: Blackwell Publishing Limited, 2013, pp. 1-14

⁶⁷ Claudia Mesch, *Art and politics: a small History of art for Social Change since 1945*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013

⁶⁸ Bertrade Ngo-Ngijol Banoum, 'Négritude in AFRICANA AGE; African & African diaspora transformation in the 20th century: Schomburg Center for research in Black Culture', 2011

Africa's input to the world to restore the continent and its people to their appropriate position in the global community of equals. The curators Okwui Enwezor and Octavio Zaya point out that *négritude* advances the notion of the essentiality of what is found in the continent's pre-colonial traditions.⁶⁹

One of the early examinations of the *négritude* movement by an African outside the French colonies was done by Abiola Irele the Africanist literary scholar, a former Provost at Kwara State University, Ilorin, Nigeria. He describes the *négritude* movement as the only significant expression of cultural nationalism associated with Africa, apart from small-scale local movements. This notion, he ascribes to its vigorous organisation as a movement (especially in literature), its extra-African linking and consequences, and because it was able to develop far beyond the idea of the African personality. He defines the idea of the movement's relationship with the African personality as catchword, or a simple ideological slogan, contending that *négritude* leans more towards a philosophy.⁷⁰

Despite its significance in the nationalist struggles in Africa and its adoption almost exclusively as the route to Africa's modernism and assertion of the African pride, Mpalive-Hangson Msiska of Birkbeck University of London finds that Senghor's view did not go down well within the community of African scholars. He argues that the rationalist philosophers found *négritude* to be essentially an unphilosophical portrayal of both African and Western reason. He assesses the Marxist critics as rejecting Senghor's *négritude* as the enactment of a bourgeois reification of the actual conditions of postcolonial existence.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Okwui Enwezor, & Octavio Zaya, 'Négritude, pan-Africanism, and postcolonial African identity; African portrait photography', in, Elaine O'Brien et.al. (Eds.), *Modern art in African, Asian, and Latin America: an introduction to global modernisms*, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013, pp. 49-57

⁷⁰ Irele, 1965, 321

⁷¹ Mpalive-Hangson Msiska, 'Africa realism - reality in African aesthetics and literary criticism', 1980

Irele opposes the plausibility of positioning négritude as a philosophical idea of the essence of the black folks and states that Senghor himself was far removed from this opinion. He reasons that négritude is better suited as a historical phenomenon, a social and cultural movement faithfully related to African nationalism. Irele analyses the négritude movement as the result of all the intricacies of social and emotional issues that have produced collective experiences of western domination for black peoples and the zenith of the broad range of responses triggered by the impact of western civilisation on the African. He situates the origins of the movement in the total historical experience of the black folk's interaction with the white folks.⁷²

In accord with Irele, the London based artist and curator Rasheed Araeen points out the dangers inherent in the error of reducing the négritude movement to solely black movement. He proposes that the ideas of négritude should be reinvented as essential characteristics of a society which is perceived and constructed on the basis of symbiosis in Africa and regions beyond and liberated from its verbatim construal and the appropriation which reduce them only to forms of art produced by Africans. He finds that many of négritude's rich socio-political ideas appear to have been stifled by the over-privileging of its racialist, ethno-artistic contents.⁷³

The struggle over the citizenship of North Africa in Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77) was scrutinised by the sociocultural anthropologist Andrew Apter. He reveals the process through which a transnational field of symbolic capital accumulation orchestrated the political definition of the extent of Black cultural citizenship

⁷² Irele, 1965, 321

⁷³ Rasheed Araeen, 'Why 'Beyond' négritude?', *Third Text*, 24(2), 2010, pp. 167-176, 168

during the FESTAC 77. Apter traces the bone of contention of this competing definition of Blackness to the 1969 Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers, where the *négritude* philosophy was rejected as counter-revolutionary. This he finds engendered a mistrust of the North Africans in Senghor. The article positions the *négritude* philosophy as the impetus for the postcolonial festivals in Africa and analyses these festivals as primary objects of study in themselves rather than as secondary reflections of external realities. Apter displaces the state as the authority for defining citizenship and focuses on the festival's power to authenticate black cultural citizenship.⁷⁴

Due to connection of the pioneers of the movement to poetry, the tendency is to frequently find the analysis of the movement in art as it relates to the contributions of poets and other writers. This makes the examination of the movement's contributions to visual arts rather sparse in comparison to those in the literary arts. In the attempt to directly connect this movement to the visual arts, Harney highlights the contributions of pioneering artists, patrons, and cultural activists who operated during the immediate post- Independence period in Africa within the context of the *négritude* movement. She focuses on the Ecole de Dakar due to the vital role the institution played in defining modern art and the identity of the modern artist in Senegal. She discusses the conceptual, organisational, and discursive strictures of this state-sponsored canon and reassesses its iconography by advocating alternative explanations of its reconstruction as premeditated and creative distortions of European primitivist practices.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Andrew Apter, 'Beyond *Négritude*: Black cultural citizenship and the Arab question in FESTAC 77', in, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 2016, 313-326, 314

⁷⁵ Elizabeth Harney, 'The Ecole de Dakar: Pan-Africanism in Paint and Textile', *African Arts*, 35 (3), 2002, pp. 12-31+88-90, 13

My thesis aligns with Harney's conclusion that many historians and critics have given attention to the poetry and prose of this movement, while the visual arts have not been privileged to receive the same kind of attention. Most modern African art works have hardly been looked at within their constructions as inventive, indigenous responses to and engagement with cross-cultural concepts of Africanism. They have rather been often disparaged as mimetic consequences of a colonised mindset.⁷⁶

Art institutions as cultural performances of national orientation

According to Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, the history which became part of the trust of knowledge, or the philosophy of nation, states or movements is not what has actually been preserved in the popular memory. It is rather what has been designated, institutionalised, engraved, pictured, and propagated by those whose function it is to do so.⁷⁷ Knell in concurrence with this viewpoint articulates all national galleries as potentially powerful resources for nation building. He asserts that the reason why this is not so obvious is that curators act to depoliticise art. This they do by facilitating a purely aesthetic or social reading through a constructivist approach which creates for us the consciousness that objects and institutions are legitimised by our actions, as they characterise our arrangements rather than acts themselves.⁷⁸

Addressing the negotiation of cultural performances of art institutions, the early-modern culture specialist, Peter Aronsson describes national museums as institutions where knowledge is negotiated, transformed, materialised, visualised and communicated with

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, 2016, 20

⁷⁸ Simon Knell, 2016, xii

national identity politics,⁷⁹ while Knell holds that national museums are subtly the product of national history and local circumstance and performances in particular ways.⁸⁰ Aronsson further identifies three prominent models for understanding the birth of national museums as: the spread of enlightenment; the nationalism born out of the Napoleonic conquest; and shaping of subjects into citizens.⁸¹

Aronsson and Gabriella Elgenius, a sociologist in the University of Gothenburg present an overview of the historic roles of European National museums in the state-making process, highlighting the basis of comparative elements and significant variables. Their analysis relates cultural expressions and processes with the comparative variables in the initiation of national museums, as it discusses the process and the reason (socio-political, historical, economical, fostering of national pride...) for the creation of most national museums in Europe. Four central contexts for national museums and nation-making are identified here as: pro-active national museums; stabilising national museums; reactive national museums; and fading national museums.⁸²

In the investigation of museum realities as performances in national orientation, Aronsson finds that the most suitable framework for examining the role of national museums is to view them as arenas for complex negotiations and representations that follow changing scenarios.⁸³ In a similar vein, Knell likens national museums to the scenography and stage for

⁷⁹ Peter Aronsson 'Explaining national museums: exploring comparative approaches to the study of national museums', in, Simon Knell et. al. (Eds.) *National museums: new studies from around the world*, New York: Routledge, 2011, 48

⁸⁰ Simon Knell, 'National museums and the national imaginations' in, Simon Knell et. al. (Eds.) *National museums: new studies from around the world*, New York: Routledge, 2011, 4

⁸¹ Aronsson, 2011, 29

⁸² Peter Aronsson & Gabriella Elgenius (Eds.), '*Building National Museums in Europe 1750-2010*', Conference proceedings from EuNaMus, European national museums: identity politics, the uses of the past and the European citizen, EuNaMus report, 1 (1), Bologna 28-30 April 2011

⁸³ Aronsson, 2011, 46

performance of the myths of nationhood.⁸⁴ This position is also shared by the Professor of Art History at the University of California, Los Angeles Donald Preziosi, who argues that museums manufacture belief in what is collected, and that the assembled contents are staged sampling or exhibiting. He finds that museums manufacture a two-fold belief: belief in what its contents or collected objects signify, and belief in the independent existence or agency of what it signified. Preziosi reasons that the truthfulness of a given historical exhibition is in no small measure an artefact of its theatricality; that its facticity is a function of its ficticity.⁸⁵

The art historian Kiersten F. Latham addresses the construction of 'the real thing' (TRT) in museum displays by examining the different ways museum visitors understand their experience of the real thing in the museum context. She queries the idea that the uniqueness of the museum in relation to other leisure and educational experiences and offerings is focused on being the keepers of real things. She enumerates four ways of understanding an experience of the real thing in museums: through aspects of the self, in relation to others, through the presence of the actual physical thing, and through one's surroundings.⁸⁶

The cultural negotiations as performances in national orientation by art institutions have also been studied by other writers like Alan Crookham, who narrates the stories behind the development of the National Gallery, London. He provides an insight into the history of the people and events which have helped shape the collection of the National Gallery of Art, London.⁸⁷ Neil Harrison in *Capital Culture* describes the role played by J. Carter Brown,

⁸⁴ Knell, 2011, 4

⁸⁵ Donald Preziosi, 'Myths of nationality', in, Simon Knell et. al. (Eds.) *National museums: new studies from around the world*, New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 55-6, 61-2

⁸⁶ Kiersten F. Latham, 'What is 'the real thing' in the museum? An interpretative phenomenological study', in, *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 30:1, 2015, 2-20, (online) Available from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274265094_What_is_'the_real_thing'_in_the_museum_An_interpretative_phenomenological_study [Accessed: 7th September 2020]

⁸⁷ Alan Crookham, *The National Gallery: an illustrated history*, London: National Gallery Company, [n.d.]

director of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC from 1969 to 1992, along with the contributions of Dillon Ripley, who served as Smithsonian secretary for much of this time. He analyses the roles played by these men in reinventing the museum experience in ways that had important consequences for the cultural life of Washington and its visitors as well as for American museums in general.⁸⁸ While Nick Prior illustrates the contradictory dynamics characterising the relations between art museums and modernity in a study of national art galleries in continental Europe, England and Scotland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He addresses museum issues bordering on current debates about citizenship and cultural equality.⁸⁹

Such divergence of views represents the revolving discourses around the production of the cultural identity through art, which might appear difficult to connect to the Nigerian identity. As this literature review suggests, the existing publications dwell more on the development and classification of modern African art and studies on national museums in Europe and North America. This reveals the gap to be filled by a historicised cultural study of modern art in Nigeria and the politics of nation making. However, these literatures provide the basis for the analysis of the construction of cultural nationalism through art, and the definition of the Nigerian citizenship. This line of research has scarcely been done in Africa. The research for this project is situated in the context of scholarship on art for the propagation of knowledge through national identity politics.

⁸⁸ Neil Harrison, *Capital Culture: J. Carter Brown, the National Gallery of Art, and the reinvention of the museum experience*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013

⁸⁹ Nick Prior, *Museums and modernity: art galleries and the making of modern culture*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2002

Research Methods

This research is qualitative in nature. According to the educational psychologist John W. Creswell, qualitative research is mainly a fact-finding procedure where the researcher systematically unravels the complexities of social phenomenon by contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing, and classifying the objects of the study. The goal of qualitative research is to develop deeper insight and perception of a particular social situation, event, role, group, or interaction.⁹⁰ My research is a cultural and historical enquiry into the engagement of modern art in Nigeria as a means for the communication of national identity politics.

The research is hinged upon recent debates centred on the role of modern art and national art institutions as establishments where knowledge is transformed, negotiated, materialised, visualised and communicated in discourses associated with national identity politics.⁹¹ It looks at the development of modern art in Nigeria as a nation-making process, by adopting an interdisciplinary approach which entails contextual analysis. It is situated within the framework of writing by authors like Claudia Mesch and Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen whose works offer me some valuable insights for investigating the postcolonial nature of Nigeria art.⁹²

My aim is not to produce biographies of the artists involved, but to gain a new understanding of their contributions to constructive acts of identity and orientation. The thesis adopts three methodological approaches: the gathering and use of oral histories and interviews with key

⁹⁰ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*, London: Sage, 1994

⁹¹ Prior, 2002; Aronsson & Elgenius, 2011; Knell. et. al., 2011; Harrison, 2013; & Knell, 2016

⁹² Mesch, 2013 & Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, 2016

actors; the consultation of contemporary documents; and the examination of some modern Nigerian art works produced since the 1920s, which manifest expressions that are focused on the Pan-Africanism ideals for the reorientation of the African mind.

Oral histories and interviews

One of the key classifications of analysis within the field of cultural studies is experience. It has been drawn on as tangible material for many of the questions which cultural studies have engaged.⁹³ According to Hernandez, et.al. oral histories are snapshots—open-ended narrative explanations of a part of the storyteller’s life which could be based on a focused topic. Oral histories permit greater flexibility for the storyteller to address specific issues.⁹⁴

Data collecting through oral histories is a culturally appropriate method of gathering research information which reveals narratives of missing information in communities which have little or no documented information to aid the identification and address of the needs or problems in such communities. Hernandez, et.al. recommend oral history for data gathering in situations where the literary materials on the topic are insufficient. They position oral history as having the potential to enhance the quality of art historical research, as it provides unique insight from the interviewee’s lived experiences and reveals more complex phenomena than traditional qualitative methods. The study notes that oral histories balance power relationships inherent in research and allow community members greater control of their representation, as it emphasises a more open methodological approach that does not constrain participants with predetermined inquiry strategies.⁹⁵

⁹³ Michael Pickering, ‘Experience and the Social World’, in, Michael Pickering & Gabriele Griffin (Eds.), *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008, 17

⁹⁴ Sarah Gabriella Hernandez, et.al., ‘Oral Histories as Critical Qualitative Inquiry in Community Health Assessment’, 44(5), 2017, pp. 705-715, 707

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 705

The cultural analyst Michael Pickering reasons that although the lived experience could be common to both the researcher and the researched, the details of the experiences and their interpretations are to a large extent varied and subjective. This he associates with the pressures and conflicts over our interpretations of those experiences. These subjective dimensions of social relations are crucial for the construction of our sense of who we are or might become, and imperative to our changing identities and changing ideation of the social worlds inhabited by us.⁹⁶

Hernandez, et.al. find that oral history adds a holistic understanding to cultural research by representing artists' community cultural wealth, the identity, culture, and lived experiences of artists in their own words. The study assesses oral history as being able to improve procedural revolution and inclusivity to increase reliability and the significance ascribed to findings by the community.⁹⁷ Unlike interviews and focus groups, oral histories are open, unstructured, and guided by informal probes.

My interviews with actors included those with modern artists in Nigeria whose works evince a direct connection to the idea of art in the negotiation of Nigeria's identity politics; academics in art colleges; as well as curators and art critics. As Sophia Krzys Acord argues in *Learning how to think, and feel, about contemporary art*, the operations of curators can be positioned within their membership of a larger creative team to facilitate the production of culture by linking products to groups, influencing the flow of information and establishing the practice of consuming products. She points out that they define for others what art is.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Pickering, 2008, 17-18

⁹⁷ Sarah Gabriella Hernandez, et.al., 2017, 706

⁹⁸ Sophia Krzys Acord, 'Learning how to think, and feel, about contemporary art: an object relational aesthetic for sociology', in, Laurie Hanquinet & Mike Savage (Eds.) *Routledge international handbook of the sociology of art and culture*, London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 219-231

Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen contends that in the modern art-world, where the construction of new intellectual discourse on a work of art is central to definition of its worth, the conventional rules like the good eye are no longer appropriate. She finds this discourse to be more dependent on a theoretical discourse drawn from philosophy, literary theory, cultural studies, and sociology, and less on the contextual approach steeped in art history.⁹⁹

My interviews also included those with directors of the National Gallery of Art in Nigeria, and curators of the institution for a better grasp of the cultural dynamics inherent in modern Nigerian art (see table 1 in the appendix). Since this type of knowledge and evidence are contextual, situational and interactional, Mason recommends that the interviews may need to be flexible and sensitive to the specific dynamics of each interaction, so that each interview is effectively tailor-made to suit the interviewees. She suggests that it is better to take cues from the interviewees about what to ask them, rather than to go into the interaction pre-scripted, so that the researcher is able to follow up the interviewee's specific responses along lines which are peculiarly relevant to them and their context, and which the researcher could not have anticipated in advance.¹⁰⁰

The unstructured interview method is employed in collecting data from the selected directors and curators. The data gathered from them is valuable in gaining the proper insight into how modern art in Nigeria has deployed different narrative devices in representing socio-political, religious, historic, and socioeconomic events in Nigeria. Please find table 1 in the appendix for the list of actors who granted me some degree of audience for the interviews for this research.

⁹⁹ Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, 2016, 20

¹⁰⁰ Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative researching*, London: Sage, 1996, pp. 60-82

Consultation of contemporary documents

The research required the consultation of documents such as exhibition catalogues and ephemera, related literature from the *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, government reports on the establishment of the NGA, and so on. The sociologist Jennifer Mason endorses the analysis of documentary sources as a major method of social research, and one which many qualitative researchers see as meaningful and appropriate in the context of their research strategy.¹⁰¹ The descriptive annotations attached to each work provided my research with the initial information upon which my analyses were developed.

Cultural analysis of visual art

The purposive or judgemental sampling technique was deployed in identifying the artists and the art works that were discussed in this thesis. The educationist and sociological theorist Joseph Alex Maxwell holds that the purposive or judgemental sampling is a strategy in which particular individuals, events, or situations are selected deliberately in order to provide important information that cannot be obtained from other choices.¹⁰² According to Hamed Taherdoost, the purposive or judgemental sampling technique permits the researcher to include cases or participants in the sample because they believe that their inclusion is essential.¹⁰³ The artists and art works for this thesis were selected and analysed by a means of a system of inference. This system seeks the roots of the factors that relate the works of Nigerian artists in these collections to the discourse of nation-making and their various relationships to the artistic, cultural, and ideological base of being Nigerian.

¹⁰¹ Mason, 1996, pp. 60-82

¹⁰² Joseph A. Maxwell, 'Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach', in, *Applied Social Research Methods Series*, London: Sage, 1996

¹⁰³ Hamed Taherdoost, Sampling method in Research Methodology; How to Choose a Sampling Technique for Research', in, *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARN)*, 5(2), 2016, pp. 18-27, 23

As the main objective of cultural studies is the analysis of cultural production, its performance and consummation, the engagement of the visual by scholars working in cultural studies is most imperative.¹⁰⁴ In order to gain a proper appreciation of the engagement of the visual for cultural studies, Sarah Pink in the article 'Analysing Visual Experience' advocates the needs to situate the visual in three ways:

First both researcher and research subjects' use of visual methods and visual media are always embedded in social relationships and cultural practices and meanings. In any research situation these need to be reflexively unpacked. Second, no experience is ever purely visual, and to comprehend 'visual culture' we need to understand what vision itself is, and what its relationship is to other sensory modalities. Third, in academic analysis and representation we are never really dealing with 'visual' subdisciplines.¹⁰⁵

The focus in cultural studies of art works is on the significance of the cultural objects to the people who produced them, the museum practice, and to the culture at large.¹⁰⁶ The general perception and judgement of an artwork as a masterpiece is immaterial to this study, the ability of the work to give us information about the culture in which it was produced is of greater significance in this situation.¹⁰⁷

This research implements a culturally situated slant which permits every respective artwork to act as a qualifier for the understanding of the other work. Knell analyses this process as exposing similarities and differences in the use of these works in the negotiations of nationhood and national identity. This is because virtually all art works occur in the

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Pink, 'Analysing Visual Experience', in, Michael Pickering & Gabriele Griffin (Eds.), *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008, 129

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 131

¹⁰⁶ Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative researching 2nd edition*, Los Angeles: Sage, 2013

¹⁰⁷ Anne D'Alleva, *Methods and theories of art history*, London: Lawrence King Publishing Ltd., 2005, 76

specificity of an institutional, historical, economic, and cultural context, which contest the notion of a universal understanding of all art works.¹⁰⁸

Paintings provide the uniqueness of an original artwork, even though the means by which they enlighten, or influence, the audience is that of reproduction. Painting as a chosen visual medium for educating the masses has been illustrated by Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen as conceivably the most straightforward cultural material for mass cultural reorientation. The audience is simultaneously given the collective right to own.¹⁰⁹ Sidney Kasfir in *African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow* affirms that 'Painting has a more literary, message bearing character than the plastic arts and is also a greater artifice, collapsing three dimensions onto a flat surface. As such it is riper for semiotic analysis.'¹¹⁰ The limitation of exclusively analysing Nigerian art history through the testimony of written sources has necessitated the juxtaposition of a sort of ethnohistory based on oral history and material culture in this thesis. This is done to locate culture in the ways in which Nigerians exploited their material resources and geography.

The analysis of the selected art works is done by a careful scrutiny of the art works and informal discussions with members of staff of the NGMAL like, Mr Sola Sodiya, NGMAL's photographer; Mr John Egwatu and Mr James Itodo, members of the NGMAL's curatorial staff; Olakunle Morrisol and Mrs Comfort Anunu, the longest-serving gallery guide in the NGMAL. We developed an experimental method of authorship where these staff of the NGMAL collaborated with me to analyse and interpret the data. This method of authoring art mirrors the nature of co-curating by gaining investment and contribution from professionals

¹⁰⁸ Knell, 2016, xi

¹⁰⁹ Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, 2016, 13

¹¹⁰ Kasfir, 1992, 50

in the field as a means of collaborating which yields more robust perspectives on the art works.¹¹¹ The discussions proved to be very resourceful in the contextualisation of these art works, as cultural objects should be considered not only in relation to other objects, but also in relation to the social structure of the world.¹¹²

Pickering notes that the need for the otherwise silent or marginalised voices whose perspectives have been excluded from former narratives to be heard, and the necessity of presenting their accounts directly in their own words have occasioned a greater recognition of the need to deploy more participant-centred research methods in the construction of connections between researchers and researched.¹¹³ However, he argues that even though the act of attending to experience is necessary, it is never enough in itself, as it comes with its own difficulties. He contends that it is one thing to respect what is said by research subjects, but it is most essential that the information gathered is balanced with a critical regard for what any kind of evidence might mean and how this evidence can be connected to the organisational position of the research subject. Pickering observes that cultural analysis warrants the ability to move back and forth between what has been portrayed by the informants and what can be decrypted from all that.¹¹⁴

The study therefore necessitates consulting with all the players listed above to find out the relevance that they place on these cultural objects. Mason recommends that in dealing with visual data like sculptures, drawings, and paintings, visual arts and artefacts, we

¹¹¹ Meghan Ferriter, et al., 'We learn together: crowdsourcing as practice and method in the Smithsonian Transcription Center', in, *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*, 12(2), 2016, p. 207+, (online) Available from: *Gale Academic OneFile*, [Accessed: 9 September 2020]

¹¹² Lala Hajibayova & Kiersten F Latham, 'Exploring Museum Crowdsourcing Projects Through Bourdieu's Lens', in, *Knowledge Organization*, 44(7), 2017, (online) Available from: DOI: [10.5771/0943-7444-2017-7-506](https://doi.org/10.5771/0943-7444-2017-7-506) [Accessed: 2nd September 2020]

¹¹³ Pickering, 2008, 19

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 19, 20

have to think about the visual, spatial and design elements of such data, because they do not take a text-based form. She states that the visual gaze should be confined to the generation and use of wholly visual data.¹¹⁵ The established status of the easel painting as an object of political representation, positions it as a most significant tool for the invention of the national gallery, as it was very suitable for integration into processes and institutions associated with nation-making.¹¹⁶

Since the research deals with visual objects, a camera was indispensable in capturing the paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints etc. The art works are physically examined, and others are examined through the photographs of the art works. Studying the artwork through photographs is a creative method of collecting data as it captures attention visually. Mason recommends that photographs and images can be a very effective way of accessing aspects of the interviewees' lives or experiences which are non-verbal, or difficult for them to verbalise.¹¹⁷

At the beginning of this research, the institution was only able to work skeletally and therefore, was not able to function optimally. By the conclusion of my study in 2021 the whole of the collection had been moved into the stores, as the management of the National Theatre complex which house the National Gallery of Modern art Lagos had been handed over to the Central Bank of Nigeria's Banker's Committee. Despite this, I refer to my six years of experience within the institution between the years 2002 and 2008 in drawing my analysis of the mechanisms of the national gallery and how its collection was deployed in creating a narrative of a national identity and its act of canonising Nigerian art. Nevertheless, there are

¹¹⁵ Mason, 1996

¹¹⁶ Simon Knell, 2016, 8-9

¹¹⁷ Mason, 1996

some difficulties in the interpretation of some of the works, especially the works of some artists who are no longer living and there are not enough available data for a proper analysis of these works: hence the need to consult the actors responsible for making the art culture in Nigeria.

This research thus outlines a visual slant to cultural studies research, which is rooted in a sensory awareness of culture and society, and in a participatory and intersubjective approach to the creation of knowledge. The deaths of Uche Okeke and David Dale in recent years underscore the urgent need to document these art histories which are retained in the ephemeral traces left by their artistic projects in these institutions.

Ethical implications

Regarding ethical implications of my research, there were no particular issues related to the involvement of vulnerable groups as such, and approval was sought and obtained for the study. The ethical issues related to the thesis were principally those towards my interviewees. The relevant work was carried out according to the University of Leicester's code of ethics. As everyone is entitled to basic human rights, when interacting with my respondents I was mindful of ethical issue such as their willingness to be interviewed, the security of their personal information and comments, the permission from them to use acquired data in my thesis for the specified purpose. Furthermore, I made efforts to protect interviewees' contributions, by providing adequate information about the interview and the thesis to interviewees. I was also careful with my choice of words and manner of enquiry in order not to offend them or make them feel uncomfortable.

Structure of the Thesis

This thesis examines the political manoeuvres of the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos in its acts of shaping the Nigerian identity through its collection. The NGMAL is rightly positioned to influence the socio-political dynamics of the country with its narration of the national identity politics of the nation through its evolution from colonialism to independence as a sovereign state. This has been aided by the institution's position as the first of several branches of the National Gallery of Art in Nigeria, and its location in the former capital and the most populous state of Nigeria.

Within this introduction is contained a brief overview of the core argument of the construction of the thesis, a brief statement about the position of the author, followed by the aim and objectives, the research context and potential contributions, the literature review, an outline of my research methods, and the final section then ends with introducing the thesis structure and key thesis argument.

The thematic structure of my thesis is shaped into six sections, the first being this Introduction. Chapter one addresses the role of the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos (NGMAL) in the negotiations of national identity and the canonisation of modern art in Nigeria. Chapter two locates the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos within the construction of the Nigerian national narrative and its social negotiations.

Chapter three looks at the Pan-Africanism movement and its historical interpretations across Africa and the African diaspora. It locates its manifestations in struggles for independence across Africa, in negotiations of the African identity, in colonial and postcolonial debate regarding Africa, and in the authoring of modern art in Africa. Chapter four looks at the *négritude* philosophy as a performative Pan-African expression. It examines

the development of the movement, its adaptation for the development of a new artistic language in Africa and amongst its diasporas, its use for socio-economic reconstruction in Africa and the assertion of African pride and the empowerment of the subjugated voices of minority artists.

The concluding section of the thesis reflects on the performance of the thesis on the set objectives. It enumerates the findings on the negotiations of national identity and canonisation of modern art in Nigeria by the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos (NGMAL). It records how modern art in Nigeria has been used to help citizens locate themselves in relation to the national story through the collection of the NGMAL. It analyses the use of modern art in Nigeria as an essential part of both local and national socio-economic frameworks for addressing the recent past and present through the related discourses of Pan-Africanism and the *négritude* movement as key discourses to finding the national perspective in Nigerian art.

Chapter One: National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos in the Negotiations of National Identity and Canonisation of Modern art in Nigeria

Introduction

In the construction and positioning of the nation, there is both tangible and imagined connection between the material thing within the museum and that without; between movable material culture and immovable landscape.¹¹⁸



Plate 2. The main Entrance of the National Theatre Lagos Nigeria

¹¹⁸ Simon Knell, 'National museums and the national imaginations', in, Knell, Simon; Aronsson, Peter; & Arne Bugge, Amundsen; (Eds.), *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, New York: Routledge, 2011, 24

Housed in the magnificent general's cap¹¹⁹ (see plate 2), one immediately starts to feel the sense of the importance of this once eminent institution known as the National Gallery of Modern art, Lagos. The front façade is embellished with intricate motifs from traditional African art designs, and elaborate murals and wood carvings which display the richness of modern Nigerian art in very exclusive mahogany and teak wood (see plate 3). However, it does not take long for all the grandeur of this once distinguished institution to fade. Its external beauty betrays the deterioration that lies within. Due to the epileptic power supply to the institution, many of the works in the collection have started to deteriorate. Some of the works in the permanent exhibition had to be relocated to the stores in an attempt to save them from further deterioration. But, behind all that, one can perceive a strong will to produce a narrative of nation-building that had been put in place by the founding fathers of the institution for the re-orientation of the post-colonial Nigerian mind, with the purpose of highlighting that which is essentially Nigerian.

In the process of translating the material into the nation, the structures and function of national museums are defined by their relationship with contemporary politics, which are synthesised and explicated by connecting collections to historical trajectories of nation-building.¹²⁰ Looking at the collection of the NGMAL, one can deduce nuances of its performance as a bridging institution, rather than providing the material bases for segregation in a country that is subdivided into many ethnic groups. It has attempted to

¹¹⁹ The National Theatre in Lagos is sometimes referred to as the General's cap because it was theme built to depict the importance of the Nigerian army who were ruling the country at the time of the commissioning of the building.

¹²⁰ Peter Aronsson, 'Explaining national museums: Exploring comparative approaches to the study of national museums', in Knell, Simon; Aronsson, Peter; & Arne Bugge, Amundsen; (Eds.), *National Museums: New Studies from around the World*, New York: Routledge, 2011, 38

exploit museum techniques politically to iron over the creases of diversity, using its power to display and shape collective values and social understandings.



Plate 3. The entrance of the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos

The collection has been organised to fine-tune the politics of regional diversity, uniting the disparate groups by linking them to a shared culture, identity, and history in the bid to foster national cohesion to make the nation feasible. Such shaping of ideas developed out of the need to order a nation of peoples with a consciousness of their cultural, historical, and geographical differences.¹²¹ The NGMAL therefore had to aid the creation of a unified cultural identity to make explicit values for the citizens of the nation.

¹²¹ Aronsson, 2011; Knell, 2011; & Donald Preziosi, 'Myths of nationality', in, Knell, Simon; Aronsson, Peter; and Amundsn, Arne Bugge; (Eds.) *National museums: new studies from around the world*, New York: Routledge, 2011

In addressing the politics of nation-making in state-owned institutions, Knell analyses the national museum in its local production as a reflection of the agglomeration of site-specific conditions. These include nationalism and wealth, international connections, identity and competition, individual and corporate interests, political and economic relationships, the ideological possibilities of culture, networks of appropriation and emulation, diplomatic efforts, and so on.¹²² Knell points out that the term ‘national gallery’ is widely used in parts of Europe, in the English-speaking world, in much of the British Commonwealth, and in Africa and throughout much of Asia. He observes that the preference has been for ‘national museum of fine art’ in other parts of Europe, Latin America and in countries of the former Soviet Union.¹²³

Aronsson argues that systematic collection reflected a general desire to shape the world, discover the unidentified and share splendour and knowledge with peers. He connects this situation to the spread of enlightenment and the political changes from the conglomerate states of ancient regime into nation-states. He classifies the British Museum as the iconic model of a universal museum of the enlightenment, and the Museum National d’Histoire Naturelle, Musee des Monuments Francais and the Louvre, as Napoleonic role models for the national museum.¹²⁴

Most other nations appear to have emulated these European models in the construction of their national identities. With Nigeria also deploying its national gallery for sharing knowledge with its citizens and the rest of the world, the national gallery has become

¹²² Knell, 2011, 6

¹²³ Simon Knell, *National galleries: the art of making nations*, New York: Routledge, 2016, Pp. 8, 9

¹²⁴ Aronsson, 2011, Pp. 30, 31

a vehicle for the development of its national narratives and negotiation of social and political change through the process of creating connections between the cultural objects and the nation.

The policies deployed by the national galleries take multiple forms which are informed by the peculiar socio-cultural and geographical needs of each nation, causing the development of specific methods for directing national gallery narratives. The various shapes that politics takes within this sector include, the mode of presenting the museums' contents to the public, funding decisions, and the effect of national government.¹²⁵ The narratives produced by these national galleries and how they create them are subject to the power relationships that permit these institutions to exist.¹²⁶

In the scrutiny of state-owned cultural institutions as providers of material settings for the performances of the nation, it is essential to understand that their performances of national politics are done by their manufacture of belief in what they have collected. One of the principal products of the stagecraft of these institutions is a belief in the independent reality and agency of what their objects signify. They exist primarily to produce beliefs in their collection.¹²⁷ We can therefore imagine these institutions as providing the scenography and stage for their performance of myths of nationhood. Hence, their assembled contents are staged as implying an existence.

The form of an artefact is made to act as a witness of the value of its truth in narrative, as its characteristics are interpreted to evidence its truth and essence. Kasfir illustrates that

¹²⁵ Clive Gray, 'Museums, Galleries, Politics and Management', 2011, (Online) <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0952076710365436>

¹²⁶ Preziosi, 2011

¹²⁷ Ibid., 56, 57

the act of displaying an isolated mask or figure encased in a vitrine or lit with track lights means to convey the information that the object is to be apprehended as 'art'. However, she finds that when the same object is embedded in the busy diorama of a natural history's museum display, it is meant to be read differently as a cultural text.¹²⁸ This insinuates that, not only is the museum narrative constructed, but such a narrative is subject to change based on the intent and location of the cultural institution which authors it.

Nigeria possesses a recent past of colonial subjugation, political upheavals, and a demography that includes more than two hundred and fifty ethnic divides. Its national gallery's task in negotiating all these variables is profoundly different from those from sites of high cultural empowerment both in mission and context. Knell shows that national galleries have been built by almost every nation, except for in Africa, the Caribbean and Pacific islands. While Africa has fewer national galleries, it is nevertheless observed that national galleries were amongst those institutions that several African countries produced to express their national identities post-independence. In this respect these African nations are no different from the new states established in Europe after the First World War and following the collapse of the Soviet Empire.

National galleries are key nation-making institutions. However, relatively little work has been done on the national galleries that exist in Africa, including those in Nigeria. The only extant publication on the National Gallery of Art in Nigeria is Simon Ikpakronyi's effort in his book *The Development of the National Gallery of Art and the National Studios of Art in Nigeria*.¹²⁹ Simon Ikpakronyi is a director at the National Gallery of Art. The book traces the

¹²⁸ Kasfir, 1992, 47

¹²⁹ Ikpakronyi, 2002

development of the institutionalised gallery system in Nigeria as a response to the evolution of modern art in the country and the development of the national studios attached to the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos. This publication, even though it worked on the NGA, Nigeria did not deal with the institution in terms of its role in the politics of Nigerian national identity. That is the gap that my work intends to fill.

Since there has scarcely been any material published on the NGMAL, my research leans heavily on the interpretation of the artefacts in the collection. Although we might think of it as a shame that it has not really realised its full potential yet, this unrealised potential contributes to what makes it a rather interesting institution to study. Studying the NGMAL at this time requires the understanding of the history that has produced it. The leading national galleries in Europe misrepresent the global phenomenon of these institutions.¹³⁰

The study of national galleries should situate their appreciation in the contexts of their production.¹³¹ This perspective, which observes the cultural, political and bureaucratic context, is increasingly becoming a model for the study of these institutions. For example, Yon Jai Kim's 2018 PhD thesis titled *The Making of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), South Korea, 1969-2016* is centred on the cultural situation of the institution's production.¹³² The best way to look at an institution in Nigeria is through the Nigerian perspective.

This chapter looks at how the dynamics of art nationalism in Nigeria leads to institutionalisation or non-institutionalisation of national art and how the national canon of

¹³⁰ Knell, 2016

¹³¹ Simon Knell, 'Modernisms', in, Simon Knell (ed.) *The Contemporary Museum: Shaping Museums for the Global Now*, London: Routledge, 2018

¹³² Yon Jai Kim, *The Making of the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA), South Korea, 1969-2016*, PhD thesis submitted to the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester in 2018, (Online) <https://lra.le.ac.uk/handle/2381/41227>

art is articulated in Nigeria. It brings an analysis of the Nigerian art culture and politics as authenticated by the NGMAL to the discourse. It locates certain artists whose works are displayed in the permanent exhibition of the NGMAL, tracing their political affiliations in connection to the discourse of the subject of Nigeria as it projects the national identity of the country. Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen argues that such information does not have to be true or even believable. She states that the transformation of perception is supposed to originate in the viewer's contact with the image. This act she finds, produces the belief that positive imagery led to a positive perception of the situation and at the same time, any diversion from such imagery is considered dangerous.¹³³

In this discussion the National Gallery of Modern Art, Lagos is taken as an institution of national collection and display, which articulates and negotiates the Nigerian national identity politics. Going by the understanding that the national museum is a term that can be interchangeably used for the national gallery in this context, as they are state-owned cultural institutions which basically perform the same functions of negotiating national identity politics,¹³⁴ the term "national museum" and "national gallery" will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter, as in English, the two terms are equivalent.¹³⁵

Even though this chapter is shaped by the post-colonial art in Nigeria, it is quite necessary to point out that modern art in Nigerian cannot be strictly confined to its encounter with colonialism. It is art that has metamorphosed over several centuries and it is therefore an agglomeration of all these experiences engraved in the Nigerian sociology over these

¹³³ Aliya Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, *Central Asia in art: from Soviet orientalism to the new republics*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2016, 173

¹³⁴ Aronsson, 2011, 31

¹³⁵ Knell, 2016, Pp. 8, 9

centuries. This chapter is framed by the work of scholars like Chika Okeke-Agulu, Claudia Mesch, and Sylvester Ogbechie who are concerned with the idea of art and political identity.¹³⁶

It is set within the context of art modernisms that developed out of an ideological conflict with the imperial West in order to accentuate the variation in the visual arts predisposed to anti-colonial nationalism and Pan-Africanism. It examines Nigerian Modern art with the purpose of illustrating how the works have been used to re-educate, inspire, and ultimately create a new Nigeria. It is connected to the context of writers working on the idea of national institutions and national identity politics. Evidencing the biographies of objects with the idea that objects have life histories just as people do, which can help visitors make connections with exhibits.¹³⁷

The development of art Institutionalisation in Nigeria

Shortly after the inauguration of the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA) in 1963, a body known as the Federal Society for Arts and Humanities (FSAH) was established. Both associations arranged exhibitions and held discussions together on how to go about the establishment of a national gallery in Nigeria for the propagation of national art. The Federal Society for Arts and Humanities is recorded as the first group in Nigeria to source for funds from the federal

¹³⁶ Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, USA: Duke University Press, 2015; Claudia Mesch, *Art and politics: a small History of art for Social Change since 1945*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013; & Sylvester Okwundu Ogbechie, 'More on Nationalism and Nigerian Art', *African Arts*, 42 (3), 2009

¹³⁷ Francesca Monti & Suzanne Keene, *Museums and Silent Objects: Designing Effective Exhibitions*, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013, 16

government in Nigeria for the acquisition of Nigerian modern visual art for the founding of a national collection.¹³⁸

With regards to modern art training, the country had to embark on the development of formal art schools in Nigeria due to the craving of Nigerian artists for higher qualifications in art. The first formal art school at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology (now known as the Fine Arts Department of the Ahmadu Bello University), in Zaria, was established by the colonial government of Nigeria in 1952.¹³⁹ It was established through the ordinance No. 12 of the Colonial Government Edit. The College had two campuses then referred to as the Ibadan and Zaria Branches. The colleges admitted architecture students at Ibadan, while the teacher training students were sent to Zaria.¹⁴⁰

The Department of arts of the Yaba Technical Institute, now Yaba College of Technology, was also established in 1954. These were followed by the Fine Arts Department of the University of Nigeria, in Nsukka in South-eastern Nigeria, which was established in 1961.¹⁴¹ The first two institutions had been established within the borders of the North and South-western regions of the country.

It appears that the sequence of events of the establishment of these art schools in Nigerian universities follow the chronological order of the dates and positions of the ancient art traditions found in Nigeria. The Zaria art school, which was the first university in Nigeria

¹³⁸ Simon O. Ikpakronyi, 'The development of galleries, national studios of art, structures and functions: National Gallery of Art – Nigeria in focus', Dike, Chike, & Oyelola, Patricia, (Eds.), *The Development of the National Gallery of Art and the National Studios of Art in Nigeria*, Nigeria: National Gallery of Art Nigeria, 2002

¹³⁹ Chinedu C. Chukueggu, 'The Origin and Development of Formal Art Schools in Nigeria', *African Research Review, Journal*, Ethiopia, 4(2) Apr. 2010, pp. 502-513, 504, (Online) Available from:

<https://www.ajol.info/index.php/afrrrev/article/viewFile/58365/46710> [Accessed: 22 August 2018]

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Cornelius O. Adepegba, *Nigerian art; its traditions and modern tendencies*, Ibadan: Jodad, 1995, 82

to offer art at the University level, was established within the region where the Nok culture of the Iron age, dating to around 1500 BC–300 AD. This establishes it as the oldest evidence of creative culture discovered in Nigeria.

The art department of the Nsukka School is located within the Eastern region of Nigeria where the Igbo-Ukwu culture dating back to the 9th Century AD,¹⁴² the second oldest art culture in Nigeria originates. Could it be a mere coincidence that this school of art was the second university to offer art in Nigeria? The Ife art school in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife was the third university to offer art at the university level, coincidentally, the Ife art culture dated around 1200 -1400 AD is the third oldest art tradition in Nigeria. The Benin art school was the fourth University to offer art at the university level in Nigeria and Benin art culture dated around the 13th century to date closely follows Ife in a lot of ways.

The time between the end of the Ife culture and the rise of the Benin culture is very close, and the early works of bronze produced in the Benin culture bear strong resemblance to that of the Ife culture in their naturalistic style. It seems that someone at the helm of affairs of the creation of the art departments in these universities must have been mindful of this order. This maps the route through which fine art teaching at the university level was established in Nigeria. These schools have produced the artists, academics and administrators who have introduced art to many newer Nigerian universities and higher institutes of learning. Their emergence on the Nigerian art scene therefore plays a significant role in directing the flow of modern art in Nigeria.

¹⁴² John E. G. Sutton, 'The International Factor at Igbo-Ukwu', in, *The African Archaeological Review*, 9, 1991, pp. 145-60

Over the years more universities have established their own art schools or departments. Similarly, colleges of technologies and teachers training colleges have also developed more training facilities for artists. Various types of workshops have also emerged over the years and there is also a thriving market for the self-taught sign writers within the society.

Most formal art schools in independent African countries followed the European models of training at their inception. However, a radical course was charted by graduate artists who jettisoned the academy-tradition by employing a more African outlook in both the form and content of their work. This situation produced varying degrees of hybridisation of Western formats with African concepts of visual creativity. This has occasioned the performance of many creative experiments by artists of the 20th century, using creative adaptations of indigenous traditions.¹⁴³

The development of art collecting and the NGA

Along with the increase in training avenues came the increase in the number of trained artists. This resulted in an increased demand for exhibition spaces. Patrons were very few and the facilities for exhibiting were limited. In the early 1960s, only the LABAC (Lagos Branch of Nigerian Art Council) in Marina and the British Council were exhibiting art.¹⁴⁴ Some private galleries and arms of the department of culture began to exhibit art much later. Ironically, the European style of art collecting and preservation in museums in Nigeria was pioneered by

¹⁴³ Olakunle Filani, 'The Question of Identity in contemporary African art and art criticism: Background to the study of African art and criticism', 2004, pp. 81-94

¹⁴⁴ Adepegba, 1995, 79

Kenneth C. Murray, an education officer who became the first director of antiquities in Nigeria.¹⁴⁵

Murray came into Nigeria through his appointment as an adviser to the government of Nigeria on education and art-related matters. His initial effort in collecting art generated over six hundred traditional art pieces which later formed the nucleus of the National Museum in Onikan, Lagos. Nevertheless, Bernard. E. B. Fagg and his wife had been accumulating archaeological specimens in Nigeria since 1910. Initial efforts to kickstart a museum can be further traced to the late 1930s.¹⁴⁶

Although there had been records of art exhibitions on the Nigerian art space since the 1920s, one of such being the art exhibition of Aina Onabolu and his students in the Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos, 1925, the *Exhibition Centre* at the Marina in Lagos, which was established in 1946 under the Ministry of Information was the first purpose-built exhibition space in Nigeria. There the Society of Nigerian Artists held its inaugural exhibition in January 1964 as one of the more significant exhibitions which took place at the venue.¹⁴⁷

With the increase of art institutions in Nigeria, there was an intensification of the practice of art and the resultant advancement in the number of artists and stakeholders in the Nigerian art field. There occurred a growing awareness and yearning for art representation in galleries. Along with this development came the yearnings for a national gallery of art, where the Nigerian national and cultural sensibilities could be negotiated by these artists.

¹⁴⁵ Adepegba, 1995, 79

¹⁴⁶ Ikpakronyi, 2002, 1

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 4

Consequently, talks continued within the ranks of the Society of Nigerian Artists and the representatives of the federal government in the Ministry of Culture, until plans for the establishment of the National gallery was brought to fruition. Nigeria has since then experienced the establishment of several private galleries all over the country, a development that has facilitated the connection of Nigerian artists to other players in the art world. This in turn has caused the dynamism expressed on the Nigerian modern art scene through the effective promotion of these players.

Borne out of Nigeria's consent to host the Second all African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1970, the federal government of Nigeria assented to the establishment of the National Gallery of Art. In November 1979, the Federal Department of Culture established the National Gallery of Modern Art at the National Theatre complex in Lagos.¹⁴⁸ Unlike many European national collections which metamorphosed out of royal collections, the collection of the NGMAL grew out of the exhibition of modern Nigerian art at FESTAC. It was augmented with works from the collection of the Nigerian Magazine Exhibition Centre and commissions made by the NGMAL to produce certain artworks to enhance what was derived from these two collections. Those commissions were mostly portraits of figures from Nigerian history to aid the institution's creation of a national story.¹⁴⁹

FESTAC was held in Lagos, Nigeria, attracting around 17,000 artists from about 57 countries and nearly 500,000 spectators. Its attendees comprised of actors from all over the world to legitimise cultural unity among Black people around the world. Of great significance was the National Commission for Museums and Monuments' exhibition, which traced 2,000

¹⁴⁸ Ikpakronyi, 2002, 1

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Dr Paul Chike Dike former DG. Of the National Gallery of Art Nigeria on 6th of September 2017

years of Nigerians culture through its unique diversity.¹⁵⁰ It highlighted the skills of Nigerian artists of the past and stimulated an interest in the work of Nigerian artists of the present.

The exhibition received global acclaim when it travelled around the world, this brought the Nigerian government to the realisation that works of art were a means of enhancing national image abroad.¹⁵¹ The National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos was commissioned in 1981 as a section of the Department of Culture. It holds a permanent display of artworks by modern Nigerian artists and foreign artists inside the National theatre.¹⁵² The National Gallery of Art (incorporating the National Gallery of Modern Art) was established as a parastatal (Federal Government agency) by decree No. 86 of August 1993.¹⁵³ The establishment of the institution was promulgated into law by the Federal Government of Nigeria in the *National Gallery of Art (Amendment) Act 2004* on the 12th of May 2004.¹⁵⁴

The Objectives of the National Gallery of Art are as follows:

- (i) To serve as a repository for the artistic creations since the birth of Nigerian as a nation.
- (ii) To promote research, education and appreciation in art and works of art.¹⁵⁵

In its regional negotiations, the institution has established local and regional galleries in several states within the six geopolitical zones of the federation. This is in addition to its

¹⁵⁰ Arthur Monroe, 'FESTAC 77-THE SECOND WORLD BLACK AND AFRICAN FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND CULTURE: LAGOS, NIGERIA', in *The Black Scholar*, 9(1), BLACK LABOR (September 1977), pp. 34-37. Taylor & Francis, Ltd. (Online), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41066961> & Pat Oyelola, 'Internationalism and Ethnicity in Modern Nigerian Art', in *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, 2(1&2) Jan. 1997 - Dec. 1998, pp. 20-32, 20

¹⁵¹ Oyelola, 1998, 20

¹⁵² Adepegba, 1995, 88, & Oyelola, 1997, 20

¹⁵³ Ikpakronyi, 2002, 26

¹⁵⁴ *National Gallery of Art (Amendment) Act 2004*, 12th May, 2004, 1

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

headquarters in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, and the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos, which was the first branch.

This incorporates stations in Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Benue, Borno, Delta, Osun, Kaduna, Niger, Rivers, Sokoto, and Taraba states of Nigeria (please see plate 1). These arms of the National Gallery will concentrate on specific forms of art, which are geography-specific. For example, the Lagos state hosts the National Gallery of Modern art, arguably due to its cosmopolitan nature and the fact that Lagos was the former capital city of Nigeria. Ikpakronyi lists Niger state as hosting the portrait gallery, Benue state will host the textile gallery, Akwa Ibom will host the contemporary gallery of Christian art, while Sokoto state will host the National gallery of contemporary Islamic art.¹⁵⁶

The area of specialisation of these various galleries is reflective of the regional negotiations in Nigeria, as the institution purposes to enhance the federal character and foment a cohesion of all the geopolitical zones in the country. Although all these stations listed above have been inaugurated, they are yet to be fully operational. At present, they merely function as liaison offices.

In the case of the NGA in Nigeria the bulk of the decision-making lies in the hands of the Minister of the Federal Minister of Information and Culture. He expresses the mind of the federal government to the board of trustees,¹⁵⁷ the Director-General, and directors of the National Gallery of Art. Elected politicians at the national level are formally responsible for key funding decisions, while the NGA's professionals have the responsibility of addressing issues related to the technical decisions over matters such as conservation techniques.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Ikpakronyi, 2002, 36

¹⁵⁷ Usually selected for their fame and not necessarily for their interest in, or knowledge of the field.

¹⁵⁸ *National Gallery of Art (Amendment) Act 2004*, 12th May, 2004, 3

These policy choices of political actors serve to identify which functions are seen to be important, and why they are seen as being important.¹⁵⁹ All these stakeholders in policymaking in the NGA make their choices to exercise their power in different ways, but essentially work together to politicise the institution's content and display. However, since the establishment of the NGA the collecting of Nigerian modern art by Nigerians appears to have improved.¹⁶⁰

Locating the NGMAL in the Narrative of National Galleries

A 'national gallery' might be understood as an institution meeting some or all of the following criteria: holding and exhibiting all or part of the national collection of fine art; established by an act of parliament or government decree; funded at least in part by the national government; possessing a professional staff employed by the state; situated in government bureaucracy and delivering in policy areas in the arts; and designated or referenced to as national museum or gallery. The definition of a national gallery is further complicated by the unitary, united, federal, and other systems of national or state organisation and operation.¹⁶¹

In the politics of art institutionalisation as performed by national galleries, the debate is not one on content or subject matter alone. They are better appreciated by our consideration of what makes them unique rather than fixing a uniform system of appraisal on national galleries from disparate parts of the world. Napoleon's admittance of the public into the Louvre in 1793 set the goal of national aspirations for national galleries all over the world. These national aspirations, however, are interpreted variously in response to the corresponding

¹⁵⁹ Gray, 2011

¹⁶⁰ Adepegba, 1995

¹⁶¹ Knell, 2016, 9

socio-political milieu of the nation in question. This has signalled within these nations, a different way of appreciating the self, cognisance of art as history as well as the assumption of responsibility by the State for its display as an expression of national identity and pride. Functioning as markers of a nation's self-esteem, national galleries can differ markedly in character.¹⁶²

National galleries have been classified in diverse ways, but the most widely adopted are the classification based on the provenance of their collection and how their narratives are constructed. According to Peter Aronsson in *Explaining national museums: exploring comparative approaches to the study of national museums*, 'Archaeological museums ground their narrative in the very distant past and in the soil of the territorial state, while cultural museums transform the class and cultural variation into a rich heritage; normalising the present borders and order of the community.'¹⁶³ Art museums can be said to validate the superiority of taste and proficiency by defining the variances between art and crafts.

The performance of 'nation' in the national gallery could either be a citizen-constructed response to the artwork and the museum; or the representation of a concrete historical, political, and territorial entity. These are constructed in the national galleries to give us something to anchor our belief on.¹⁶⁴ National galleries depict the nations that they represent from the geographically specific perspective, with their proclivity to author the collective qualities of the nation by hinting at what the desired virtues of individual citizens ought to be.¹⁶⁵ They are tasked with the representation of the nation in which they are

¹⁶² Hayden Proud, 'Our National Gallery: The 'Book' of our Art?' [n.d.] (Online) https://hsf.org.za/publications/focus/focus-61/Hayden%20Proud_Our%20National%20Gallery.pdf

¹⁶³ Aronsson, 2011, 50

¹⁶⁴ Knell, 2016, 24

¹⁶⁵ Aronsson, 2011, 45

located, and as their goals evolve, they amend the terms of engagement with, and revivify the nation they serve.

National Galleries/Museums in Africa

In the contemporary discourse of the role of African cultural institutions in the construction of postcolonial cultural strategies, and their existence in local, national, and international settings there have been more significant activities within the performances of the Pan-African festivals. Perhaps the most significant landmark event in recent times regarding the African discourse of national galleries and museums in the politics of nation-making is the opening of the Musée des Civilisations noires (Museum of Black Civilizations) in Senegal, in late 2018. Opened in early December 2018, with \$48.1m of Chinese investment, the museum focuses on African cultural history and the black diaspora. It highlights the continent as the “cradle of civilisation” and the echoes of Africans in diaspora today. The museum could be a manifestation of the lifelong dream of Léopold Sédar Senghor and other exponents of the Pan-African and *négritude* movements. The idea was conceived when Senghor, Senegal's first president hosted the World Black Festival of Arts in 1966.¹⁶⁶

One of the most developed national galleries in Africa is the National Gallery of Zimbabwe. An art museum in Harare is devoted to collecting, preserving, and promoting Zimbabwean visual culture. It played a fundamental role in the swift rise of Zimbabwean artists in the world art market and observed the dramatic revolution of the country from colonialism to independence.¹⁶⁷ Though the collection focuses on contemporary artists from

¹⁶⁶ ABC News, ‘Senegal's Museum of Black Civilisations is open, asking the West to return stolen treasures’, Updated Wed at 2:56pm Wed 26 Dec 2018, 2:56pm. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-12-27/museum-of-black-civilisations-opens-in-dakar/10669212>

¹⁶⁷ National Gallery of Zimbabwe, ‘National Gallery of Zimbabwe historical background’, 2015, (Online) <http://www.nationalgallery.co.zw/index.php/whats-on/upcoming-exhibition/117-planetary-community-chicken>

Zimbabwe, its holdings are diverse, containing traditional and contemporary African along with European Old Master painting. A reflection of the acquisition interests of the first director Frank McEwen.¹⁶⁸

In South Africa, the impetus for the development of a public gallery in Cape Town was activated in 1871 through the bequest of 45 paintings and a small sum to the SA Fine Arts Association by Thomas Butterworth Bayley. It took 80 years between the first conception in 1850 and the eventual opening of the present Iziko South African National Gallery (SANG) in its own custom-designed building in 1930.¹⁶⁹ Currently, the collection comprises of South African, African and Western European art; its foreign collection's value gives an insight into the taste of the early patrons of the Gallery. The growth of Western art in the collection was later stifled by underfunding and the excessive prices on them, causing the slow growth of this type of art in the collection.¹⁷⁰

Since the 1980s the gallery has made attempts to fill the gaps in the collection resulting from the nation's apartheid past by incorporating creative ideas from the emergent new art forms in South Africa. This triggered a shift in the acquisition policy to concentrate on contemporary South African art. The collection has since 1990 been deployed to acknowledge and celebrate the expressive cultures of the African continent. It has been enhanced with repatriated artefacts removed from the country over the last two hundred years.¹⁷¹

The National Museum Institute in Kinshasa can be perceived as a player in the construction of postcolonial cultural politics in Zaire. This is especially in the context of the

¹⁶⁸ Amanda H. Hellman, 'The National Gallery of Zimbabwe', in, *Routledge research encyclopedia*, 2016, (Online) <https://www.rem.routledge.com/articles/the-national-gallery-of-zimbabwe>

¹⁶⁹ Proud, [n.d.]

¹⁷⁰ Iziko South African Art Gallery, 'History of the building', [n.d.], (Online), <https://www.iziko.org.za/static/page/history-of-the-building>

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

authentic politics of the Mobutu regime. Created between 1969 and 1971 as a collaboration between Zaire and Belgium in the context of cultural restitution demands. The national museum Institute in Kinshasa was deployed for projected decolonisation, creation of knowledge about 'traditional' cultures, forming of a 'national' collection of 'traditional' heritage, and the process of restitution of museum collections from Belgium.¹⁷²

There are several other national institutions of art in Africa that are yet to be examined, like the National Gallery of Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia. Many of them are projects which were flagged off during the independence era of their countries but have become moribund due to lack of funding by their respective states. This is because many of these countries lack the financial wherewithal to sustain these projects. Due to the high cost of these projects, they emerge in third world countries only in connection with economic growth.¹⁷³

The Process of Nationalising Objects in the NGMAL

The national perspective dominates not only because it is the standard for art historiography, but also because, more substantively, the nation and nationalism held a central place in the political and cultural unconscious of most modern artists; and as a governing construct of modernity, the nation effectively determined the shape of modern identity, politics and official culture.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Sarah Van Beurden 'Art, the "Culture Complex," and Postcolonial Cultural Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa, Critical Interventions', in *Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture*, 10 (3), Ohio State University: 2016, 255-260

¹⁷³ Lotte Philipsen, *Globalizing Contemporary Art: The art world's new internationalism*, Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2010, 18

¹⁷⁴ Elizabeth Harney, 'Inside Modernity: Indigeneity, Coloniality, Modernisms', in Elizabeth Harney and Ruth B. Phillips (Eds.), *Mapping Modernisms: Art, Ingenuity and Colonialism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2018, 22

Art cannot be contemplated based on what it looks like, but its objectification should be derived from the intent for which it was created.¹⁷⁵ The value of the authentic object in a museum cannot be overlooked. These objects which can be described as original objects that served a real-world purpose in the past and take on historical significance, are of great worth to museum collections. They create opportunities for historical research, have high financial value, and they increase the museum's status.¹⁷⁶

The artists who desire some level of significance within the society must think about the proximity of what he or she does to the overall goal of the society. The representation of objects as ideas made manifest in the NGMAL's viewpoint is encumbered by complex political concerns with issues of ideological and political difference born out of the diversity of the Nigerian people. The task before NGMAL's professionals prescribes a 'manufacture', especially in the negotiation of complex geographies within the collection.

Just like many European nations adjust their time forward or backward to maximise the day-light available to suit specific purposes, museums engineers adjust stories to suit the purpose of their national and societal agenda. The readjustment of time by the season in Europe does not mean that time has been moved back or forward in reality, because time remains the same in other parts of the world. This act works for these nations because it allows them to have longer days, which invariably translates into longer working hours and greater productivity for the nation.

¹⁷⁵ Mesch, 2013, pp. 1-14

¹⁷⁶ Constanze Hampp & Stephan Schwan, 'Perception and evaluation of authentic objects: findings from a visitor study', in *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 29:4, 2014, 349-367, {online} Available from: DOI: [10.1080/09647775.2014.938416](https://doi.org/10.1080/09647775.2014.938416) [Accessed: 7th September 2020]

In the same way, objects are utilised to address peculiar political issues in national museums and galleries. These narratives produced however, may not suit the context of other nations, as it has been adapted specifically for the nation which has created it. These images could wield completely different meanings at different times and places.¹⁷⁷

Value in the collection is subject to the interpretations of the management of the NGMAL and other value makers in the cultural sector. It does not reside solely within the power of the artists alone. The creation of innovative variations in a specific cultural field gives rise to cultural products. This cause field experts to search for the permission on whether or not to include them in the field's domain, as the presence of these novel variations is highlighted on the field.¹⁷⁸ In *The Curator as Culture Broker*, Sylvester Ogbechie argues that, 'Curatorial practice as brokerage redefines a process where known objects accumulate greater value merely by being known, while other objects of equal value, rendered unknown by selective curatorial dismissal, find it difficult to gain traction.'¹⁷⁹ Institutions orchestrate the prominence of an art work through the process of its definition by the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. For a piece to be recognised as art, its existence must be recorded in the art institutional apparatus.¹⁸⁰

In the process of actualising the institution's objective to create the circumstance for an ideal encounter with their objects, the NGMAL references its collection in the address of the nation's issues. In stimulating nationalism, the reference of art as the core of the narrative

¹⁷⁷ Preziosi, 2011, 56-7

¹⁷⁸ Gino Cattani, et al., 'Value Creation and Knowledge Loss: The case of the Cremonese Stringed Instruments', in, *Organization Science*, 24, 2012, (Online), <http://pubsonline.informs.org/doi/full/10.1287/orsc.1120.0768>

¹⁷⁹ Sylvester Okwundu Ogbechie, 'The Curator as Culture Broker: A Critique of the Curatorial Regime of Okwui Enwezor in the Discourse of Contemporary African Art', 2010, (Online)

<http://aachronym.blogspot.de/2010/06/curator-as-culture-broker-critique-of.html>

¹⁸⁰ Philipsen, 2010, 13

is uniquely decipherable. These types of institutions produce non-instrumental expression of emancipation, independence, and autonomy as different notions of patriotism in terms of an artistic composition.¹⁸¹

The shaping of knowledge in the NGMAL is affirmed by state policies and dominant ideologies which articulate the systems of power in endorsing certain artistic and cultural expression. These constructions suggest to us a perception of the manufacture of antiquity and making of tradition. As the narratives contained within the ideation of these nations is not what has been preserved in popular memory, but what has been nominated and popularised through careful curating by the management of these institutions.¹⁸² They precipitate visitors' covert and indirect learning of the characteristics of their national being in these institutions by disguising the displays for a less political interpretation in favour of a more aesthetic connotation.¹⁸³ Questions concerning the expression of the 'real' have remained at the core of museum practice throughout its entire history.¹⁸⁴

In *Myths of nationality* Donald Preziosi contends that 'Collection or collecting always co-exists, and it is co-defined and co-determined by, recollection and de-collection.'¹⁸⁵ This indicates that national galleries construct their national narratives based on particular ideas. During the process of this construction, artefacts which do not fit into this narrative are discarded and replaced with those that seemingly portray the account which the nation intends to portray.

¹⁸¹ Patrick D. Flores, 'Between possession: collecting art and identity in a time of war in the Philippines', in, Rycroft, Daniel J. (ed), *World art and legacies of colonial violence*, London: Routledge, 2013, 224

¹⁸² Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, 2016, 20

¹⁸³ Knell, 2016, 7

¹⁸⁴ Latham, 2015, 2

¹⁸⁵ Preziosi, 2011, 59

This construction of national narratives is often done through what Preziosi refers to as the process of collection and 'de-collection'. He argues that this produces a certain homogeneity of purity of patrimony or legacy, which can be demonstrated as developing progressively over time along a particular stylistic trajectory.¹⁸⁶ This act of collection and de-collection is the vehicle through which nations define how they want to be perceived and how they want their citizens to locate themselves within their national narrative. As this process is negotiated, the art is rejected and reduced to an obscure merchandise for the art market if it does not participate in critical alignment with the system which it purposes to be recognised with.¹⁸⁷

However, certain artists in the NGMAL whose works did not meet the collection criteria at the period when the collection was being put together have over the years found relevance in other sections of the gallery. Since the national task of Nigeria is constantly evolving, the narrative also evolves with the time. This exclusion is further highlighted by the fact that after the first few years of instituting the NGMAL, the gallery has not participated much in collecting, thereby missing out on the creative output of Nigerian artists for the larger parts of the mid 1980s till date.

The NGA provides its collection with the ability to contribute to the political shaping of the Nigerian mind through the process of masking its collection as social truth. The political potentials inherent in these works are enunciated in their subject matter and the derived status of the artists. The import of this is that contemporary African art is not characterised by entirely new paradigms, rather, what is obtainable are changing phases of basic canons of

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 64

¹⁸⁷ Rasheed Araeen, 'A new beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics,' *Third Text*, 14 (50), 2000, pp. 3-20

culture that are defined by exigencies of modernity.¹⁸⁸ The idealised notion of a Nigerian identity is undergirded by these engagements with nation building in the collection, positioning art at the confluence point of economic, social, and historical conditions, which are subject to change as time passes by.

¹⁸⁸ Filani, 2004, pp. 81-94

Chapter Two: Locating the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos in the Construction of the Nigerian National Narrative and Social Negotiations

In the process of making certain types of cultural practice visible or invisible, curatorial practice reengineers artworks as data and establishes the curator as the authoritative search engine that positions artists and artworks according to its ambiguous self-referential independent logic.¹⁸⁹ The NGMAL positioned itself to shape the thoughts and ideas of Nigerians within the confines of the national narrative through its collection. No matter how materially negligible or substantial a nation is, its artefactual environment is articulated through communications with signs and symbols, as many societies engage the use of material objects to illustrate ideas or instructions about practically everything.¹⁹⁰

Nigerian artists deployed their imagination in navigating new perspectives and fresh metaphors of Nigeria and the Nigerian experience, creating works that function to ignite critical thinking and commentary. These critical engagements of the artists are what the NGMAL has reinvented in the address of the societal issues within the country. Cultural institutions are institutions where exhibition performances ascribe great importance to sight over other senses and display artefacts principally as institutions of the visible.¹⁹¹ Their reconfiguration of artworks is governed by the need to organise ideas in an optically pleasing arrangement, which privileges aesthetic ideals over those of more conceptual import.

¹⁸⁹ Sylvester Okwundu Ogbegie, 'The Curator as Culture Broker: A Critique of the Curatorial Regime of Okwui Enwezor in the Discourse of Contemporary African Art', 2010, (Online) Available from: <http://aachronym.blogspot.de/2010/06/curator-as-culture-broker-critique-of.html> [Accessed: 13 August 2018]

¹⁹⁰ Donald Preziosi, 'Myths of nationality', in Knell, Simon; Aronsson, Peter; and Amundsn, Arne Bugge; (Eds.) *National museums: new studies from around the world*, New York: Routledge, 2011, 55

¹⁹¹ Francesca Monti, & Suzanne Keene, *Museums and Silent Objects: Designing Effective Exhibitions*, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013, 6

Artefacts which defy the aesthetic logic of the curatorial agenda in these institutions may lose meaning and significance in the negotiation process.

The concept of the Nigerian nation has been built around the concept of a state of many peoples rather than a single nation. In Nigeria, a country of about 200 million people, and over 250 ethnic groups, ethnic diversity and social parity are key issues in negotiating the nation's unity. Diversity has been written into the national myth of the country. This suggests the need for all ethnicities under the umbrella of the Nigerian nation to live in peaceful coexistence. That all these people were first and foremost Nigerians before they were citizens of their ethnic divide. The ability to smoothen out differences has been the responsibility of the political leaders in Nigeria since independence. Dealing with feelings of cultural difference and subjugation in a nation is complex and dependent on suitable negotiations of power relations to cement the difference in identity, as some of these component ethnic nationalities identify and often foreground past or present disputes with others.

In the NGMAL's production of information for societal reforms, the institution deploys its power in operation aimed at providing official or dominant knowledge which imparts power to those who know and understand the institution's constructed narrative within the society. Thereby using its authority as a state-owned institution in ordering the information that must be ingrained into the society. It displays art works portraying the social life of various parts of Nigeria, cultural norms, historic, economic, political, and religious aspects of art. The collection seeks to foster new Nigerian cultural base on self-consciousness of the people as Nigerians, organising the nationalist train in the reinvigoration of the traditionalist temperament in the arts. The artists whose works are represented in this collection have galvanised their experiences both home and abroad to evolve their peculiar artistic language.

By taking the occasional step back into their history and culture, they articulate meaningful themes in their paintings and sculptures.

Negotiating the Contemporaneity of Traditional Nigerian art

Early in the twentieth-century, Nigerian nationalists in the creative fields took to native beliefs and cultural practices as important elements of a modern subjectivity that was compatible with negotiating their relationship with Europe.¹⁹² In this regard, Ogbechie connects the Western art society's attraction to African art in the early 20th century, where the architectonic forms were deployed in the invention of new forms. He assesses that the transformation of European modern art through the architectonic logic of African art was reflected in an equal transformation of African art by its engagement with new forms and protocols of artmaking engendered by European colonisation. Such changes he tracks by a reflection on the careers of artists such as Olowe of Ise (1873-1938),¹⁹³ Lamidi Fakeye (1928-2009) and Bisi Fakeye (1942-2017) who were woodcarvers and Yussuf Grillo's (b. 1934) paintings.

In his argument for the contemporaneity of 'traditional African art' Ogbechie holds that African art can be defined in a dynamic context which is constantly adapted to new socio-political and environmental conditions. He states that early European anthropologists who went to Africa caught African art in the middle of its transformation and fixed it as timeless examples of a very broad range of times. He faults the misconception of traditional African art in most European collections as pre-colonial art, when many of these works were

¹⁹² Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, Duke University Press, 2015, 7

¹⁹³ Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie, 'Carl Einstein's "Negerplastik" and the Invention of African Art', Part of the conference "Deep Time and Crisis, c. 1930" English original version Lecture, May 26, 2018, (Online video) Available from: <https://www.hkw.de/en/app/mediathek/video/63536>

produced in the period between 1880 and 1960 which falls under the colonial period in Africa.¹⁹⁴ The continuous manifestations of the traditional in contemporary African art render irrelevant arguments of the death of African art.¹⁹⁵

On the contrary, Adepegba contends that despite the presentation of isolated cases of revivalism by some scholars who either mistake or encourage and falsely present such cases as continuity, traditional African sculpture is dead. He associates this argument with the fact that 'traditional African carvings' are currently produced with imported tools, as the materials used for producing modern art in Africa are either imported or produced in local industries modelled after those of Europe and America.¹⁹⁶

Adepegba argues that the colonial government in Nigeria's tragic suspension of the Obaship¹⁹⁷ and its associated art in 1897 did not obliterate the past value of traditional art in Benin royalty. He finds that the need for the ancestral validation of the Obaship made the revival of traditional arts imperative after the restoration of the institution. In the resuscitation of the wood carving tradition, Adepegba observed some modifications as the wood carvings produced from that point onwards were not only revived, but they were also enlarged. Notable among the new Benin carvers were Idah Ovia (1909-1968) and H. I. Erhabor.¹⁹⁸ During this period, carvers like Olowe of Ise's imagery documented African

¹⁹⁴ Ogbechie, 'Carl Einstein's "Negerplastik" and the Invention of African Art',

¹⁹⁵ Kunle Filani, 'Of assumptions and realities: critical perspectives in contemporary Nigerian art', 2014 (Online) <https://www.hourglassgallery.com/of-assumptions-and-realities-critical-perspectives-in-contemporary-nigerian-art/>

¹⁹⁶ Cornelius O. Adepegba, *Nigerian art; its traditions and modern tendencies*, Ibadan: Jodad, 1995, 88

¹⁹⁷ The institution of traditional Yoruba Kings.

¹⁹⁸ Adepegba, 1995, 80

Kingship and their European colonisers, as both jostled for power and authority within the colonial order.¹⁹⁹

Olowe of Ise was hired as a facilitator by the Catholic Church Mission in Oye-Ekiti in an experimental attempt at resuscitation of traditional art in Southwest region of Nigeria. In agreement with papal declarations that, except when considered detrimental to Catholic doctrines, indigenous cultures should be encouraged.²⁰⁰ The workshop was set up in 1947 and ran by Catholic fathers Kevin Carrol and Sean O'Mahoney. In the workshop craftsmen from all walks of life were encouraged to fashion objects for church use.

The workshop made lasting impressions in wood carving, with its participants coming from traditional Nigerian religious worship, Christian and Muslim faiths. All of them were commissioned to produce Christian themes in traditional Yoruba forms. Adepegba observes that although objections were sometimes raised regarding how some sacred figures should be carved, the images were essentially Yoruba in style. He points out Lamidi Fakeye as one of the carvers brought up in the workshop, analysing his figures as characterised by clarity of details.²⁰¹ See plate 39 as discussed in the *Regional negotiations in art from Western Nigeria* section of the Chapter Four of this thesis.

Olakunle Filani cites Bisi Fakeye as one of the other equally competent artists belonging to this category of Nigerian artist who developed their skills through informal modes of training that have roots in the traditional apprenticeship system. Hailing from a long

¹⁹⁹ Ogbechie, 2018

²⁰⁰ Adepegba, 1995, 80

²⁰¹ Ibid., 81

lineage of Ila-Orangun traditional Yoruba carvers, his sculptures depict a fascinating union of old and new art forms (see plate 4&5).²⁰²

A vital aspect of the characteristic 'Third space'²⁰³ formation of Nigerian modern art is the relationship between Nigerian artists and the use of elements of their traditional arts to create art between tradition and modernity. The degree to which these traditional art forms are articulated range from those artists who still practice traditional style of art to those who have completely conceptualised their art forms. For instance, the analysis of Bisi Fakeye's art cannot be categorised as traditional even though it is characteristically traditional, based on his themes and materials deployed in the creation of his art. His art takes on the appearance of both. It has borrowed aspects from traditional art and created a new form of art which dines within the parlance of art modernity.

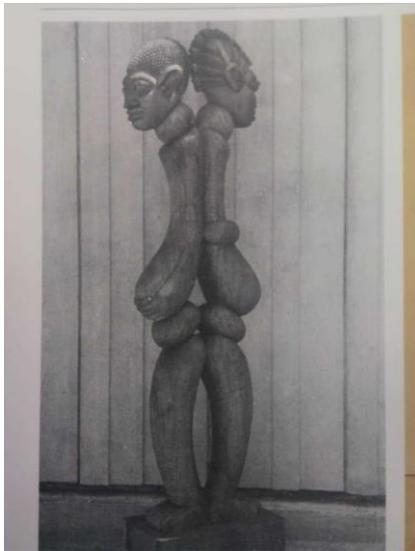
Within the collection of the NGMAL, one can recognise several episodes: traditional arts, the transitional period, and the contemporary. This evidences the progression of Nigerian art through two different lines of evolution: Modern art borrowing from traditional art and traditional art borrowing from the modern. An example of traditional art borrowing from the modern in the NGMAL's collection is Bisi Fakeye's wood carving titled *Divorce* (see plate 4&5). The sculpture typifies the estranged relationship between two lovers, as the figures are depicted backing each other, in a position that portrays them as not wanting to have anything to do with each other. My discussions with the staff of the NGMAL reveals this as connoting a metaphoric expression of the no longer cordial relationship between the

²⁰² Filani, 2014

²⁰³ The result of Homi Bhabha's hybrid concept, when two cultures meet.

coloniser and the colonised in Nigeria of the time. Hence, the sculpture appears to be saying that it is time for Nigeria and the country's coloniser to go their separate ways.

The depiction of the couple as the traditional 'man and wife' is also indicative of the power relations between the coloniser and the colonised. The man (in the Nigerian context) is usually the bigger and the taller one in the relationship and therefore the one who wields all the authority, but in Fakeye's *Divorce* the woman is depicted taller. With the woman's head and elaborate hairdo towering above the figure of the man. Thereby, insinuating that with the country's independence, the country has acquired a much bigger status in the scheme of things.



Plates 4&5
Artist: Bisi Fakeye
Title: *Divorce*
Medium: Wood carving
Height: 187cm
Width: 43cm
Location: NGMAL

The features of the heads in the composition are typical of the angularity of the Yoruba traditional sculptures. While the execution of the torso and the limbs in the composition are more amorphous, indicating an adaptation from the global modern art practice.

The National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos articulates the artist as one who is critical of the multiple realities in his society. Their artistic expressions provide the necessary insights into class struggles and how a critical mass of the Nigerian public interprets leadership, commerce, and culture, since these issues remain fundamental to understanding the society that produces them. The NGMAL is compartmentalised into seven sections, which the NGA plans to convert into detached galleries in its branches across the nation.

1. The portrait gallery, presenting the leaders of the post-independence Nigerian state and government. It also comprises a section dedicated to the memories of pioneers and heroes of visual art, performing and literary arts, to unify the creative arts.
2. The works of modern and other Nigerian artists: This section displaying the most popular Nigerian artists and their creative endeavours on the Nigerian art scene of the period ranging between 1977 and 1993.
3. Sculpture section: This section comprises of the works of dominant sculptors in the Nigerian art space at the time.
4. Ceramic section: This section exhibits some creative ceramic wares which manifest the adaption of contemporary art practice.

5. Art from other lands: this section presents art from citizens of other countries living and practising art in Nigeria at the inception of the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos.
6. Movements and styles in modern Nigerian art: This section presents the dominant styles of the Nigerian art scene of the time.
7. Nigerian textiles: This section presents the textile innovations and adaptations of traditional Nigerian art designs into contemporary designs.²⁰⁴

The law establishing the NGA permits it to deploy the use of historical photographs in the depiction of nationhood, as records of the salient moments in the nation-making process. Therefore, the NGA aims at deploying its collection for creating order and understanding within the society. The country's past experiences dictate that museum art history in Nigeria should begin from traditional art in Nigeria i.e., NOK, Igbo-Ukwu, Ife, Benin, Epa mask, ere ibeji, egungun and other excavations. Any historical construction of artistic modernity that does not reckon with the times of Nigeria's traditional culture will not be historically correct. Creating an evolutionary history of Nigerian art is contingent on the country's recognition of its past artistic developments. Nigerian art should not be judged within the Western context of art examination, as they do not have the same history.²⁰⁵

In locating the NGMAL in its performance of the Nigeria national identity politics, the NGMAL is considered with the aim of identifying its role in the nation making process of Nigeria, thereby locating its context within its specific geography. Since nearly every artefact subsists in its institutional, historical, economic and cultural context that contests the idea of

²⁰⁴ Ikpakronyi, 2002

²⁰⁵ Interview with Dr Dike on 6/9/17

universalist interpretation for it in its particular situatedness and positioning.²⁰⁶ The production of museums in a non-western context attempts the trail of a national line in their acquisition procedures in order to advance an intimate link with their local audiences, by producing a site-specific scheme in the presentation of their cultural tradition.²⁰⁷

The collection of the NGMAL portrays the realities of cultural politics as they affect Nigerian artists within and outside the country. It also points to issues of cross-cultural aesthetics and consciousness within modern and contemporary art practice since it exhibits the reflection of reciprocal traffic of ideas and influences within Nigeria and the effects of the global art practice. Its exhibitions exemplify the production of history in Nigeria as they are building blocks of art history and therefore central in translating knowledge from the collection to the public.

A careful analysis of this collection reveals its philosophical and political aspirations to nation building and national identity in Nigeria as evinced by works in its displays. It elucidates the conceptual and creative impetuses of these artists, especially in the reformative tendencies as regards traditional Nigerian artistic iconography. The collection is positioned to act upon the reformation of existing traditions and the contemporary Nigerian political space by positioning modern art in Nigeria within the power structures in the country. This is because the information contained within the images about the society are organised to brand crafted ideas rooted in Nigerian nationalism.

²⁰⁶ Simon Knell, *National galleries: the art of making nations*, London: Routledge, 2016, xi

²⁰⁷ Hans Belting and Andrea Buddensieg, *The Global Art World: Audiences, Markets, and Museums*, Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009, 48

The NGMAL Redefining Yesterday's Impression on Today for Tomorrow

In the national museum no subject is more central to the construction of the nation than history or, the handling of the past. The past can provide a powerful anchor for nationhood.²⁰⁸

Opinions have been raised about history being an obsession for countries whose nationalism is constructed on the grounds of their past achievements. However, this could also be perceived as an empowering narrative for these nations to anchor their need for routes out of their peculiar circumstances. Besides, history provides the enabling narratives for all nations to anchor their drive for the development of an up-to-date narrative, as it is perceived that if the nation has achieved greatness in its past, it is also capable of replicating such greatness in the contemporary milieu.²⁰⁹

In the process of defining the collection of the NGMAL for national consciousness and social stability, the exhibition was arranged to commence with works which reflected past heroes from various ancient Nigerian traditions who have been essentially deified by their communities. This highlights the importance of characters such as Moremi (Yemoja), Mai Idris Aloma (d. 1596) and King Jaja of Opobo (1821-1891). In authenticating what is portrayed historically by material relics, museums and galleries need to anchor their narratives to evidence outside the domains of art, such as biology, genetic make-up, divinity, or nature itself,²¹⁰ as museums are centrally involved in reshaping and preserving memories for posterity.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Simon Knell, 'National museums and the national imaginations' in Knell, Simon; Aronsson, Peter; and Amundsn, Arne Bugge; (Eds), *National museums: new studies from around the world*, New York: Routledge, 2011, 8

²⁰⁹ Timothy Asobele, *Contemporary Nigerian arts and artists*, Nigeria: Upper standard, 2003

²¹⁰ Donald Preziosi, 'Myths of nationality', in, Knell, Simon; Aronsson, Peter; and Amundsn, Arne Bugge; (Eds.) *National museums: new studies from around the world*, New York: Routledge, 2011, 63

²¹¹ Sheila Watson, *Museums and their Communities*, London: Routledge. 2007, 4

The NGMAL's collection articulates past myths to inspire the nation for nation building, by anchoring the nation into several eras of accomplishments. Preziosi analyses this act as the realisation of the past and the extensions of the new nation, as they are invested with a date-and-timestamp which addresses the future. Every artefact referencing its own past and potential future as a statement on their specific geography and period.²¹² Their presentation endows them with powers of historical tradition of state-making, the universal value of virtue, truth and beauty within these collections.²¹³ Therefore, within the NGMAL, historical and cultural experiences are performed as ways of articulating past events for its national identity politics.

In the revalorisation of national pride through national heroes and mythological legends, the NGMAL delves into history to produce not just the portraits of modern-day Nigerian leaders and nationalists, but also the portrait representations of many Nigerian pre-independence personalities and prominent Nigerian artists. An interrogation of the history paintings in the collection reveals their deployment as a connection between the current political dispensation and past heroes, kings, mythological and religious icons. This evidences them as not just imaginary or mythological paintings but documents of history in an act to empower Nigerian modern art renditions over archaeological findings as a preferred medium for locating the contemporary cultural essence in the Nigerian identity.

Take for instance the offerings of Erhabor Ogieva Emokpae (1934-1984), whose works feature prominently in this section. Born in Benin, Emokpae was commissioned by the federal

²¹² Preziosi, 2011, 60

²¹³ Peter Aronsson, 'Explaining national museums: exploring comparative approaches to the study of national museums' in, Knell, Simon; Aronsson, Peter; and Amundsn, Arne Bugge; (Eds) *National museums: new studies from around the world*, New York: Routledge, 2011, 32

government of Nigeria to artistically embellish the whole of Lagos city for the FESTAC celebration in 1977. His works are infused with political symbols which suggest the movement from the old towards the new in Africa. Emokpae's paintings style portrayed a transmutation from abstraction towards photorealism in the late seventies and early eighties, as he documented Nigerian heroes in his painting.²¹⁴

In plate 6 Emokpae depicts Mai Idris Alooma, the 54th King of the Sefawa dynasty who ruled the Kanem-Bornu empire located in modern-day Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria between 1564 to 1596. Idris Alooma was an outstanding statesman, who steered the Kanem-Bornu empire to the pinnacle of its power under his rule.²¹⁵ He is depicted in the painting, not only as a king but also as a man of war, commanding great troupes of men across three countries in the most populous region in Africa today. In the expression of the power and might attained during his rule, his attire, that of his army and the adornment of their horses connote an empire with immense economic and political success.

²¹⁴ Jean Kennedy, *New currents and ancient rivers: Contemporary African artists in a generation of change*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution press, 1992, 40

²¹⁵ African heritage blog, (Online) <https://afrolegends.com/2016/02/02/idris-alooma-warrior-king-of-the-bornu-empire/>

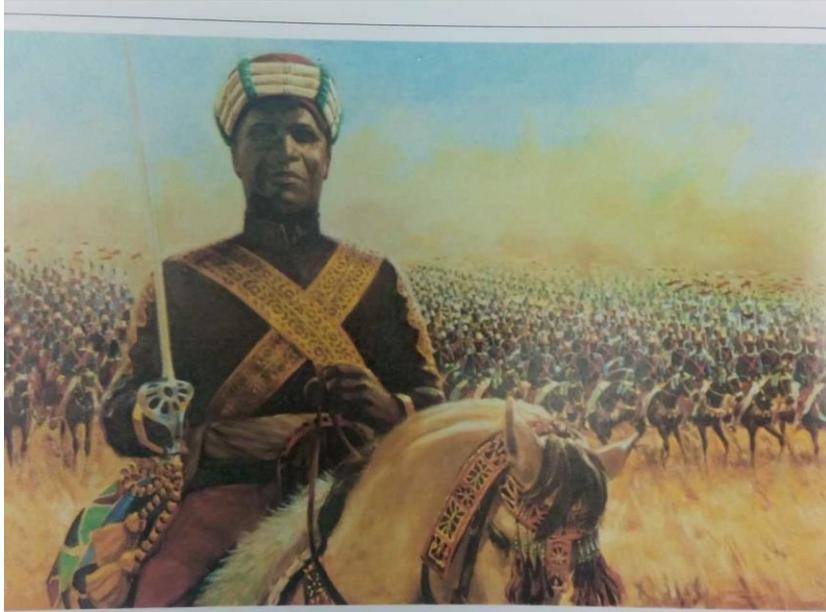


Plate 6

Title: *Mai Idris Alooma of Bornu*

Artist: Erhabor Emokpae

Medium: oil on canvas

Size: 76 x122cm

Year: 1976

Location: NGMAL



Plate 7

Title: *Queen Amina of Zaria*

Artist: Erhabor Emokpae

Medium: oil on canvas

Size: 76 x122cm

Year: 1976

Location: NGMAL

In the negotiation of gender equality, the NGMAL has displayed in the history section the portrait of Queen Amina by Emokpae (see plate 7). Queen Amina of Zaria (1533-1610) was recorded to have extended the territory of the Hausa people of the northern regions of most West African states into North Africa. During her reign, the Hausa nation was extended to its largest boundaries in history.²¹⁶ According to the gallery guides at the NGMAL, the commissioning and display of her portrait was done in an attempt to address the issue of gender inclusivity by the creation of awareness of the part played by traditional Nigerian women in politics. It could be perceived as a call to service to Nigerian women. Other history paintings by Emokpae in this section of the NGMAL include illustrations of pre-colonial rulers of various regions of Nigeria such as King Eyo II of Calabar, Oba Esigie of Benin (1504-1550), King Masaba of Nupe, Sultan Muhammadu Bello of Sokoto (1781-1837) and King Jaja of Opobo.

Within the same section is the illustration of Nanna of Itshekiri Koko (see plate 8). He was born in 1840 and enthroned by the colonial government in Nigeria as Governor of Benin River in (1885-1894). He faced many trials in conflict with the colonialists, from the Nanna (Ebrohimi) war in 1894 through his trial and detention in Calabar (1894-1895) to his deportation to Accra Ghana in (1896). He later returned to Nigeria in 1906 and died on 3rd of July 1916.²¹⁷ He is a symbol of courage and resilience in the face of strong opposition, a character which the institution hopes to instil in the Nigerian public through their collection. This arrangement of images can be considered as the collection's re-evaluation of the nation's history to impact Nigeria's political issues.

²¹⁶ Amina of Zaria Facts, (Online) <https://biography.yourdictionary.com/amina-of-zaria>

²¹⁷ Egufe Yafugborhi, '100 years of Nanna of Itsekiri's Living History,' 10 July 2016, (Online) <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/07/100-years-nanna-itsekiris-living-history/>

The artist has depicted him in the traditionally, Itsekiri men's long-sleeved shirt called a Kemeje, coral beads around his neck and a hat with a feather stuck to it, which reveals him as a man of eminent personality in Itsekiri land. The feathers of the rare white peacock known as the 'okin' in Yoruba land is a symbol of royalty across Yoruba land and cultures related to the Yoruba culture. Coral beads are of great significance in identifying the royal class in Benin kingdom and kingdoms whose royal lineage trace their origin to the Benin kingdom.



Plate 8

Title: *Nana of Itsekiri Koko*

Artist: Shina Yussuff

Medium: oil on canvas

Size: 76 x122cm

Year: 1976

Location: NGMAL

Nationalism and Transition

The classification of art from most of the 3rd World is usually pigeon-holed by the theory of hybridity.²¹⁸ Araeen holds that the Black Art movement was most significant in the politicisation of the questions of both the practice and legitimation of art, but it ended as a victim of free-for-all eclecticism or 'anything goes'. He bemoans the idea of everything being referred to as Black Art so long as it was produced by black artists.²¹⁹ For artists outside the West, such as Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan and Abayomi Barber to whom Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity as it is widely accepted can hardly do justice, national identity has fashioned for them a dialect of negotiating their position in their national art discourse. Their depiction of key nationalist figures from all the regions of Nigeria in the portrait section of the NGMAL was constructed to act as a powerful witness to the rich political past of the nation.

Aina Onabolu expressed his nationalism in defying colonial and Euro-centric expectations in his art and sought emancipation from the colonial stronghold to actualise and preserve the autonomy of his artistic rights. Due to his actions, generations of Nigerian artists after him were able to spearhead their own subjective modernity. In his portrait of *Dr Sapara* in 1920 (see plate 9), he depicts Dr Sapara, an accomplished Nigerian medical doctor in honour of his achievements. His valorisation of Dr Sapara also acts as a pointer to other Nigerians that quality education is to be highly esteemed.

²¹⁸ For instance, the direction of art patronage in Nigeria of the 1960s revealed a tendency towards art sponsored by European expatriates. A situation where the art produced, although described as authentic naïve, appears to emanate from the dreams and fantasies of the sponsors of the workshops and the imagination of those who participated in the workshops.

²¹⁹ Araeen, 2000, pp. 3-20



Plate 9

Title: *Portrait of Dr Sapara*

Artist: Aina Onabolu

Medium: oil on canvas

Size: N/A

Year: 1920

Location: NGMAL

Akinola Lasekan is a prominent artist whose career in the Nationalistic terrain of the pre-independence Nigeria played a major role in inspiring younger Nigerians of his time. Lasekan deployed his art for nationalistic expressions as he produced political cartoons to caricature the colonial administration in Nigeria.²²⁰ He created oil paintings of historical figures like 'Moremi', a queen of the ancient Ife Kingdom. His most profound contributions to nation-building in Nigeria are his political cartoons. Since they have wide circulation in

²²⁰ Oloidi, Ola, 'Art and Nationalism in Colonial Nigeria,' *Nsukka Journal of History*, 11, University of Nigeria, Nsukka: 1981, 106

newspapers, political cartoons are the most practical and most visible means for the spread of information in art.²²¹

Like Onabolu, Lasekan's art was geared towards highlighting the potentials of the Nigerian. In his painting of the *Nigerian Constable under Colonial Rule* (see plate 10), he depicts a well-groomed young man in colonial Nigerian police uniform. Even though the character appears obedient as a man under authority, he is also portrayed as focused and conscientious. The painting is deployed as an illustration of the character required for building the nation after independence. The artist calls out the disposition of service to the nation and the zeal to protect the people and their culture. He projects himself as his own valorised subject, avowing his mastery of visual and verbal metaphors. Traditionally, the portrait of the artist in art history implies a personalised interference by the artist in the construction of the narratives about his artistic practice.²²²

²²¹ Akin Adejuwon & Shina Alimi, 'Cartoons as Illustration: Political Process in Nigeria', *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4(3), March 2011

²²² Sylvester Okwundu Ogbegie, Ben Enwonwu: the making of an African Modernist, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2008, 2



Plate 10
Title: *Nigerian Constable under Colonial Rule*
Artist: Akinola Lasekan
Medium: oil on canvas
Size: 42 x 55cm
Year: date unknown
Location: NGMAL

Benedict Enwonwu's role as an art adviser to the federal government enabled him to influence the canons of Nigerian art. Perhaps his most significant legacy is his resolve that the works of African artists must be judged by a set of canons appropriate to their own cultures.²²³ This is made manifest in his painting titled *Négritude* (see plate 11) in the NGMAL's collection.

²²³ Kennedy, 1992, 33

Enwonwu's *Négritude* depicts the female figure which appears to represent the receptive nature of the African who has been conditioned to be subservient to the colonial dictates. The artist depicts the leading figure in the painting as a youthful female figure, portraying his Blackness as fertile, strong, at the prime of life and endowed with the ability to be whatever it purposes to be. During one of the co-creative dialogues which were organised during the field work for this thesis, the painting was analysed as serving as a call for an awakening of Nigerians and the African continent as a whole, as is objectified in his sculpture titled *Anyanwu* (the Igbo for awakening) standing in front of the National Museum in Lagos, Nigeria.

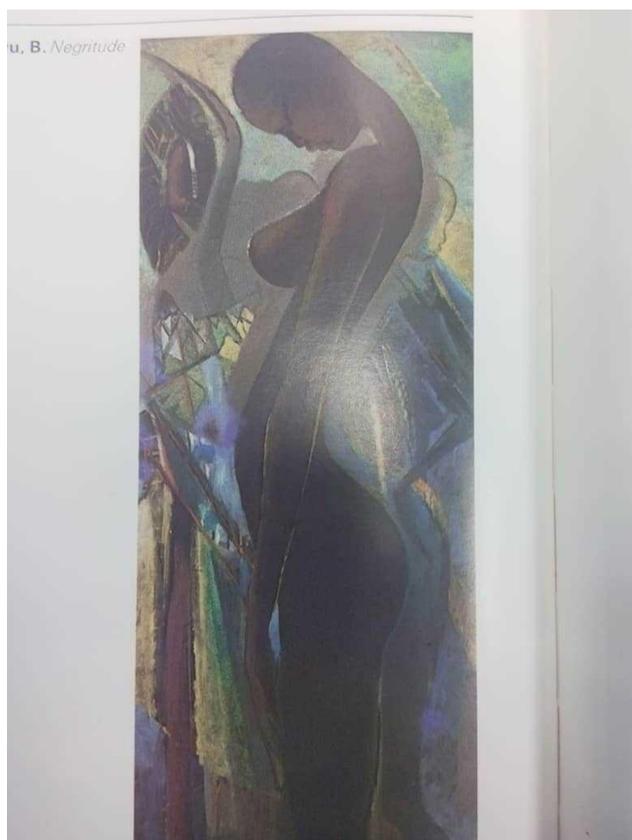


Plate 11
Title: *Négritude*
Artist: Ben Enwonwu
Medium: oil on canvas
Size: 98 x 75cm
Year: undated
Location: NGMAL

Within the first section of display where the NGMAL displays illustrations of heroes of Nigeria's past, the collection also exhibits the images of the founding fathers of Nigeria's nationalism and the line-up of Presidents and Heads of State after Nigeria's independence. This has been done by the NGMAL to sensitise the populace about the efforts of the early Nigerian nationalists in securing Nigeria's independence from colonial rule.

The portrait of Herbert Macaulay (see plate 12), by Erhabor Emokpae fall in this category. Herbert Macaulay is known as the father of Nigerian nationalism and grandson of Samuel Ajayi Crowther the first Nigerian bishop. Macaulay was at the forefront of agitations for Nigeria's independence. He was responsible for starting the first Nigerian political party and grooming the first generation of Nigerian politicians.

Macaulay is represented in his signature immaculate white suit, marking him as a man of purity. The discussion held on the painting reveals that his stern gaze advocates his person as a man of wisdom, vision, and purpose. The portrait portrays him as a man who is given to serious studying behind the curtains, before going out to address his constituency from a well-informed perspective. Also represented in the collection is the portrait of Obafemi Awolowo, a Pan-Africanist and champion of the Nigerian politics of the first republic, but this portrait was produced after the catalogue of the works in the collection had been published and therefore could not make it into the catalogue.

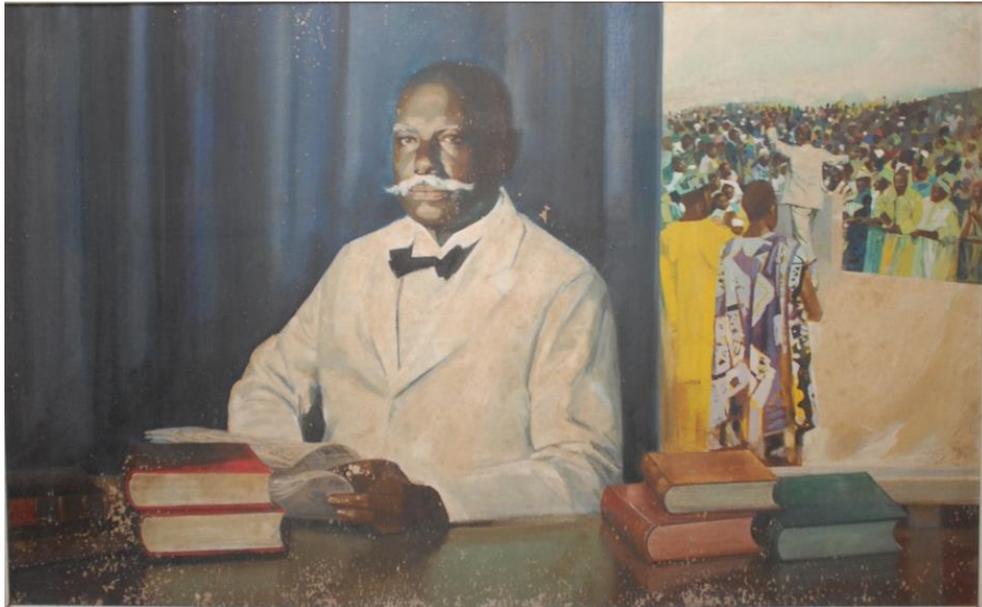


Plate 12

Title: *Herbert Samuel Heelas Macaulay*

Artist: Erhabor Emokpae

Medium: oil on canvas

Size: 76 x122cm

Year: 1976

Location: NGMAL

The most obvious image in the section of the NGMAL where the founding fathers of Nigerian nationalism are exhibited is the portrait bust of the late Ooni of Ife, Oba (king) Adesoji Aderemi (see plate 13), by Abayomi Barber. Oba Adesoji Aderemi was a direct descendant of the Ife monarchs whose portraits were represented in the archaeological finds of the ancient Ife art tradition. Apart from his political role as the Ooni, Aderemi was the first black Governor-General of the Western region of Nigeria. Making him the only sitting traditional ruler to hold a position as Ooni and governor over a third of the whole nation.

The Ooni is the King of Ife and the spiritual head of all Yorubas around the world. The Yoruba people are predominantly found in South-West Nigeria, Southern Benin republic, Togo and parts of Ghana in West Africa and they form the larger corpus of the Black nationals of Brazil and Cuba. Other examples of political leaders in that section of the NGMAL are the

portrait bust of Late General Murtala Mohammed (Nigerian Head of State, 1975-1976) by Abayomi Barber and the portrait in oil paint of President Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari (1979-1983) by Abayomi Barber (see plates 14 & 15).



Plate 13

Title: *Oba Adesoji Aderemi* – The late Ooni of Ife and the first governor of the Western region of Nigeria

Artist: Abayomi Barber

Medium: patinated plaster

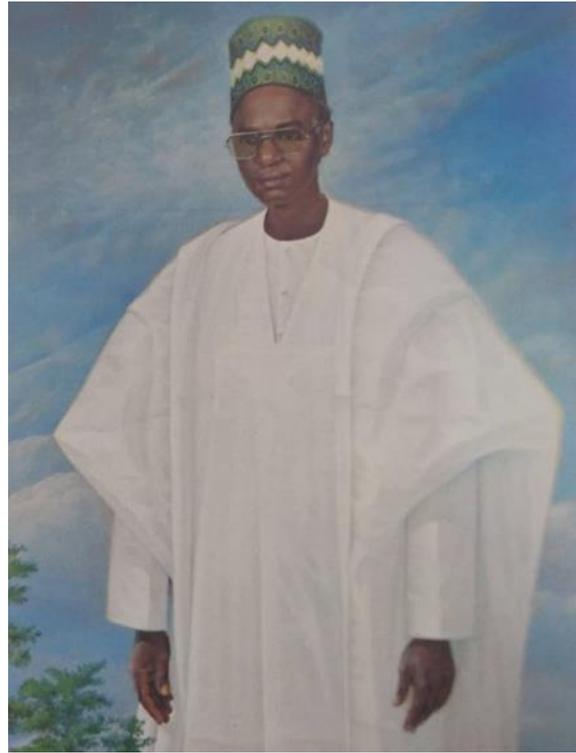
Height: 136.91cm

Breadth: 152.4cm

Width: 76cm

Year: 1979

Location: NGMAL



Above left:
Plate 14
Title: *General Murtala Mohammed, Nigeria's Head of State 1975-76*
Artist: Abayomi Barber
Medium: patinated plaster
Height: 106.44cm
Breadth: 91.44cm
Width: 53cm
Year: 1979
Location: NGMAL

Above right:
Plate 15
Title: *President Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari – Nigeria's first executive president*
Artist: Abayomi Barber
Medium: Oil on Barber board
Size: 183 x 122cm
Year: 1979
Location: NGMAL

In the section of the NGMAL which deals with modern Nigerian styles and movements the gallery exhibits a print by Bruce Onobrakpeya titled *Ominira*²²⁴ (see plate 16). It depicts the various geopolitical zones of the country in their characteristic modes of dressing, playing

²²⁴ Yoruba for Independence

musical instruments that are site-specific for easy recognition of the negotiations of the nation's plurality and political unity. Despite the jubilations occasioned by the attainment of independence in the country, the work somewhat evinces some tension in the rigidity of its forms. Almost an ominous sign of the impending difficult political negotiations ahead of the country.



Plate 16
Title: *Ominira*
Artist: Bruce Onobrakpeya
Medium: deep etching print
Size: 60.5 x 45.5cm
Year: 1971
Location: NGMAL



Plate 17

Title: *Mother Africa*

Artist: Felix Idubor

Medium: tyranti metal filler

Height: 260cm

Breadth: 111.44cm

Width: 107cm

Year: undated

Location: NGMAL

Even though Nigeria appears to be a patriarchal society, the significance accorded women in the society cannot be overlooked. This is evident in the role given to the queen mother in traditional Benin kingdom. Felix Idubor's sculpture titled *Mother Africa* (see plate 17) is positioned as a tribute to the African woman in recognition of her role in building African generations as nuanced by the depiction of the baby on her back. She cautiously nurtures the child, transmitting the warmth of her body in a bond that can only be achieved by a mother-child relationship. Her depiction in heroic proportions, the crown on her head and the traditional fan in her hand which is a typical feature of the attires of noble men denote her as some who wields authority, both as a spiritual head and a political head.

The sculpture portrays an intimate scene of socialisation, where a mother gradually initiates her child into learning the negotiations of life through her actions. The sculpture promotes the ideals of pride in the identity of the African woman, instructing African women to imbibe the awareness of self-love, by expressing the nurturing attributes of Africa as a continent. However, this sculpture can also be related to the religious concept of the Madonna and child in the Christian context, as an indigenised rendition of the Madonna and Child motif. This could be perceived as an act in which the artist emphasises his identity, and at the same time asserts his artistic license to appropriate colonial idioms in art.

The difficult times occasioned by the civil war in the country also required negotiating. The wounded had to heal and those who felt ostracised needed to be reintroduced to the rest of the country. Various artists produced works reflecting their feelings about the situation. Some re-enacted the war scenes as a memorial for their losses and others produced works which sought the reunification of the country. Particularly interesting in this section regarding the idea of a political unification of Nigeria are the posters by Haig David-West (b. 1946). David-West created works with titles such as *No more aggression* in celebration of the cease fire after the civil war, and *Unanimous wish for peace*, denoting that all Nigerians would prefer a peaceful coexistence. His other works include *Protect our culture* (see plate 19) and *Togetherness*. These works are possibly the most directly engaged in the political negotiations of Nigeria's unity, as his language is clear for easy comprehension.

In his poster titled *No more aggression* (see plate 18), David-West in a simple composition with a reverberating message, reiterates the country's need to live in peaceful coexistence. The poster depicts the image of a white dove, which in the Christian faith is symbolic of peace and the presence of the Holy Spirit. At the same time the composition

portrays a clenched right-hand fist held up high, a symbol of Black Power in the African American struggle which had been adopted by Pan-Africanist all over the world. The red background of the picture symbolises the danger and the turmoil around the nation, while the intersection of the dove with the clenched fist casts the light of peace on the struggles within the nation.



Plate 18

Title: *No more aggression*

Artist: Haig David-West

Medium: gouache

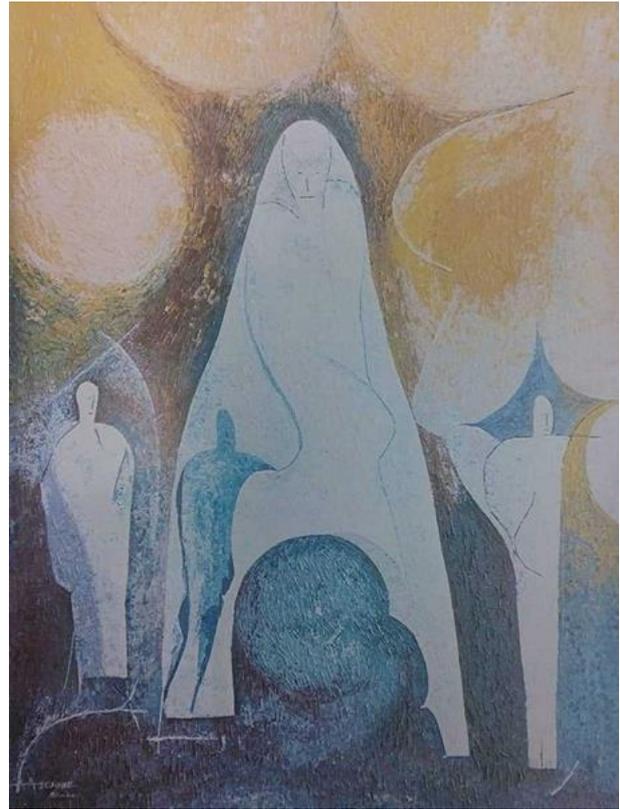
Size: 100 x 70cm

Year: 1980

Location: NGMAL



Above left:
Plate 19
Title: *Protect our culture*
Artist: Haig David-West
Medium: gouache
Size: 100 x 70cm
Year: 1980
Location: NGMAL



Above right:
Plate 20
Title: *Giant strides*
Artist: Adetayo Adenaike
Medium: oil on canvas
Size: 122 x 91.5cm
Year: 1980
Location: NGMAL

With the independence in the bag, and the civil war successfully defused, Adetayo Adenaike in his painting titled *Giant strides* (see plate 20) acts as an advocate for the country to start making conscientious efforts to build the country. The painting calls the nation to action, urging the citizens to rise to the call of nation-building and start accomplishing great things. In this section, the NGMAL's collection parades Nigerian artists as developing concepts

which variously express and explain the geopolitical, socio-cultural, and ideological issues confronting the country.

International Diplomacy

The admittance of works by international artists into a country's national collection has been variously defended by several countries involved in this practice. Exhibiting the whole world in single collections as a notion was flirted with considerably by many European nations in the 19th century.²²⁵ Some countries have these works inculcated in their national collections as a sign of their colonial conquest, while others engage in collecting artists from other countries as a sign of their economic might and right to appropriate, or as symbol of goodwill towards these other countries. The concept of portraying diversity in content of permanent national art collections in other parts of the world can be said to have evolved out of this practice.

The act of representing the 'national' in national galleries performs in three ways to imply: a possession of the nation; a representation of the nation; and a service to the nation. These can be realised in these institutions by deploying the international survey and national art, which are two unambiguous forms of collection.²²⁶ While the British model of museums incorporates the art of other nations as an expression of its universalism which is derived from the enlightenment thinking which stipulates that knowledge requires access to the world. The National Gallery of Art in Nigeria incorporates foreign art in its exhibition as a sign of goodwill towards these nations. Principal among these nations whose works are included in the NGMAL's collection are works of Bulgarian artists working in Nigeria at the time of constituting the collection. The magnificently structured design of the National Theatre in

²²⁵ Philipsen, 2010, 17

²²⁶ Knell, 2016, 17

Lagos where the NGMAL is housed was designed and executed by Bulgarian architects and builders.

Nigeria might have had a more robust collection of international artists through loans from more established institutions in the West, but despite Nigeria's membership of the Commonwealth, the grace granted South Africa which enabled it to access works of European artists on loans was never offered to Nigeria. Hayden Proud records the loan of works by significant artists to the South African National Gallery (Sang) from the 1940s to the 1960s, before South Africa abandoned the Commonwealth in 1961.²²⁷

In the NGMAL's negotiation of its international diplomacy, the institution deployed components of its collection in the address of African diplomatic relations and international relations politics in a section which displays paintings from friendly nations. Art is universalistic in conception and idealism and has no colour or religion, as it is not specific to any geographical area in the world.²²⁸ This act of displaying foreign art side by side the works of contemporary Nigerian artists tells different yet relating stories. The donation of works by these foreign artists to the NGMAL was predicated by Nigeria's amiable disposition towards other countries, a reflection of the country's foreign policy views of an inclusive cultural relations with other countries.

An illustration of such diplomatic negotiations is the print by Bulgarian artist Stoyan Stoyanov titled *Freedom memorial* (see plate 21). Stoyanov depicts the many sides of oppression on the faces of the citizens. Although the work is rendered only in red and black, the artist illustrates the pains and agony that Bulgarians had to face in their quest for self-

²²⁷ Hayden Proud, 'Our National Gallery: The 'Book' of our Art?' [n.d]

²²⁸ Interview with Dr Chike Dike on 6th of September 2017.

determination from the Ottoman Empire. Even though the work appears to have been created in the light of the artist's recollection of his country's struggle, the message seemed to resonate accurately with the agenda of the NGMAL at the time.



Plate 21

Title: *Freedom memorial*

Artist: Stoyan Stoyanov (Bulgarian artist)

Medium: Etching print

Size: 42 x 29cm

Year: undated

Location: NGMAL

The Articulation of Religious Beliefs in the NGMAL

Religion has always played a crucial role in the sponsorship of art in any nation. It furnished the ammunition for the development of a wide repertoire of traditional art in Nigeria, in its deployment as social control by traditional Nigerian rulers using carved paraphernalia for masquerades and other envoys of the 'gods'. Ironically, the introduction of Christianity to

Nigeria appears to have had a rather destructive effect on the production of art. The early Christian missionaries not understanding that they were extinguishing a great cultural heritage of Nigerians disallowed the continued production of traditional Nigerian art. They publicly burnt the 'fetishes' because they associated African woodcarving with what they called 'idol worship'.²²⁹

In the articulation of nationalism through religion, the NGMAL connects the formalism of the art to the articulation of the essence and spirit of the nation. Barber's sculpture titled *Yemoja* (see plate 22) in the collection represents the Yoruba goddess of the sea and fertility Yemoja. This deity is worshipped by many Africans who live along the coastline of their nations, even though the deity's name varies from place to place. She is popularly referred to as *mami wata* or *mami water* in most riverine areas. Its depiction by Abayomi Barber is in line with Senghor's idea of Africans going back into their past to highlight aspects of their culture for the expression of the African identity, as their religious beliefs were being gradually eroded by the introduction of foreign religions. This piece combines both classical and contemporary art forms. Its location as the first piece inside the gallery positions it as the key to the exhibition with its complex spiritual powers and stratification.

The art historian Freeborn Odibo analyses the sculpture as illustrating the fecund imagery of a spirit possessing the ability to bestow children and blissful earthly accomplishments. Since most Africans attach great importance to the issue of children and wealth. This positions Yemoja as the deity mother of all rivers and seas, whose worship traverses the cultural horizons of Yoruba, African, and people of African descent in the

²²⁹ Ulli Beier, 'Beginning of a Christian art in Nigeria', in, *Art in Nigeria 1960*, Nigeria: Ministry of Home Affairs Ibadan, Cambridge University Press, 1960

diaspora.²³⁰ This spiritual being who symbolises fertility is also akin to the fruitful nature of the country.

The sculpture is rendered in the most convincing naturalism, the woman is ageless and of immanent composure. Barber clearly restates with this work, his claims to the heritage of ancient Ile-Ife naturalistic art. This composition is the result of an adventure started when he was commissioned by the University of Lagos, Nigeria, to reproduce the exquisiteness of the 'Ori Olokun' (an archaeological find from ancient Ife). This was presented to President Leopold Sedar Senghor on his visit to Nigeria in 1973.²³¹

Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther (see plate 23) is recognised as one of the earliest African Christian missionaries and therefore, one of the earliest Western-educated Nigerians. He is responsible for the translation of the Bible to the Yoruba language. Representing Nigeria as a nation that has embraced Christianity alongside the traditional beliefs and Islam. The Bishop is depicted as old and grey as a sign of wisdom. In many parts of Nigeria, age is synonymous with wisdom.

A popular Nigerian adage explains this theory accordingly: 'What the elderly can see sitting down on the floor, a fledgling, even while located on the tallest tree cannot see.' This is also exemplified in the ascribing of wisdom to the tortoise in African mythology, as the tortoise is portrayed as the wisest animal because they grow to be several hundreds of years. This has to do with intuition and perception, which has been acquired by many years of experience: experience being the best teacher.

²³⁰ Freeborn Odibo, *Abayomi Barber: The politics of African art*, Nigeria: digitAll books. 2018, 15

²³¹ Discussions with Abayomi Barber.



Plate 22

Title: Yemoja

Artist: Abayomi Barber

Medium: patinated plaster

Height: 213.36cm

Breadth: 75.96cm

Width: 75.96cm

Year: 1979

Location: NGMAL



Plate 23

Title: *Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther*

Artist: Kolade Oshinowo

Medium: oil on canvas

Size: 91cm x122cm

Year: 1976

Location: NGMAL

The exhibition is directed to flow organically through Pan-African themes which dwell on the articulation of the African identity, négritude, liberation movements and the negotiations of the country's difficult past as discussed in chapters three and four. The prominence of the location accorded the classical themes in the collection illustrate them as spiritual keepers of the national narrative of the exhibition, around which other contemporary styles and movements are orchestrated.

The role of the NGMAL in Canonising Nigerian Art

Conceivably the NGMAL has been recognised as the author of the canon of Nigerian art for quite a while. My experience as a member of the institution's curatorial staff revealed that it was the first port of call for many researchers and art collectors making their initial venture

into the sphere of Nigerian modern art. Apart from the fact that its exhibition performs the act of authenticating Nigerian art and artists in its collection by presenting them as the idyllic Nigerian artists. Its position as the most visible state-funded institution handling and exhibiting modern art in Nigeria creates in the mind of its visitors its right to author Nigerian art and artists.

The curatorial practice can be perceived as a political force, even if not directly involved in the politics of the state. This act empowers the curator over the artist as the author of the master narratives to define art and cultural objects. In the art world the completed art piece ceases to be the artist's monopoly, the artists share in authoring an artwork is limited to the conception of a subject, and the magic power to transfer to a canvas, or some other surface.²³² The presence of an artefact or phenomenon in an institution is what authenticates it as art. This is connected to the rights of establishments to define the notion of art's freedom from ethical or representative ties, which privileges aesthetic experiences.²³³ The performance of according higher appraisal to museum collections than the cultural processes that bring them into being in art history is responsible for the canonisation of art as a response to the structure of knowledge production in art history.²³⁴ The NGMAL's act of canonising modern art in Nigeria encompasses the illustration of the intricate structures documented in the institution's display and the cataloguing.

²³² Lionel Cust, 'NATIONAL MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES', *Fortnightly review*, May 1865-June 1934, 125 (747), (Mar 1929) pp.330-346, 338, 339, (Online) Available from:

https://search.proquest.com/docview/2452942?rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo

²³³ Philipsen, 2010, 159

²³⁴ Sylvester Okunodu Ogbechie, 'The Historical Life of Objects African Art History and the Problem of Discursive Obsolescence', *African Arts*, 38 (4), UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center (Winter, 2005), pp. 62-69, 94-95, (Online) Available from: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20447736>

The institution's position as an agency of the government which deals with modern art in Nigeria already empowers it to produce the canon of Nigerian art. The gallery privileges some objects over others, merely by the way these objects have been arranged. This gives some prominence and renders others silent, taking into consideration the works that ended up in the store and those that have not been considered to possess virtues of national importance. This act permits the qualification of good or bad art. Those recognised as most suitable in the institution's context are authenticated by the institution as what should be regarded as Nigerian modern art. This, however, intensifies the charged situations where self-other and subject-object relations are reaffirmed or denied, as some works are celebrated, and others sublimated.²³⁵

By doing this the NGMAL defines the standards to which artists have to aspire. The contemplation of this crafted narrative by other artists, produces in their subconscious the acceptability of the art forms presented by the NGMAL, which becomes enshrined in their art styles. This act has its implicit effects on the way the art market flows, as works displayed by the NGMAL assumes the status of the higher art, and therefore, the more expensive art forms. Since the goal of many younger artists is to sell their works for a living, they appropriate these forms that have been propagated by the NGMAL, with the hope that they will also be collected and displayed by the institution. As Gino Cattani, et al. argue in *Value Creation and Knowledge Loss: The case of the Cremonese Stringed Instruments*, 'Acceptance of an artist's work into the national collection is considered a stamp of approval and signals to collectors that the artist's work has investment potential. In the art world, reputation develops through consensus.'²³⁶ This can lead to significant increases in the value of an artist's work, providing

²³⁵ Daniel J. Rycroft, *World art and legacies of colonial violence*, London: Routledge. 2013, 2

²³⁶ Gino Cattani, et al., 2012

them with work and a steady income. The NGMAL therefore plays a pivotal role in stimulating the art market by helping artistic careers and recognising achievement. In this respect the NGMAL has exercised considerable influence on the direction of Nigerian art.

With the increased presence of certain artists in the permanent exhibition of the NGMAL arose a desire in other private galleries to also collect the works of these artists. Therefore, the artists' acclaim grew and became widespread. This evolution that brought art into the NGMAL facilitated the act of setting Nigerian art at liberty from aristocratic and religious rules and restrictions. The increase in demand for modern art in Nigeria occasioned by improved patronage and institutional acquisitions also helped to situate Nigerian art in the global art negotiations.²³⁷

The emergent middle-class with greater propensity for art patronage around the late 1970s and early 1980s found art-collecting as a way of defining their Nigerian identity. Many of them took directions from the NGMAL's collection about what kind of art and artist were relevant in Nigeria and therefore built the quality of their collection based on what had been conveyed by the NGMAL's collection.²³⁸

Since there was a paucity of publications on modern art in Nigeria, the NGMAL at its inception focused its efforts on the production of literary materials for the study and appreciation of art in Nigeria. These books were not written to merely edify the artists in context, but to reveal their motivations for producing the kind of art they created, as their works contributed to the nationalistic movement in colonial Nigeria. They used art to draw attention to the colonial situation.²³⁹

²³⁷ Interview with Dr Dike on 6th of September 2017.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Ibid.

The institution also awarded grants to selected Nigerian artists, it organises art workshops, seminars/symposia and produced literature on modern Nigerian art for historical research purposes and it intermittently puts up local and international art exhibitions in the propagation of Nigerian art. Since the inauguration of the NGMAL, its major concerns were derived from the need to improve Nigeria's understanding of art, which in turn would enhance the significance and appreciation of their collection. The institution commissioned art studios in 1999 which it named after Aina Onabolu and incorporated a section within it aimed at encouraging the development of artistic and creative innovations in children from an early age.²⁴⁰

In some respect, the collection presents the canon in the works displayed and in what it has recorded as its version of Nigerian art in its maiden catalogue titled the *Nucleus*. The NGMAL has largely endorsed the naturalism style of painting that was introduced to Nigeria by Aina Onabolu and Akinola Lasekan. This was further developed in the art of Abayomi Barber, Erhabor Emokpae and Josy Ajiboye a painter and cartoonist. The institution gave prominence to works of artists like Ben Enwonwu, Vincent Amaefuna who were working in abstraction inspired by a direct engagement with forms and content from the traditional African art and culture. The NGMAL also endorsed the works of wood carvers such as Bisi Fakeye and Simon Agbetuyi whose carving were both expressions of the traditional wood carving styles and contemporary adaptations of traditional idioms in wood carving.

The NGA has also taken steps to familiarise the members of the public with the collection by printing out reproductions of the works in the collection in postcards.²⁴¹ The

²⁴⁰ Simon O Ikpakronyi, 2002, 41

²⁴¹ Pat Oyelola, 'Internationalism and Ethnicity in Modern Nigerian Art', in, *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, 2(1&2) Jan. 1997 - Dec. 1998, pp. 20-32, 20

cataloguing of these artists created recognition and generated provenance for their oeuvres. The inclusion of these artefacts in the catalogue of the NGMAL has created a tradition which can be dubbed as the canon of Nigerian art. Both the exhibition and the catalogue have been performing their act of authoring as long as viewers have had the opportunity to visit the collection and consult the catalogue.

However, since the collection has not grown much over the years and there have been several new ideas and artists who have evolved over this period, this canon that the institution has produced requires urgent revision. Most of the artists who came to prominence in Nigeria since the 1990s have not been represented in the collection. This means that many of the conceptual art, installations and more recently performance art are not included in the display of the NGMAL. These newer genres are mainly sponsored by private galleries in Nigeria.

With the understanding that anything can be art once exhibited in an artistic context, called art, or consumed as art; we can therefore deduce that the NGMAL has systematically introduced its perception of what forms and styles modern Nigerian art should exhibit. The institution's dedication of a section as *Movement and styles in modern Nigerian art*, also connotes a deliberate act of canonising Nigerian modern art, as the institution set out to define the dominant styles of art for Nigerians through its collection.

All these factors have privileged the NGMAL as the location of the canonising of art in Nigeria, as exhibition dynamics are essential frameworks for reconceptualising the cultural politics and artistic histories of a nation. However, the institution still grapples with issues of underfunding, mismanagement of funds and poorly trained staff, which interfere with its possibility of realising its full potentials. It exists today in partial operation, having latent

potentials for creating the canon that reflects Nigeria's contemporary art. But with the necessary tweaking here and there, it could effectively develop into an institution from which 'the' canon could be represented in the future.

The following chapters of this thesis will look at the significance of the movements of Pan-Africanism and its negritude offshoot in the address of the politics of modern and contemporary Nigerian art. The study focuses on how the influence of these political movements have evolved and influenced the form and content of modern and contemporary art in Nigeria. It will also reveal how these movements have directed the flow of the art narrative in Nigeria by locating the connections to the political implications of the construction of modern art in Nigeria. This is exemplified in the works of artists like Ben Enwonwu whose painting titled *Negritude* (see plate 11) depicts his Blackness as fertile, strong, at the prime of life and endowed with the ability to be whatever it purposes to be; and the painting by the artist Haig David-West titled *Protect our culture* (see plate 19) were West highlights the importance of the African culture in the process of nation making.

Chapter Three: Pan-Africanism in the agency of Africanity

Introduction

Pan-African movements can be traced back to the struggles against the subjugation of the African in the context of the revolts dating back to slave uprising in the New World. It is synonymous to the rejection of oppression by the assertion of the rights and the plans to unify Africa, both in the mother continent and in the diaspora by the Black folks. The movement encompasses a series of activities which were geared towards the identification of the contributions of the Black folks to the world, as inspiration to spur today's Black population of the world to greater heights.

In the analysis of the performance of the movement, the artist and art historian Babasehinde Ademuleya and art historian Michael Fajuyigbe locate the discourse within ideologies centred on Africans and the expression of their Africanity, as they are manifested either within the continent of Africa or in other continents. They hold that the ideals of Pan-Africanism transact the queries of African dignity, African identity, and African renaissance which cannot be divulged from its (racial) equality content. In the colonial context they relate it to the issue of independence and power structure, asserting their belief that African peoples, both on the continent and in the diaspora share not merely a common history, but a common destiny.²⁴²

Similarly, Adi and Sherwood approach Pan-Africanism as the perception of having common interests by people of African origin and descent. They situate the discourse as an

²⁴² Babasehinde Augustine Ademuleya; Michael Olusegun Fajuyigbe, 'Pan-Africanism and the Black Festivals of Arts and Culture: Today's Realities and Expectations', in *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20 (3), Mar., 2015, 22-28; & Immanuel R. Harisch, 'Facets of Walter Rodney's Pan-African Intellectual Activism during his Dar es Salaam Years, 1966-1974', in *Stichproben. Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien / Vienna Journal of African Studies*. No. 38(20), 2020, pp. 101-129, 106

important spinoff of colonialism and the enslavement of African peoples by Europeans. They analyse its varied transformations and evolutions over the two centuries of its fight for equality and struggle against economic exploitation, which have resulted in the Back-to-Africa movement in the United States and also in nationalist beliefs such as an African 'supra-nation'.²⁴³

In the observations of Michael Onyebuchi Eze an African political theorist, Pan-Africanism's emergence can be positioned as an agency of restoration of African subjectivity as well as challenging the intellectual roots of colonial historicity.²⁴⁴ While Kamau Rashid an educationist who majors on the study of classical African civilisation positions the movement as a means of championing the reconstruction of African history, advocating anti-racist struggles, serving as a basis of political and economic cooperation. He identifies two main classifications of Pan-Africanism, as the global and continental Pan-Africanism.²⁴⁵

Pan-Africanism can therefore be described as a cultural and political movement which positions all Africans and descendants of Africa as belonging to a single race and sharing cultural unity.²⁴⁶ Araeen connects the movement in relation to Africa and its diaspora from the bases of their shared participation in slavery and the colonial experience, tailoring its aim towards salvaging, preserving and propagating Africa's contributions to the world. He illustrates the movement's highlight of the necessity of history in recognising the specificity of a culture's own ground from which to speak and realize its authentic voice.²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Hakim Adi, and Marika Sherwood, *Pan-African History: Political Figures from Africa and the Diaspora Since 1787*, London: Routledge, 2003

²⁴⁴ Michael Onyebuchi Eze, 'Pan Africanism: A Brief Intellectual History1', *History Compass*, 11(9), Center for African Studies/Martin Luther King Jr. Institute, Stanford University, 2013, 663–674, 664

²⁴⁵ Kamau Rashid, 'Beyond the Fetters of Colonialism: Du Bois, Nkrumah, and a Pan-African Critical Theory, Equity & Excellence in Education', 2019, 3, (Online) Available from:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1672593> [Accessed: 4th May 2020]

²⁴⁶ Wilson J Moses, 'Pan-Africanism', in, *Encyclopedia of African- American Culture and History*, 1996 & Rasheed Araeen, 'Why 'Beyond' négritude?', *Third Text*, 24(2), 2010, pp. 167-176

²⁴⁷ Araeen, 2010, 172

This chapter explores the Pan-African movement's negotiations of the question of African nationalism. It evaluates the engagement with the issue of the African pride and the activities of African nationalists in their attempt to recreate favourable conditions for promoting nationalist interests across the various geographies of Africa, by discussing the desire for self-governance in order to regain the former glory of pre-colonial Africa. The chapter positions a selection of activities in Africa, the Caribbean and Europe, in demonstration of how Pan-Africanists of the 20th century used due diligence to develop their political response to the subjugation of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

In order to explore this Pan-African concept, the chapter leans on the analysis of documented evidences of this movement in various literatures from Africa and its diaspora, and also from America, and Europe where many of these activities were originated in the articulation of the struggles for emancipation from colonial bondage. This chapter examines these situations for a proper understanding of the ideas which foreground the expressions of African identity politics in art. Pan-Africanism transmuted from a utopian into a political project which was circulated to other parts of the continent by Ghanaian public diplomats, through the writing and activism of other intellectuals of African descent, such as C.L.R. James and Jomo Kenyatta from 1957.²⁴⁸

The Development of the Pan-Africanism Movement

Pan-Africanism originates as a fall out of the dispersal of Africans abroad, in response to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade at the dawn of the sixteenth century, and its consequent rise of

²⁴⁸ Frank Gerits, 'When the Bull Elephants Fight': Kwame Nkrumah, Non-Alignment, and Pan-Africanism as an Interventionist Ideology in the Global Cold War (1957–66), *The International History Review*, 2015, 4

European colonial expansionism and global capitalism.²⁴⁹ The disapproval of the ideology of racism, subjugation of people of African ancestry and confrontation of exploitation were tools which furnished the philosophical development of the Pan-African history.²⁵⁰ Early Pan-Africanist activities can be traced to the activities of three anti-slavery campaigners in the eighteenth century who played a significant role in the struggles against slavery and racism:

Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the revolution in St Domingue, which produced the only successful slave revolution in history, establishing Haiti as a symbol of the possibility of successful liberation and African independence in the Western hemisphere; and the two British-based writers and activists, Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoana, who are thought to have pioneered the writing of the slave narrative and were influential champions of the humanity of Africans and the abolitionist cause.²⁵¹

The existence of legal slavery and the trade in enslaved Africans in many parts of the Americas and Africa during the nineteenth century, and increased colonial activities in Africa throughout the century, culminated in the 'scramble for Africa'. In order to justify the crimes perpetrated against people of African descent by their enslavement and colonialization, excuses were framed and justified by racist ideologies which sometimes assumed a 'pseudo-scientific form'.²⁵²

Eze notes that, the discovery of America produced a modernist theory of humanity which had grave consequences for Africans whose cultures would become disqualified as

²⁴⁹ Bentley Le Baron, 'NEGRITUDE: A PAN-AFRICAN IDEAL?', 1966, (online) Available from: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/NEGRITUDE%3A-A-PAN-AFRICAN-IDEAL-Baron/56621d8c77b824370be1c57d4747e8e4439802c4> [Accessed: 27th August 2020]

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Adj, & Sherwood, 2003; & Eze, 2013, 664

²⁵² Ibid.

'rational' or 'civilized' for its dissimilarity to Western culture. He deplors the conversion of Africans to 'modern' barbarians who could be objectified, enslaved, or dominated in replacement of the Native Americans. The Indigenous persons of the Americas had been formerly enslaved at the beginning of the Trans-Atlantic slavery, until the Jesuits convinced the slavers that Native Americans, like the Europeans had 'souls'. This he contends, caused the slavers to shift focus to Africa to enslave the soul-less African. He reports this act of savage domination as being institutionalised both by the political and religious hierarchy of the time, stating that, the papal bull of 1455 urged the European powers to reduce all infidel peoples to servitude.²⁵³

Living in a society that accorded them little or no rights, the early African American Pan-Africanists must have assumed that people of African descent could not flourish alongside the White American of European ancestry. The awareness of their place in the imbalance within a strange society of shared ethnicities, was triggered by their experience of segregation and limitations inherent in their Blackness in distant lands. This informed the anchoring of their identity on race or ethnicity, as they advocated the return of Africans from America and Europe where they had been relocated to through the slave trade. They proposed a return to Africa purposing to transfer certain elements of Western civilisation that they had witnessed and participated in, to Africa through Christian missionary activities.

Pan-Africanism as a movement gained increased fervour due to the expansion of European colonisation of Africa and the struggle for the abolition of slavery of the late nineteenth century. Its projection in Africa was facilitated by the founding of Sierra Leone by the British in 1787 and Liberia by the Americans in 1816.²⁵⁴ The Church Missionary Society

²⁵³ Eze, 2013, 664

²⁵⁴ Mugyabuso M. Mulokozi, 'LANGUAGE, AFRICAN IDENTITY AND PAN-AFRICANISM', 2015, 1

(CMS) introduced Western education to West Africa and some of their students later traced their roots to their countries of origin in Africa.²⁵⁵

One of such students was Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first Nigerian Bishop of the CMS in Nigeria. These returnees from Europe, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Brazil, and the Caribbean coalesced to produce the leaders of early African nationalism in their respective countries. The battle to defend the black race and repudiate ideas of African subservience was the animator for most of these activists in Pan-African history, as it became the overriding expression in their writing and activism.²⁵⁶

The formation of the African Association in London in 1897 and the ensuing arranging of the first Pan-African Conference three years later in 1900, can be recorded as the take-off point of the controlled and calculated Pan-African movement.²⁵⁷ This was directed by the Trinidadian, Henry Sylvester Williams to initiate a dialogue among people of African origins with the aim of forging a united front against colonialism.²⁵⁸

Eze credits the title of a founding father of Pan-Africanism to W. E. B. Dubois. He records Dubois as responsible for summoning the first Pan-African Congress in 1919 in Paris with the object of harnessing a universal sense of black identity, shared aspiration and solidarity for blacks all over the world. The second and third Pan-African Congresses were held in London in 1921 and 1923, respectively. The fourth Pan African Congress was in 1927 in New York, the fifth was held 1945 in Manchester, the sixth was held in 1974 in Dar es Salaam and the seventh was held in Kampala in 1994.²⁵⁹ All bordering on, but not restricted to the liberation of African peoples around the world from colonialism and neo-colonialism,

²⁵⁵ Moses, 1996

²⁵⁶ Adj, and Sherwood, 2003

²⁵⁷ Ibid., viii

²⁵⁸ Eze, 2013, 665

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

the right for self-governance, and an unconditional recognition of peoples of African origins as equal citizens of the world among other themes.

Until 1945, nearly all the leading political Pan-Africanist lived and worked in Europe rather than in Africa, situating Europe as the centre of Pan-African activities. They were inducted into Pan-African thinking as students or workers living in France or Britain, the two leading colonial powers of the era.²⁶⁰ The history of Pan-Africanism has connected Pan-Africanist thinkers and activists from the Anglophone and Francophone worlds of the past two hundred years as exponents in the advancement of Black pride and race consciousness. These include: Martin Delany (1812-1885, USA), Constance Cummings-John (1918-2000, Sierra Leone/England) and Duse Mohamed Ali (1866-1945, Egypt/Nigeria), Du Bois, Marcus Garvey (1887-1940, Jamaica/USA/London), Frantz Fanon (1925-1961, Martinique/USA), Malcolm X (1925-1965, USA), Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972, Ghana) and others.

Quite significant to this discourse are the efforts of W.E.B Du Bois who extensively investigated the negotiation of the rights and apposite social status of the African, at home enmeshed with the struggles of colonialism and in diaspora. He unwaveringly promoted the study of African history and culture.²⁶¹ Du Bois' theories on the knowledge-creating procedures are inherently political, as they are entrenched in a larger political economic framework. He equates education with the creation of ambition, dissatisfaction, and revolt, as he reasoned that educated people cannot be held down.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Adj, and Sherwood, 2003

²⁶¹ Peter Kuryla, 'History of Pan-Africanist intellectuals', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, [n.d.] (Online) Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pan-Africanism#ref323499>

²⁶² Du Bois, W. E. B, 'A mild suggestion', In, Huggins, Nathan, (Ed.), *W.E.B. Du Bois: Writings*, New York: Library of America, 1986, [Qtd]. In, Kamau Rashid, 'Beyond the Fetters of Colonialism: Du Bois, Nkrumah, and a Pan-African Critical Theory, Equity & Excellence in Education', 2019, 1, (Online) Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1672593> [Accessed: 4th May 2020]

Du Bois' concern with the past was connected to his agitations concerning the present and future. Du Bois' intellectual work was focused on deploying the information gathered to prevail over the multiple systems that were contributory to their shared subordination and understand the social-historical realities of African people. He was a principal contributor to the establishment of Africana Studies. This positions his scholarly, journalistic, and artistic productions, and his life's journey as producing an extensive narrative of the difficult history of people of African ancestry.²⁶³

Du Bois' works and rationale have continued to perform an inspiring role to nationalists both in Africa and its diaspora. The Pan-African movement received complementary efforts from Marcus Garvey, who focused on the liberation of Africa from colonialism, and the assertion of Black pride through positive reinforcements of attributes inherent in historical accounts of Africa. Even though both he and W.E.B. Du Bois were contemporaries and working for the same cause, Garvey was however suspicious of the involvement of Du Bois, because of his Jamaican background where the caste system instituted by slavery had positioned the mixed-race children²⁶⁴ (which W.E.B. Du Bois was one) higher in the scheme of things than the typical black enslaved people in their societies.

Peter Kuryla a historian from Belmont University argues that the blood relationship engendered a more favourable disposition by the slave masters towards the lighter-skinned offspring, according them better rights and privileges in the social order. This instigated a self-assessed feeling of superiority to their darker siblings by the lighter-skinned mixed-race children, and they behaved as such.²⁶⁵ However, Garvey and some of their other colleagues like Kwame Nkrumah and Cheikh Anta Diop shared Du Bois' concerns about the synergy

²⁶³ Rashid, 2019, 1, 2

²⁶⁴ Offspring produced by sexual exploitations of the young, enslaved women.

²⁶⁵ Kuryla, 'History of Pan-Africanist intellectuals', [n.d.]

between Africa's past and future, and its significance to Africans. Garvey manifested this in his ideation of the development of a formidable African nation-state and the need for an African world-community; this is integrated worldwide, while Nkrumah maintained the need for a united and socialist Africa, and Diop advocated for the formation of an African federated state.²⁶⁶

Marcus Garvey emigrated to Harlem in 1916, after struggling to attract a followership for his cause in Jamaica. The relocation planted his Universal Negro Improvement Association (U.N.I.A., founded in 1914) on a firmer footing.²⁶⁷ In 1920, Garvey presented 'The Declaration of the Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World', demanding self-determination for all Peoples and the inherent right of black people to possess themselves of Africa. He believed that Africa was the best-suited place for black people and associated the emancipation of Afro-Americans with the decolonisation of Africa.

Garvey propagated the political philosophy based on the principle of self-esteem of black people to encourage the struggle for independent states that should develop under the leadership of the African-American diaspora.²⁶⁸ In his propagation of the 'Back-to-Africa' ideals, he supported relocating black people and those of African-American descent back to Africa. Garvey's legacy has continued to stimulate Pan-Africanist concepts throughout Africa and its diaspora.

Donna McFarlane, the late curator of Liberty Hall, Jamaica, in her PhD thesis locates the origin of Africa to about 195,000 years ago. She defines the African as the descendant of the first person who walked on the face of the earth; the first person to use language both

²⁶⁶ Rashid, 2019, 2

²⁶⁷ Albert Kasanda, 'Exploring Pan-Africanism's theories: from race-based solidarity to political unity and beyond', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 28(2), 2016, 179-195, 184

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

written and spoken; the first doctor, musician, architect, engineer. She argues that the acquisition of these information encouraged Garvey to conduct further inquiries about the ancient history of Africa and to create an organization that would spread Africa's rich history to Africans in Africa and in the diaspora to inspire them to create more greatness in the future.²⁶⁹ These are backed by studies in several Universities such as Ibadan, Legon, London, Madison, Makerere, Dakar and Dar es Salaam. They underscore Africa as the cradle of mankind and highlight that Africans had created powerful empires which flourished long before the arrival of the Europeans.²⁷⁰

The conscription of Black soldiers from colonies into the army to fight in support of their colonisers in World War I revealed the double standards of European hegemony to these men.²⁷¹ They reasoned that, even though they were drafted to fight a cause that was not their own, the rights and privileges accorded their European counterparts was not bestowed on them. The situation however ignited a feeling of brotherhood in them, which they seemingly took advantage of in the development of their Pan-Africanist struggles. As they had common emotions of being suppressed.²⁷²

Relocation of the Pan-African Movement to the African Soil

The subordination of the African continent by Europe at the start of the Twentieth Century gave rise to the Pan-African discourses in the Western hemisphere. At this point the people were slowly emerging from the oppression of chattel slavery, with a vision of community building. They struggled for the realization of social liberties and freedom from colonial

²⁶⁹ Donna Elaine McFarlane, *Representing Blackness: Marcus Garvey and the Politics of Museology in Post-Colonial Jamaica*. PhD. Dissertation, University of Leicester, 1-Mar-2013, 276 (Online) Available from: <https://ira.le.ac.uk/bitstream/2381/28232/1/2012mcfarlanedephd.pdf>

²⁷⁰ Harisch, 2020, 110

²⁷¹ Moses, 1996

²⁷² 'Pan-Africanism', *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, Encyclopedia.com, (Online) Available from: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/pan-africanism>

subjugation. 'It is onto this stage that Pan-Africanism emerged; the child of those dispossessed of Africa, yet doubtless of its potential role in the redemption of her far-flung people.'²⁷³

The core programme of the Pan-Africanism movement at its inception was the prohibition of the caste or racial order produced in the West, which situates the black folks at the bottom rung of the ladder.²⁷⁴ This instigated the conduct of research into the pre-colonial African past to highlight significant civilizations in the African past, which it deployed in a psychological reappraisal and reassertion of the Black folk's worth to themselves and to others.

At the inauguration of the movement, it was channelled towards the liberation of the blacks and Africa as a whole. Okeke-Agulu situates the beginning of colonialism in Africa as overlapping with the rise of nationalist activity, especially in colonial Lagos where a vibrant print media culture had been established since the 1880s. He points out that majority of the early politicians were freed enslaved immigrating from Sierra Leone, Liberia, Brazil, the United States and native Lagosian, many of whom had trained in England as lawyers and medical practitioners. Influenced by the politics of W.E.B. Dubois and Marcus Garvey, the Lagos based nationalists had a broader Pan-African perception.²⁷⁵

By the 1940s the movement had been consolidated in Africa, through the efforts of Senghor in the negritude movement, and other Pan-Africanists like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana who led Ghana to Independence as the first African country to attain independence

²⁷³ Rashid, 2019, 3

²⁷⁴ Le Baron, 1966; & Moses, 1996

²⁷⁵ Chika Okeke-Agulu, and John Picton, 'Nationalism and the Rhetoric of Modernism in Nigeria: The Art of Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, 1960-1968', in *African Arts*, 39(1) (Spring, 2006), pp. 26-37, 92-93, 36, UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center. (Online) Available from: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20447749> [Accessed: 12th of January, 2018 12:46 UTC].

from colonial rule.²⁷⁶ In Nigeria there were records of the Pan-Africanist activities of Hebert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ahmadu Bello and Obafemi Awolowo who activated the political engineering of Nigerian independence from colonial rule.

The political career of Kwame Nkrumah provided significant inspiration for Pan-Africanism in Africa. Like Du Bois, Nkrumah believed in the need for the formation of a new standard of African knowledge construction as a major device in the process of decolonization for undoing the persistent and derisive effects of colonialism.²⁷⁷ The Ghanaian Independent transformed the country into an ideal which attracted many from the diaspora to Africa by the end of formal British colonial rule in the Gold Coast in 1957. This resulted in the foundation of a new type of Pan-Africanism centred on the African continent, which climaxed in the establishment of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963. An idea he shared with other Pan-Africanists like Guinea's Sékou Touré, the Algerian leader Ahmed Ben Bella and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania.²⁷⁸

In the words of Issa G. Shivji in *Nationalism and Pan-Africanism*, 'While individuals may make history, they do not choose the circumstances in which they do so.'²⁷⁹ Kwame Nkrumah Francis Nwia Kofie was born in 1909, in Southwestern province of Gold Coast (currently Ghana) at Nkroful village in Nzima land to a goldsmith father.²⁸⁰ Nkrumah got his primary education in Catholic mission schools in the same region. He qualified as a primary school

²⁷⁶ Rashid, 2019, 2

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Adj, and Sherwood, 2003, ix

²⁷⁹ Issa G. Shivji, 'Nationalism and Pan-Africanism: Decisive Moments in Nyerere's Intellectual and Political Thought Preliminary Notes', [n.d.], (online) Available from: https://www.academia.edu/3677657/Nationalism_and_Pan_Africanism_revised_decisive_moments_in_Nyeres?auto=download&email_work_card=download-paper [Accessed: 19th August 2020]

²⁸⁰ Andrew Akampurira, 'AFRICAN NATIONALISM (POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY THE QUESTION OF NATIONALISM ACCORDING TO KWAME NKRUMAH'S POLITICAL THOUGHT)', [n.d.] [online] https://www.academia.edu/29123323/AFRICAN_NATIONALISM_POLITICAL_PHILOSOPHY_THE_QUESTION_OF_NATIONALISM_ACCORDING_TO_KWAME_NKRUMAH'S_POLITICAL_THOUGHT (Accessed: 19/6/2018).

teacher in Accra. He was awarded a Bachelor of Arts in sociology and economics from Lincoln University where he was later appointed as a Lecturer of political science. Nkrumah was also awarded a postgraduate degree in philosophy and education from Pennsylvania University.²⁸¹

During his teaching career at Lincoln University, he was greatly inspired by Marcus Garvey's thoughts on Pan-Africanism. Nkrumah's personal philosophy emphasizes self-sufficiency and collective obligation designed to create the right ideals in Africans, espousing it as the living and creative force in modern life. He advocates the recognition of each person in the community as the basic unit.²⁸²

Nkrumah proposed to reveal the falsehood of Europe's civilising mission and demonstrate how post-colonial leaders could act autonomously on the global stage by striving for an enhanced international position through the emotional appeal.²⁸³ His political ideology can be summed up in his conceptual position referred to as *Philosophical Consciencism*.²⁸⁴ This he portrays as an amalgamation of indigenous, Euro-Christian, and Muslim heritages. A synthesis which he finds would propel Africa to social and intelligent progress for Africa's interpretation of these varying traditions into the African character.

Nkrumah observes the uneasy co-existence between the three constituent groups in Africa, where the capitalist nature of the immigrants translated to the exploitation of the socialist egalitarianism of indigenous Africans.²⁸⁵ He however anticipates adaptation of his perception of the original humanist principles underlying African societies by the synergy of the combined presence of traditional Africa, Islamic Africa, and Euro-Christian influences.

²⁸¹ Akampurira, 'AFRICAN NATIONALISM', [n.d.]

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Frank Gerits, 'When the Bull Elephants Fight': Kwame Nkrumah, Non-Alignment, and Pan-Africanism as an Interventionist Ideology in the Global Cold War (1957–66), *The International History Review*, 2015, 1

²⁸⁴ Kwame Nkrumah, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonisation*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1964, p.70.

²⁸⁵ Akampurira, 'AFRICAN NATIONALISM', [n.d.]

Nkrumah proposes the application of scientific socialism and logical development in the socio-political heritage of Africa, in contrast to a purely cultural Pan-African revival.

Nkrumah drew his influence from the works of politicians and revolutionaries like Gandhi, Mussolini, Lenin, Marx, and Hitler, among others. The influence of Mussolini in the 1930s was widespread, as a group of African and Caribbean radicals in Britain congregated to promulgate the idea of communism's intellectual impact on Pan-Africanism. The response of Europe to Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia (today's Ethiopia) led them to abandon their fraternization with communist philosophies to focus on a more Pan-Africanist theory for the attainment of their goals.²⁸⁶

In Ghanaian politics, Nkrumah was influenced by Dr Aggrey Kwegyir, who he credits with the arousal of nationalist spirit in him due to Aggrey's enthusiasm and eloquence. He acquainted himself with several political ideologies while he lived in the USA and UK. His contacts during his sojourn in America and Europe are vital in the development of his philosophical conscience. He worked closely with George Padmore who was also advocating for Africa's independence in London in 1945 and participated as a secretary of the fifth Pan-African Conference held in Manchester.²⁸⁷ The foundation for attaining independence in Africa appears to have been laid during this conference.

Nkrumah on his return to Ghana intensified the strategies of agitation against colonialism in Africa. He established the political party called the Convention People's Party (CPP) in June 1949, which won the general elections in 1954. With his quest for the Ghanaian independence achieved on 6 March 1957, he expeditiously stated that Ghana's independence would not be of much consequence without the larger context of the liberation and

²⁸⁶ Adj, & Sherwood, 2003; & Eze, 2013

²⁸⁷ Akampurira, 'AFRICAN NATIONALISM', [n.d.]

independence of all peoples of Africa.²⁸⁸ This he exemplified in his efforts to promote nationalism in African states, as he believed that personal desires must be sacrificed for the common good of the society.

The bedrock of Nkrumah's nationalism comprises of three elements which he classified as being inextricable: unity, equality, and independence. His nationalist debate was premised on morality, reflecting the deep unethical tension between the oppressed and his oppressor.²⁸⁹ This he applies to his efforts to actualise the desire for total freedom in Africa and its political unification. In antithesis to Nkrumah's position on the unification of Africa, K.A. Busia, disparages Nkrumah's political thought on political unification of Africa. He holds that Nkrumah misread the signs of the time in the continent, because he aimed at the state replacing the tribe while ignoring the pluralism which exists in the modern societies of Africa.²⁹⁰ Nevertheless, Nkrumah supposed that the most appropriate way to develop the African unity was to overcome the individualism of the various ethnicities in Africa to bond one big, strong, formidable Africa.

One of the most tangible results of the advent of the Pan-African movement on the African soil was the creation of the new African Union by Africa's governments, largely as a response to the adverse consequences of globalisation.²⁹¹ Nkrumah's concept of the African personality was therefore geared towards assisting Africa to heal from the colonial experience. His nationalist activities were directed towards instilling pride in the African for Africa's confident emergence into, and participation in global affairs with a voice that can be

²⁸⁸ Akampurira, 'AFRICAN NATIONALISM', [n.d.]

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Kofi A. Busia, *African Search of Democracy*, London: Routledge, 1967

²⁹¹ Adi, and Sherwood, 2003, vii

heard. His quest for the reassertion of the African's dignity is a direct consequence of the scourging of the African psyche under foreign and colonial domination.

Pan-African Postcolonial Negotiations

The postcolonial negotiations in Africa as analysed by the varying arguments on the issue are hinged on the relationship between the coloniser and the formerly colonised. In this case the nature or the reaction is directly proportional to the force with which the colonised has felt encumbered. The tougher the hindrance, the stronger it appears that the colonised puts up a counter-resistance in the struggle for self-actualisation. This is evident in the more vociferous nature of Pan-African activities outside the continent of Africa than the nature with which it occurred in most African states. The subjugation that the Black folks were burdened with on the continent was quite different from that which developed out of the enslavement of the Blacks in the diaspora.

The art and culture historian Partha Mitter illustrates the deployment of the dialectal of modernism by colonised nations in the context of their specific cultural niche and the development of materials for cultural resistance to colonial empires by the inspiration of the postcolonial revolutionary message.²⁹² Okeke-Agulu scrutinises the postcolonial as describing sets of critical practices by intellectuals which were simultaneously directed at dismantling the ideological foundations of colonialism and the anticipation of the consequences of its end. He argues that the postcolonial is not restricted to literary and artistic discourses and practices that came after independence, but it is rather a dialectical concept that marks the broad historical facts of decolonisation and the determined achievement of sovereignty.

²⁹² Partha Mitter, 'Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery', in, *The Art Bulletin*, 90 (4), 2008, pp. 531-548

Okeke-Agulu also finds the postcolonial to be reflective of the realities of nations and peoples emerging into a new imperialistic context of economic and sometimes political domination.²⁹³

Homi K. Bhabha a Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University argues for the exposition of postcolonial criticisms as a result of the inequality in cultural representations as negotiated in the antagonism of political and social authority within the modern world order.²⁹⁴ This is evident in the development of the Black Panther movement in America and various other movements to enshrine the idea of 'Black power'. The prolonged incidence of inequality within the American society seems to have given rise to revolutionary characters like Malcolm X, who have been disparaged for being too violent in their form of opposition. However, a proper contextualization of the accounts that led to these struggles and its effects on the psyche of those on the receiving end might reveal the cause of such reactions.

The basic tenets of Pan-Africanism for several decades were established at the all-African People's Conference in Accra 1957, which was attended by about 250 delegates. The canons were documented as: the attainment of political independence, assistance to national liberation movements, and diplomatic unity between independent African states at the United Nations.²⁹⁵ As an international liberation movement, Pan-Africanism enjoyed its utmost accomplishments in the first two decades of the postcolonial era. One of its major achievements was the founding of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 in the midst of the decolonisation and the euphoria of Independence in West Africa.²⁹⁶ This was championed principally by Kwame Nkrumah, President Sekou Toure (1922-1984) of Guinea,

²⁹³ Okeke-Agulu, Chika, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, 2015, 13

²⁹⁴ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 2012

²⁹⁵ Kwame Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom: A Statement of African Ideology*, London: Mercury books, 1961, 131

²⁹⁶ Kasanda, 2016, 188

President Modibo Keita (1915-1977) of the Republic of Mali, and Haile Selassie (1892-1975), the emperor of Ethiopia.

A significant thought in the postcolonial effects of Pan-Africanism is the induction of the North Africans to the scheme of things. Although, the North Africans had previously claimed allegiance to the Arab world of the Middle East, the support and inclusion of Algeria, Morocco, Libya and Egypt into the Pan-African OAU had opened up an avenue for the discovery of similarities between Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa.

Of vital importance was the research of Cheikh Anta Diop (1923–1986), a Senegalese historian and politician on the involvements of Black Africans in the Egyptian civilization. A lead he had taken from the discoveries of Leo Frobenius (1873–1938) a German ethnologist.²⁹⁷ Even though the research was produced as a PhD thesis which was not accepted by his French faculty, it ended up concretising the Pan-African ideology of the relationship between Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa to a large extent.

The Misconception of Africinity in the Ideals of Pan-Africanism

With the passage of time, the ethos of Pan-Africanism acquired the nature of an idea which resonates as a call for a mere return to African traditions. This gives the impression of a conflicting situation with its original purpose as a substitute to modern social philosophy for the re-organisation of postcolonial human society in relation to the world. It acquired the disposition towards a cultural revival reflecting a paradox in Africa's concepts of its quest for modernisation.

²⁹⁷ Abiola Irele, 'Négritude or Black Cultural Nationalism', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 3(3), 1965, pp. 321-48; & Dennis Ekpo, 'How Africa misunderstood the west the failure of anti-west radicalism and postmodernity', *Third Text*, 1996

The misunderstanding of Pan-African ideals can be understood as causing severe cultural and political impairment for Africa's post-colonial negotiations of its modernity. The Pan-African idea of a traditional African social model based on symbiotic cooperation portrays propagators in the light of men without interest in conflict or disavowal of Western impute. They sought avenues of cooperation which would be mutually beneficial to both sides of the equation. If these thoughts had been followed through by Africa's political elite class, Africa's engagement with modernity might have generated better results. However, the expectations of an entirely mutually beneficial relationship would have been farfetched, as it would have been rather naïve to expect the custodians of modernity as the world knows it today to admit Africa in without a contest.

Araeen attributes the performative weakness of the ideals of Pan-Africanism to its reduction to a paradigm of rhetorical devices that seeks accommodation within what is confronted and denounced. He holds that the ideals of Pan-Africanism have been incorporated into the postcolonial discuss which not only prohibits the understanding of a sociohistorical state in which both master and enslaved might have been trapped. A state from which both need to be liberated at the same time, but all the possibilities that may bring adversaries together in a dialogue are abandoned. He concludes that the liberation of humanity from all structures of domination and exploitation is contingent on its confrontation of the question of what leads humans to become masters?²⁹⁸

Leading Pan-African theorists therefore purposed to encourage Europe to negotiate with the agitators for a common liberation of the colonised as well as of the coloniser, based on Europe's ideas of universal freedom and equality. By so doing, they sought to restore the

²⁹⁸ Araeen, 2010, 172

previously disqualified races and cultures of Africa and to create symbiotic relations among the races and cultures of the world. They also sought to create new models of egalitarian human society for a world rid of exploitative neo-colonial systems. However, the excessive injection of racialist, ethno-artistic contents appear to have stifled many of Pan-African ideals' rich socio-political insights.

The greatest cause of sabotage for Africa's modernity project seems to be the activities of African leaders. It would seem like the age-long tradition of the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised persisted in the deliberations between the two parties. There appears to be the existence of African bourgeoisie middlemen who make it a point of duty to sabotage plans directed towards Africa's progress. This class of Africans were created during the colonial experience, to facilitate the easy management of the colonies.²⁹⁹

The external powers capitalised on the vulnerability of the new states, providing sustenance for unpopular regimes, or sponsoring alternatives.³⁰⁰ This minority serves as the transmission line between metropolitan capitalists and the dependencies in Africa. They are 'gentlemen' who dance in Abidjan, Accra, and Kinshasa when music is played in Paris, London, and New York. By the repatriation of most of Africa's surplus, this class of African intermediaries along with international capitalist companies, hinder development for the masses.³⁰¹

It is imperative for us to understand that the colonial experience was not a uniform rule where everything was done by force. Araeen notes that the success of a colonial regime depended not only on its violence but also on liberal means by which it successfully enticed the natives to participate in its consolidation and administration. He holds that this produced

²⁹⁹ Harisch, 2020, 110

³⁰⁰ Gerits, 2015, 3

³⁰¹ Harisch, 2020, 110

an educated class in the colonies which accepted the modernity of a Western system. By adopting it, they not only took part in the colonial regime but ultimately took over its administration in the name of postcolonial independence and self-determination.³⁰²

Having tasted some degree of wealth and power, these African middlemen became tools for the neo-colonisation of Africa after the independence of most African countries. Unfortunately, these were the calibre of men that Nkrumah, Senghor, and their Pan-African compatriots had to deal with during the decolonisation stage of Africa. In their naivety, they got trapped in the schemes of these men, which led them to abandon the Pan-African vision for a socialist Africa that was supposed to create improved cultural, economic, and socio-political systems in Africa.³⁰³

They were instigated to navigate Africa's economic independence through methods of economic recovery rooted in Africa's traditions and knowledge of subduing the environment. Perhaps this was due to their awareness of the historical reasons for the decrepit socio-economic conditions of Africa and the understanding that Africa would not benefit from entering into a global economic system in competition with the powers of the West that control this system.

It can also be assumed that the failure to properly actualise the Pan-Africanist ideals in Africa is not only due to the shortfalls of its ideas or vision for a socialist Africa, but as a result of the nature of the political power available to Africa at independence through which Africa was supposed to implement its Pan-African ideologies. The realisation of the true intrinsic value in the conditions of Independence, which was to actualise the ambitions of

³⁰² Rasheed Araeen, 'Modernity, Modernism and Africa's Authentic Voice', *Third Text*, 24 (2), 2010, pp. 277-286, 278

³⁰³ Denis Ekpo, 'Culture and modernity Since Festac 77', 2007, (Online)
https://www.academia.edu/2652905/Culture_and_Modernity_since_Festac77

Africa's emergent native bourgeois led to the desertion of most of Africa's socialist ideas. This surrogate class' pursuit of Africa's independence was for self-enrichment. Like many post-colonies of the world today, Africa's government is in the hands of a class whose interest lies in serving the very system against which it originally struggled.³⁰⁴ These African ruling elite class seem to have appropriated the ethos of Pan-Africanism treacherously, to sustain their power for deception.

Post-coloniality and the art of the post-colony

Going by our understanding that modern art in Nigeria and indeed Africa is directly related to the country's colonial and postcolonial experiences,³⁰⁵ it is imperative to look at how these circumstances have affected the formulation of modern art in most post-colonies. Art teaching in the colonial era was tasked with the indoctrination of 'good taste' in the subject nations through the introduction of academic naturalism and classical European standards. This however ensued a situation where the subject nations who were engaged with articulating their own confrontation to the colonial order took their leading from the rebellion of the Western avant-garde against academic naturalism.³⁰⁶

Due to the fact that most of the motifs which these Western avant-garde deployed in their protest against academic naturalism were derived from colonial cultures, especially Africa, many artists from Africa became enamoured with this form of appropriation as a means of expressing their political location as products of the colonising and the colonised

³⁰⁴ Araeen, 2010, 176

³⁰⁵ Adepegba, Cornelius O., *Nigerian art; its traditions and modern tendencies*, Ibadan: Jodad, 1995, & Chike Aniakor, 'Modern Sensibilities and Africanity in Contemporary African art', in, Chike C. Aniakor et.al (Eds.) *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, 3 (1&2), Lagos: National Gallery of Art, Jan 2000 - Dec 2001, pp. 85-105

³⁰⁶ Partha Mitter, 'Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the periphery', *The art bulletin*, 90 (4), 2008, pp. 531 – 548, 532

cultures. Their works were articulated as manifestations of their relationship to the colonial Empire.

In the discourse of the notion of post-coloniality and its effects on the art of the post-colony, Mitter reasons that the resistance to colonialism was charged by new energies derived from modernism's agonistic relation to tradition, its experimental attitude that constantly sought to push intellectual frontiers, and its authority by artists socialised in the periphery as colonial subjects. He argues that modernism's fundamental lessons produced the required weaponry for antagonising the colonial empires, as each colonised nation deployed the language of modernism in the address of the cultural issues in its own geography.³⁰⁷

The literary theorist Ihab Hassan disparages the regular stance of most authors on post-colonialism, reducing the postcolonial discourse to the grumbling of discontented nations. He contends that the recovery of moral authority, beyond self-serving predispositions and the conventions of indignation can hardly be achieved, as long as post-colonial studies remain political.³⁰⁸ The Professor of Comparative Literature, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria, Dennis Ekpo appraises the structures of Western imperial rationale, on the grounds and the claims of the project of Africa's critique of the West to suggest its failure. He finds that the lack of performative force on its target is not accidental or purely political, but rather stems mostly from Africa's basic misinterpretation of the imperial mind.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 533

³⁰⁸ Ihab Hassan, 'Queries for postcolonial studies', in Rasheed Araeen, et.al. (Eds.), *The third text reader on art, culture and theory*, London: Continuum, 2002, pp. 59-68

³⁰⁹ Dennis Ekpo, 'The failure of modernity: how Africa misunderstood the West', in Rasheed Araeen et. al. (Eds.), *The third text reader on art, culture and theory*, London: Continuum, 2002, pp. 3-13

Ekpo highlights two currents of African thoughts for executing a report of colonial culture and European imperialism by African post-colonial thinkers: (i) The revolutionary/Marxist anti-imperialism inaugurated by Kwameh Nkrumah; (ii) neo-conservative, Afrocentric anti-West radicalism pioneered by Cheik Anta Diop's *National negres et Culture*.³¹⁰ Enwezor traces the origins of the idea of recontextualising post-coloniality, global art and culture to the post-war periods immediately after World war II. He finds that the aftermath of the post-war events brought about the new world order which has changed into a multilateral system of governance. He assesses the post-war era as stimulating thoughts on the pursuit of the end of colonial empires and imperial hegemony in Europe and Japan by the colonised and the process of integrating the lessons of the war and the undesirable administration of colonialism.³¹¹

Enwezor observes that the hollowness of the high-minded discourse of humanism was revealed in art by the process of decolonisation and civil rights movements, through the demand for independence, equal rights, and a termination of oppression, racism, segregation, and exclusion.³¹² He connects the idea of cultural sovereignty in Africa to the idea of *négritude* and assesses the depiction of decolonisation through metaphors which advocate the continuity of tradition within the dynamism of postcolonial modernity.³¹³

Within this argument, Enwezor addresses the different stories of art modernism coming out of Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and the West, looking at the cross current of ideas which emanated from the occurrence of activities between both the Atlantic and the Pacific.

³¹⁰ Ekpo, 2002, pp. 3-13

³¹¹ Okwui Enwezor, 'Forward', in, Enwezor, et.al (Eds.) *Postwar: Art of the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965*, Munich: Prestel, 2016, 13

³¹² Okwui Enwezor, 'The judgement of art: Postwar and artistic worldliness', in, Enwezor, et.al (Eds.) *Postwar: Art of the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965*, Munich: Prestel, 2016, 32

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 32, 33

He highlights the concurrent performances of multiple modernisms around the world during this era. In the exhibition, he situates Nigeria and indeed Africa as a site where these global modernisms were being engaged after 1945.³¹⁴

Postcolonial Negotiations in African Art

In art, we find the postcolonial argument going against the currents of institutional bias in the representation of the Blacks and other members of the formerly colonised world. The argument is that the progression of the Black artists and those from the former colonies have been pegged to a point where they cannot aspire past a certain point in the scheme of things. Modern art pursued by African artists rejects Western colonialist notions of “primitivism”, as they sought the self-definition of their Africanity as part of the repertory of modern art. They constructed their own spaces and their own network of relationships. Since art equally expresses tradition and permits direct intervention in it, it is a fit medium for this pursuit.³¹⁵

It would appear that most of what is being peddled as African art today has not been labelled as such by African institutions, but rather by major institutions beyond Africa with global interests whose decision-making arms are out of the range of influence of these African artists. Since these institutions possess the funds to purchase and sponsor art from most parts of the world, they invariably determine what the title ‘African/Black art’ describes.

The consequence of this is that many African artists are willingly choosing to disassociate themselves with the African artist label. One of such situations that have recently come to prominence is the case of Frank Bowling (b. 1934) whose artistic practice spanning over 60 years has resisted being framed by the African artist label. Bowling was born in

³¹⁴ Enwezor, ‘Forward’, 2016

³¹⁵ Thomas McEvelley, ‘Arrivederci Venice: The third world Biennials’, (Online)
<https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-14875189/arrivederci-venice-the-third-world-biennials-1993>

Guyana and his practice cuts across both Britain and the USA. He graduated from the Royal College of Art in London in 1962 and was awarded the silver medal at the end of his final year.³¹⁶

Lydia Figes the content editor at Art UK contends that despite the silver medal he was awarded and the fact that London and the UK were becoming increasingly multicultural due to immigration in this era, Bowling was ostracised from group exhibitions taking place in London at the time. She finds that the art establishments in London were still reluctant to embrace the work of Black artists. The curating of the exhibition 'New Generation: 1964' at Whitechapel Gallery by Bryan Robertson to capture the 'spirit of the new era' saw the marginalisation of the promising fresh out of the Royal College of Art Bowling, even though the exhibition included other graduates of the RCA.³¹⁷

In order to deal with the frustrations of being branded as a Black or 'exotic' artist, Bowling consciously refused to join groups like the BLK Art Group who were contending with issues of race in order to escape the stereotype of being labelled as an African/Black artist. He however affirms his identity by the colour symbolism of his Guyanese and African/Black heritage. 'As a transnational artist, the 'map paintings' arguably reflected Bowling's sense of displaced yet fluid identity between many cultures and geographical locations.'³¹⁸

These activities of authoring the art for Africa and other parts of the post-colonies makes it easy for differences to be elucidated between the arts of the West and those from other regions. The demarcation of the boundaries therefore gives room for the othering of the artistic expressions from regions outside the West which directly implies the inferior

³¹⁶ Lydia Figes, 'Frank Bowling: 60 years of pioneering colourful abstraction', *Art UK*, 14 Jun 2019, (Online) <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/frank-bowling-60-years-of-pioneering-colourful-abstraction>

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

nature of the art from those regions. This can be interpreted in the light of Homi Bhabha's 'Third Space',³¹⁹ in the sense that they are an idealisation of the artistic expressions and not necessarily from a well-informed perspective. Homi K. Bhabha is a leading postcolonial theorist.

The Third Space is demonstrated here with the representation of the contact of the West with the art from other regions to produce a work that is in-between the centre and the periphery in a conceptual Third space. This appears to be the reason why Black art is stereotyped (naked, fantasy and exotic images of Africa). Wherever it is being peddled, it speaks a certain language which denotes its inferiority. The sanctioning of these forms of expressions by these institutions seems to be practising a systematic exclusion of many novel ideas in art produced in Africa from the global narratives by describing them as being derivative of the art of the West.

Unfortunately, even though there is a development of institutions in the post-colonies which should be responsible for a proper representation of Africanity, these institutions already have ingrained in their system of analysis a certain concept of how African art can be described to follow the 'othered' path that Euro-American institutions have delineated. Apparently, this system can only exclude that form of representation from the core scheme of events. It will unfortunately take a long time for these institutions from the post-colonies to unlearn their 'Otherness'. On this issue, Bhabha maintains that the displacement of the narratives of the stereotype as a mode of knowledge and power demands the establishment of a theoretical and political response that challenges deterministic or functionalist modes of conceiving of the relationship between discourse and politics. He suggests that the point of

³¹⁹ Bhabha, 2012

intervention should shift from the ready recognition of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the processes of subjectification made possible through stereotypical discourse.³²⁰

An example of this act is seen in the National Gallery of Art Zimbabwe, where ‘quality rather than quantity was considered a universal contemporary policy’ by McEwen,³²¹ when I came to selecting European masters for the collection. His exhibition programs maintained the same quality, as he brought overseas exhibitions of originals and reproductions by world-famous artists to the gallery. The eight suggested future exhibitions by McEwen at the inception of the institution established a trend towards the popular artists and periods in art history, with only one exhibition designated for local talent. The strategy adopted by McEwen to include local art in the collection was to establish a workshop to promote the production of sculptures in 1969.³²²

The works produced in these European directed workshops are the hallmark of the art which represent the African artists in this collection. The act of directing this workshop by McEwen and his third wife, Mary like the role played in authoring and directing local art in Oshogbo, Nigeria by Ulli Beier and his wife Georgina questions the identity of the art produced in these workshops. It appears that the consideration of a ‘universal contemporary policy’ of quality rather than quantity does not seem to apply in the selection of the local art.

³²⁰ Bhabha, 2012 95

³²¹ National Gallery of Zimbabwe historical background, (online) Available from: [The gallery History \(nationalgallery.co.zw\)](http://nationalgallery.co.zw) [Accessed: 21st July 2021]

³²² National Gallery of Zimbabwe historical background

Realism, Pan-African or Not?

Nigeria's presence, population, and multiplicity of ethnicities with enormous cultural wealth put Nigeria at an advantageous position in the negotiation of the African identity. There appears to be a strong historical affinity towards representational art in the creative ventures of artists from the South-Western region of Nigeria among the wealth of creative outputs from Nigeria. This may be due to its preponderance in their traditional art.

Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan, Abayomi Barber, Yussuf Grillo who are prominent Nigerian artists from this region evince these qualities in their works. Even some of Erabor Emokpae's works can be classified as having these qualities.³²³ The one thing that ties these artists together is the philosophical characteristics of the traditional art of the region where they come from. This region in Nigeria seems to have had a tradition of producing portraits especially for the kings and royals of the region. This was also evident in the religious art forms like the 'ere ibeji' and in their representation of the various deities. There appears to be obvious attention to personal details of the character being represented.

Leaning on this tradition Abayomi Barber and Erabor Emokpae drew on their Ife and Benin ancestry and their connection to these palaces to articulate historical portraits to keep the achievements of Nigeria's past in the memory of future generations of Nigeria. Yussuff Grillo whose works appear stylised also draws directly from the colour palette of the egungun masquerade of his region in the formulation of his painterly craft. These creative adaptations have been deployed as direct stimuli for the resuscitation of the realistic artistic tradition of their region as a response to the synergy propagated in the négritude philosophy. These they

³²³ Even though Emokpae was Benin, it is necessary to note that Benin was part of the Western region of Nigeria until recently.

have organised in the service of Pan-African ideals, in the production of portraits of notable characters in the nation-making process of Nigeria.

Consequently, in the Pan-African spirit the notion that modern art in Africa, which according to most prevailing art histories began with what was adopted from so-called realism in Western painting and became the basis of art in Nigeria at the beginning of the twentieth century cannot be entirely true. Araeen queries the reason why we have chosen to only see realism as representing the beginning of modernism in African art, as is believed by many historians. He questions the rationale behind evidencing realism particularly in the work of Nigerian artist Aina Onabolu and not, in Africa's own tradition of realism in the terracotta and brass portraits of Ife during the twelfth to sixteenth centuries.³²⁴

This questioning and renegotiation of the direction of modern art in Nigeria almost disavowed the inclusion of the realism genre within the acceptable styles of visual art production in Nigeria, if not for the tenacity of some Nigerian artist. Taking up the realism style of artistic expression in post-independence Nigeria became an Avant-garde gesture, as many Nigerian artists and critics had been persuaded of realism's exclusive European origin. Confining the 'true' Nigerian artist to the more politically accepted expressions in naïve abstract manifestations.

Pan-African Art and the Making of African Identity

The dissemination of thoughts through art is governed by its refinement through institutions that are involved intellectually in the construction of ideas. These institutions provide a means by which to appreciate the complexity of the political requirements for arranging and

³²⁴ Araeen, 2010b., 278

controlling human societies. The critical engagement of these institutions reveals them as performing the act of contrasting and arranging works of art within their exhibition to project particular constructions on history. This act defines the intellectual and socio-political ambitions of the museum management, which exposes their compulsion to polish the presentation of the society which produced them.

Art participates most significantly in defining the demarcations of national identity, as political art has come to be recognised as a major driving force within nation-building.³²⁵ Art in cultural nationalism in Africa has been furnished with the adequate tools for the creation of institutions of learning and reasoning to develop the intellectual capacity of the African. Africa's quest to produce an improved future for its people requires the fashioning of rational programs to enhance the ability of its people to understand their role and expectations for a collective advantage.

Léopold Sédar Senghor's cultural background and his position as the first president of Independent Senegal made it possible for him to accord creative cultural activities a significant role in defining the African identity in post-independence Senegal. Mesch notes that certain artists have created their works intentionally to contribute to the construction of new political or social consciousness. She argues that, in the wake of the major world events that marked the beginning of the post-colonial era, politically engaged, activist, guerrilla art increasingly typifies a key new direction in art production.³²⁶

Mesch describes this art as being explicit in its combative stance, or in its tone of political dissent, which does not shrink from making direct reference to the social problems

³²⁵ Knell, Simon, *National galleries: the art of making nations*, London: Routledge, 2016

³²⁶ Claudia Mesch, 'Introduction', in, *Art and politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change since 1945*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013

and issues that are unique to its era.³²⁷ In Africa, these artistic expressions either took their form and character from the international artistic canons of art or they could evince their connection to traditional modes of figuration to express the artist's opinion concerning social and political issues of collective interest.

The artistic expressions of many modern African artists accentuated the philosophical rebuff of modern colonialism, tracing their inspiration to African social and political developments. This resulted in the construct of a 'quasi-independent' concept of African distinctiveness. The diverse cultures that make up the African continent however seem to be a stumbling block in the articulation of 'the African identity', owing to the multiplicity of ethnicities that make up the African continent and its diaspora. The core unifying character of African modern art is its stance on anti-colonialism and its resulting quest to rethink the African subject.³²⁸

In the analysis of the anti-colonial revolution in art modernism, modernism's investigational attitude continuously sought to push intellectual frontiers. Its ideology of emancipatory innovation, and its aggressive relation to tradition and authority extricated new energies in artists raised in a more traditional mode. Each colonised nation deployed the language of modernism to fight its own cultural corner, as they derived ammunition for cultural resistance to colonial empires from modernism's innovative message.³²⁹

The production of this kind of art was used for the purpose of sensitising Africans about the relevance of the African culture and for renegotiating the misrepresentation of Africa. The idea was to correct the misconception of 'savage, primitive, uncivilised' notion through the revalidation of the African culture. This art also demonstrates how memories of

³²⁷ Mesch, 2013

³²⁸ Ibid.

³²⁹ Mitter, 2008, 533

African cultural heroes have been transformed into a powerful visual narrative. An example produced in Congo references the rise and assassination of elected Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba (1925 – 1961), the leader of the Mouvement National Congolais (MNC) and the first leader of the country after its independence from Belgium in 1960. Lumumba was executed in January 1961 along with two other members of his cabinet, Maurice Mpolo and Joseph Okito.

The Congolese artist Tshibumba Kanda Matulu (1947 – 1981) memorialises Lumumba in the painting series *History of Zaire* (1973-4), in the works *The Death of Lumumba, Mpolo, and Okito* (*On January 17, Bob Debarid killed Lumumba, Mpolo, and Okito*) (see plate 24). The depiction of three crosses in the paintings relates Lumumba to Jesus Christ, who is the Christian sacrificial lamb for humanity. Just as Jesus died to set mankind free from the oppression of sin. The broken bounds off the hands of the slain Patrice Lumumba can be likened to a depiction of the freedom coming to the oppressed people of Congo if they would unite as inscribed in the foreground of the painting with Lumumba's blood. This can also be deduced in the artist's portrayal of the murdered trio side by side. Tshibumba clearly presents Lumumba as a martyr. The Christian iconography of this painting suggests the Christlike elements that the artist attributes to the former leader.

Tshibumba Kanda-Matulu's paintings animate the reorganisation of Lumumba's reminiscences into a powerful visual narrative of a cultural hero. This idealistic historic documentation focuses on recognisable themes such as social injustice, street violence, political arbitrariness, and generational conflicts. As classical African sculptures portrayed

cultural innovators, his depictions of Patrice Lumumba exemplify the Congolese tradition of venerating mythic or cultural heroes.³³⁰

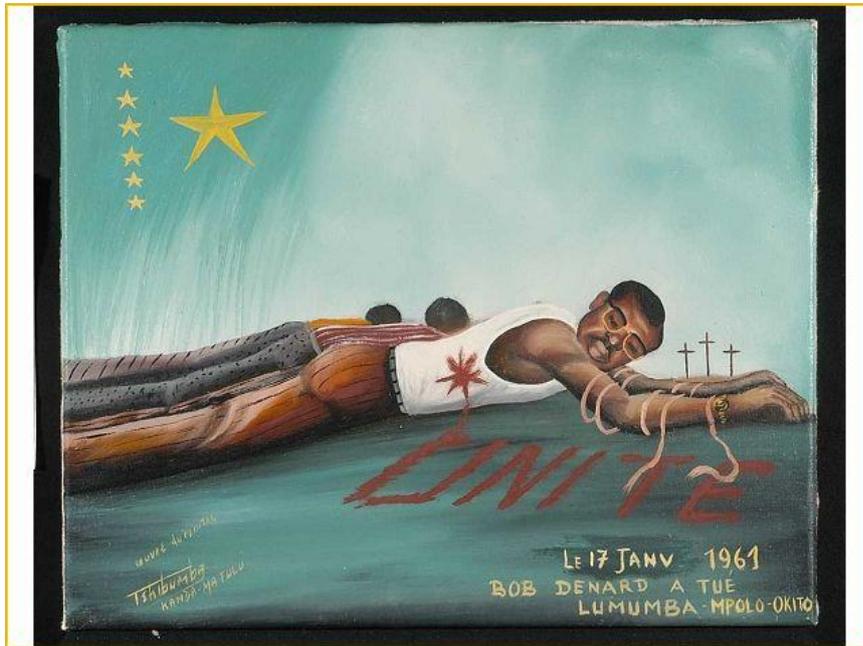


Plate 24

Title: *Death of Lumumba, Mpolo, and Okito (On January 17, Bob Debard killed Lumumba, Mpolo, and Okito).*

Artist: Tshibumba Kanda-Matulu

Medium: unknown

Size: unknown

Year: date unknown

Location: Image source.³³¹

The Ethiopian artist Alexander 'Skunder' Boghossian (1937 -2003) is among other artists who engaged the ideals of Pan-Africanism in reconfiguring visual modernism to impact their indigenous cultures. Boghossian trained in London and Paris in the late 1950s before he returned to teach briefly in Addis Ababa. In 1969 he took up a position at the Howard University in Washington DC, where he taught until his death in 2003.³³² He painted with

³³⁰ Miriam & Ira D, 'A Congo Chronicle: Patrice Lumumba in Urban Art,' Wallace Art Gallery, New York: Columbia University, New York, February 21–March 18, 2006, (Online) Available from: www.columbia.edu/cu/wallach/exhibitions/A-Congo-Chronicle.html

³³¹ Google images, (Online) Available from: https://www.google.com/search?q=tshibumba+kanda+matulu+death+of+patrice+lumumba&safe=strict&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj-4bLeorrbAhVLtRQKHRJgCVYQ_AUICigB&biw=1607&bih=766&dpr=0.85#imgrc=wQlq6AbcOqbWkM

³³² Mesch, 2013

collage and drew his forms and techniques from multiple sources, like Ethiopian landscapes and cityscapes referring to the political changes and instability of the country around 1974 and the Ethiopian revolution. His complex designs give the impression of an amazingly animate work, which demonstrate the influence of West African, Coptic, and Egyptian motifs in his expressions.



Plate 25
Title: *Self-Portrait* ³³³
Artist: Alexander (Skunder) Boghossian
Medium: watercolour
Size: unknown
Year: 1961
Location: unknown

In his 1961 watercolour self-portrait (see plate 25), Boghossian deploys the use of the traditional earth colours which have come to be preferred by many contemporary African artists. He appropriates directly the angularity of traditional African art in the execution of this portrait, referring to Ethiopian Coptic art tradition and ancient Egyptian paintings by depicting in profile the eye and head in a body facing forward as it would have been portrayed

³³³ African art, (Online), Available from: <https://www.archives.gov/research/african-art/select-list-040.html>
[Accessed: 17th March 2018]

in a portrait of a head facing forward in full view. The painting evinces the feeling of an exile longing for his return home.

The historical genealogy of Pan-Africanist intellectual discourse includes South African artists such as John Mohl (b. 1903-) and Gerard Sekoto (1913-1993), who attempted to demolish white racial supremacy from within through their works.³³⁴ As most of Africa was subjected to the same circumstances which furnished Africa with the context for its quests for autonomy.

In South African modern art Gavin Jantjes addresses the localised system of apartheid, an Afrikaans word for segregation in place in South Africa from 1948 to 1994, which assured that a white minority would remain in control of the state and its institutions.³³⁵ Jantjes attended art school in his native Cape Town and his technical proficiency transverses various media of expression, but his works articulate his preference for print portfolios. He deploys his works in the address of the politics of his native South Africa as well as the discourse of issues of cultural identity, lost histories, and experiences of shared humanity.

Jantjes conceptualises and appropriates documentary photographs as a basis of his work, codifying them morally against the injustice of institutionalised racism. His works take the form of collages of texts and image focussed on accenting the effects of apartheid, decrying the re-socialisation of the Black folks through colonialism to assume the racist value system of colonialism, thereby rejecting Black culture in favour of that of the coloniser.

³³⁴ Araeen, 2010b

³³⁵ Mesch, 2013

In a series of painting titled the *Korabra Series* which he created in 1986 at the West Indian Association Club in Coventry, Jantjes explores the Transatlantic Slave Trade through his paintings (see plate 26).

The word `Korabra' comes from Ghana and means `to go and come back'. It is also a name for a funeral drum sounded for the dead. Many people died on the transatlantic crossings because of the terrible conditions in which they were held. The exhibition was positioned as a part of the interventions around public art collections in the UK, which were carried out as part of the Black Artists and Modernism project.³³⁶



Plate 26

Title: painting from *Korabra Series*³³⁷

Artist: Gavin Jantjes

Medium: unknown

Size: unknown

Year: 1986

Location: unknown

³³⁶ Africanah.org, 'Gavin Jantjes: Black Artists and Modernism', 2016, (Online) Available from: <https://africanah.org/gavin-jantjes-black-artists-and-modernism/> [Accessed: 6th August 2019]

³³⁷ Africanah.Org, (Online), Available from: <https://africanah.org/gavin-jantjes-black-artists-and-modernism/> [Accessed: 20th August 2019]

Early Pan-African interactions between visual artist and civil rights movements can be linked to the contributions of painters Romare Bearden (1911-1988, USA), Norman Lewis (1909-1979, USA), and Hale Woodruff (1900-1980, USA). These painters synergised their personal memories with those of an entire generation of African Americans, consulting their past as a collective memory. They attempt to articulate the nature of African American experience as one united in a common spirituality with a strong sense of community.

Charles Wilbert White (1918-1979, USA), recognised for his excellent draughtsmanship and admirable graphic expressions, celebrates positive images of prominent African Americans throughout American history in his works. A social activist, his works are characterised by images portrayed to valorise Blacks, with the aim of redirecting the racial stereotypes with which Blacks had been labelled.

In *Harvest Talk* (see plate 27), White depicts two well-built Black men preparing their tools for the harvest. His exaggeration of certain anatomical features of the characters suggests the amount of hard labour that these Black folks had previously been subjected to. It could also be seen as representing Blacks as being physically fit, to signify their capability to build the desired future for the Black race.

His works criticise slavery in the USA, its legacies, including the widespread practice of lynching that had continued into the twentieth century. During his career White engaged the most problematic issues that consistently sought to review and elucidate American history. He pursued the accentuation of the historical orientations and mnemonic roles of his art.³³⁸ His art was geared towards the recompense of the wrongs of history against Africa and those of African descent.

³³⁸ Mesch, 2013



Plate 27

Title: *Harvest Talk*³³⁹

Artist: Charles Wilbert White

Medium: unknown

Size: unknown

Year: unknown

Location: unknown

In Nigeria intellectuals turned to the Nigerian traditions as a way of asserting their identity. Aina Onabolu (1882–1963), a pioneer modern Nigerian artist, in challenging the European hegemony in art, was also responsible for facilitating the employment of European artists such as Kenneth Murray onto the Nigerian art scene to train students in art. According to Nicodemus, Aina Onabolu’s choice of easel painting and academic realism was deeply political, an act of defiance against the bigotry and oppression against Africans.³⁴⁰

Onabolu took to realism in art as his expression of modernity in response to the European belief that pictorial art was outside the capacity of the African. He bemoaned the reproach of the black people of West African by the colonialists of the time as one who never produced any high form of civilisation, who never painted nor sculpted. His research into art

³³⁹ Wkiart: visual art encyclopaedia, (Online), Available from: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/charles-wilbert-white/not-detected-298069> [Accessed: 21 March 2019]

³⁴⁰ Evelyn Nicodemus, ‘African Modern Art: An Ongoing Project’, in, O’Brien, Elaine, et. al. (Eds.) *Modern Art in African, Asian, and Latin America: An Introduction to Global Modernisms*, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2013, pp. 17-25

produced a published book titled *A Short discourse on Art* in 1920. He used the book to educate the Nigerian public about the importance of art.³⁴¹ At his return to Nigeria in 1923 he began to propagate modern art in Nigeria and mentor young African students.³⁴² At this point in colonial history of African-European relations, there was the prevalence of what was termed scientific racism in Europe. This situation toughened the coloniser's attitude towards the Africans by marking Blacks as subhuman.

On Murray's assumption of duty, he directed his students to disregard European sensibilities in art in favour of a search for inspiration within their tradition. An act which could be interpreted in two ways; either as the coloniser protecting his field of interest or maybe Murray was also caught up in the wave of events which drove the avant-gardes to seek new forms of interest in African art. One of his students Ben Enwonwu (1917–1994) developed an interest in his tradition based on this nudging by Murray. Enwonwu later became acquainted with Senghor's négritude movement which had a profound effect on his works.³⁴³

The art produced with political connotations sought to address and provoke firm responses to problems causing apprehension within the society in the decision-making process at the time. Onabolu turned to portraiture as his tool for sensitising the people around him about the efforts of the early Pan-Africanists and for recording the salient points in history. He saw himself as a history painter. The conception of his subject matter was greatly inspired by the important and great personalities of his day, both Africans and Europeans.³⁴⁴ He was particularly inspired by those who had helped in the development of

³⁴¹ Ola Oloidi, 'Onabolu, Pioneer of Modern art in Nigeria: an introduction', in, *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, 2(1&2) Jan. 1997 - Dec. 1998, pp. 1-9, 2

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 3

³⁴³ Ogbechie, Sylvester Okwundu, *Ben Enwonwu: the making of an African Modernist*, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2008

³⁴⁴ Ola Oloidi, 'Onabolu, Pioneer of Modern art in Nigeria: an introduction', in, *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, 2(1&2) Jan. 1997, 5 & Odibo, Freeborn, 'Africanism' and the African Artist: The Responsorial Attitude of the Abayomi Barber Art School', in, *USO: Nigerian Journal of Art*, 4 (1&2) Jan 2002 – Dec 2005

African thought and cultural experiences. He therefore considered it a duty to situate them in the unforgettable memoirs of history through his portrait paintings.

One of such Portraits is his 1920 depiction of Chief Oguntola Odunbaku Sapara a medical doctor (9 June 1861 – June 1935) who was recognised for his campaign against the spread of smallpox and contributions to improving public health in Nigeria. He was a keen student and defender of traditional Yoruba culture, investing considerable time in scientific investigation of traditional herbal medicines and their effects. As an African medical doctor, Sapara faced great discrimination in the way that the colonial administration favoured less qualified European medical practitioners to the detriment of their better qualified African colleagues.

He vocalised his discontent with the discrimination meted against African professionals in colonial Africa. He registered his displeasure with European medical officers' disapproval of being ranked below African doctors of better qualification and the fact that African medical officers were paid less than their European colleagues. This situation was an inspiration for Aina Onabolu's quest for Western qualification in art even after he was an accomplished artist. He realised that without the certificate and endorsement from Britain, there was little room for his progression in his chosen career during the colonial era in Nigeria.

Perhaps, the most politically active Nigerian artist of the colonial era was Akinola Lasekan (1916-1974), who used his art for Nationalistic expressions, especially in his conception of political cartoons for caricaturing the colonial administration in Nigeria. He established cartooning as a vital force within the political struggle for Nigeria's liberation. His

newspaper cartooning aided the general pungent and radical mood of the agitation against colonial rule by the burgeoning Nigerian elite population of that era.

The newspapers projected the 'African Personality' for the educated audience that was able to digest academic essays.³⁴⁵ The cartoons were deployed in service of illiterate readers to aid their visualisation of what it meant to be African, postcards and other visual materials were produced to reanimate pre-colonial African.³⁴⁶ The role of the press, however, lay primarily in creating ties among elites and activists. His cartoons are provocative but simple, laced with symbolic connotations which are easily understood by the average reader.

In his single panel portrayal of the scramble for Africa by leading European and world powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 titled *Poor Africa* in the West African Pilot newspaper (see plate 28). He appropriately analyses within the context of the colonial era of its creation, a depiction of a symbolic carving of the African continent in the similitude of a thanksgiving turkey. He illustrates European nations busy carving their lot, while the former Soviet Union and America in their prominence wait at the side to divide Europe into their factions when Europe is done carting away the loot.

³⁴⁵ Gerits, 2015, 7

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

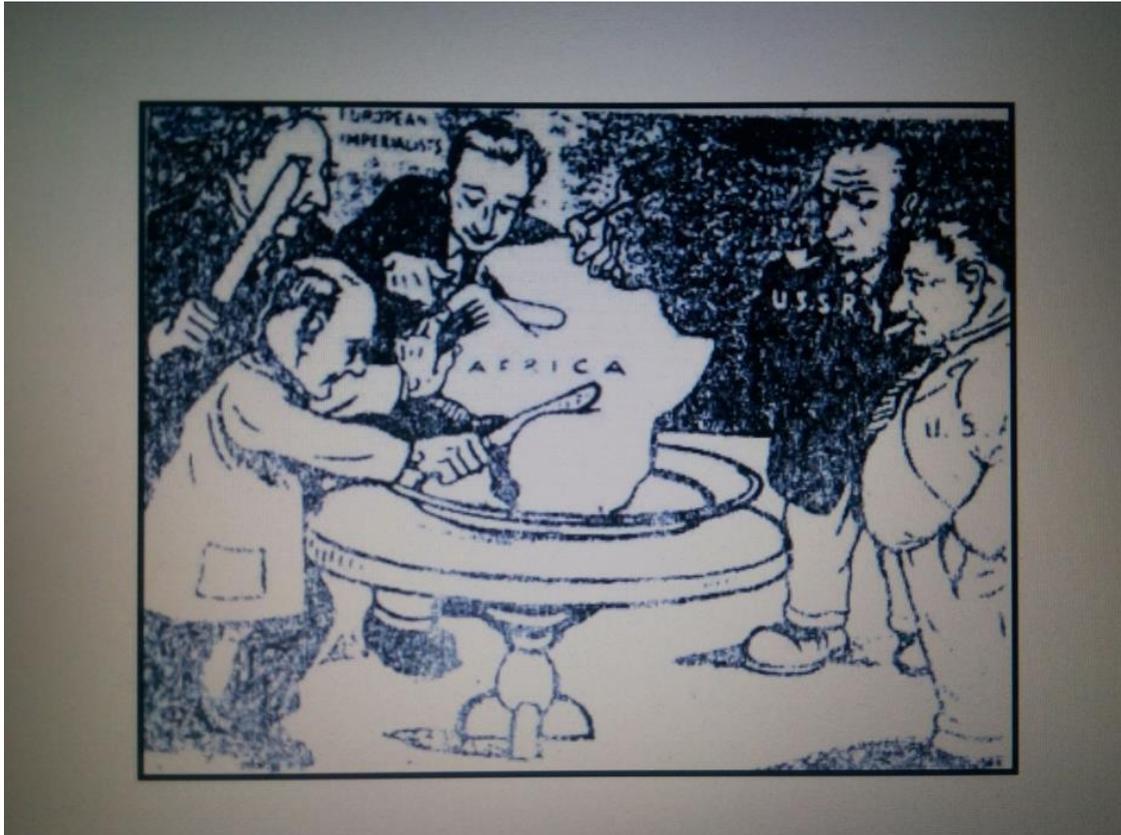


Plate 28

Title: *Poor Africa*

Artist: Akinola Lasekan

Medium: pen and ink

Size: unknown

Year: unknown

Source: West African Pilot Newspaper from Pre-Independence Nigeria.

Contemporary African and African-diaspora artists critically address the history of colonialism and conquest in their works through a carefully assembled collection of their material culture. Yinka Shonibare a British based artist of Nigerian descent whose works address a multiplicity of the influence that has shaped the outlook of African art, connects his art to the issues of colonialism and neo-colonialism. He illustrates how Europe still takes part in defining who or what is African and what Africa is. He is best known for his elaborate installations that hint at mostly European figures of the colonial era, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His characters are adorned in Dutch wax-print textiles, worn in many

African countries as a sort of traditional dressing, which he projects as a marker of the African identity.

The Netherlands origin of the wax-print materials alludes to Europe's continuous influence in authoring the concept of African identity through this fabric produced in Europe for the exclusive consumption of Africans. This, however, is to the detriment of the indigenously manufactured clothing materials. This transaction between the Netherlands and the African communities who have come to adopt this clothing material as part of their heritage and identity can be perceived from the notion of ideas and items used in negotiating the otherness of Africa by Europe.

It appears that these clothes have firstly been produced for capitalist intentions and secondly, as a marker to differentiate the former colonies from their colonisers in a fast-globalising world where cultures are continuously being melted together. This othering by colour is manifest in the exotic colourful attires of most post-colonial regions as evident in contemporary African, Caribbean, and Native American attires.

In what seems like a revisit of the partitioning of Africa in Lasekan's cartoon discussed above, Yinka Shonibare in a direct assault on the issue of colonialism recreates the *Scramble for Africa* by leading European and world powers. He portrays the carving up of the African continent, as formalised at the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 (see plate 29). His depiction of the event illustrates various statesmen clustered around a table with a large map of Africa, greedily carving their lot. The heads of states are depicted characteristically headless and equally mindless in their hunger for what the Belgian King Leopold II referred to as 'a slice of this magnificent cake'.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷ Yinka Shonibare Art, (Online) Available from: https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=yinka+shonibare+art&source=lnms&tbn=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjMincysHbAhUEfMAKHUaqCW0Q_AUICigB&biw=1301&bih=620#imgrc=W1dh4iPnklaKBM



Plate 29

Title: *Scramble for Africa*

Artist: Yinka Shonibare

Medium: An installation of 14 life-size fiberglass mannequins, 14 chairs, table, Dutch wax printed cotton

Size: unknown

Year: 2003

Location: Accessed from: The Pinnell Collection, Dallas.³⁴⁸

Another message carried in the material object of the Dutch-wax print that Shonibare stages in his installation is the ethical void and wide-ranging decadence of the 'European civilisation' whose ideology would give rise to the profound injustices of colonialism in Africa.³⁴⁹ Perhaps one of his contributions to the African popular culture is the use of wax print materials in the creation of contemporary style clothing worn particularly by West African youths.

³⁴⁸ Yinka Shonibare Art, (Online) Available from: <https://africa.si.edu/exhibits/shonibare/scramble.html>

³⁴⁹ Mesch, 2013

The analysis of these works reveals them as unambiguously focused on reappreciating the traditions of African societies. They pronounce an apprehension for the loss of indigenous culture in the flood of imported European values through colonisation, projecting African culture and world view. Through their works, these cultural commissars portray the myths, legends, beliefs, and customs in African societies to be reintroduced and engrained in the consciousness of the African people.

FESTAC 77 and the Authoring of African Art and 'Africaness'

The celebration of the 1966 first world festival of Black art in the capital of Senegal quickened the artistic life within the Black communities of the world.³⁵⁰ It established the national aesthetic of the Ecole de Dakar launching an alternative modernity for the West African artist. It also had its manifestations in Nigeria's *Second World Festival of Black Arts* popularly known as known as FESTAC '77 which was aimed at restoring the link between culture, creativity and mastery of modern technology and industrialism.³⁵¹

The Festival did not only have the participation of cultural activists from Africa and its diaspora, it also left its legacy behind in the institution of the Centre for Black Art and African Civilisation (CBAAC). A repository of all the memorabilia and proceedings from the colloquium of the event and the National Gallery of Art in Nigeria, which serves as the custodian of the visual artistic expressions from the festival. These institutions were established as reference points for the propagation of the Pan-Africanist tenets of the event.

³⁵⁰ Robert Ferris Thompson, 'Black art and culture: Outburst of creativity', in, Chimurenga (ed.), *FESTAC '77: The 2nd World Festival of Black Art and Culture. Nigeria. Lagos, Kaduna, 15th January -12 February 1977*, Cologne: Afterall, 2019

³⁵¹ Iwara, U. I. and Mveng, E. (Eds.) *Colloquium proceedings of the Second world Black and African festival of art and culture (Lagos, 15th January – 12th February 1977)*, Vol. I., Nigeria: Lagos: Federal Military Government of Nigeria, 1977, 7 & Thompson, 2019

The artist and philosopher Arthur Monroe quotes Lt. General Olusegun Obasanjo, the Nigerian Head of State at the time as declaring ‘we are attempting to recapture the origins and authenticity of the African heritage... children of the diaspora, Nigeria welcomes you all to one of your homelands here on the African soil...’³⁵² This statement at the opening ceremony's address of the festival denotes the profundity of the motivations behind the event. The festival highlighted the previously discountenanced offerings of Black folks to the world's cultural heritage in the international curating of a global exhibition.³⁵³

In art, Africa's journey into modernity follows three trajectories:

- The route into modernity by understudying the West to encourage the transfer of knowledge to Africa.
- The effectively home-grown route in defiance of Western standards of modernity.
- The artists who have been able to work in a blend of these above paths.

In Nigeria, the first category comprises of artists like Aina Onabolu, Akinola Lasekan, Ben Enwonwu, Abayomi Barber (b. 1928), Ben Osawe (1931–2007) and many others. The second involves artists like Uche Okeke (1933–2016), Demas Nwoko (b. 1935), and Bruce Onabrakpeya (b. 1932). The third category is manifested in the style and works of artists like Yussuf Grillo (b. 1934), Erhabor Emokpae (1934–1984), Jimoh Akolo (b. 1934) etc. Over the years, these courses have produced some novel expressions and are largely responsible for the direction that Nigerian art takes. In a lot of ways, people have successfully married the ideologies, even though they speak to Africa's modernity from disparate perspectives. Some

³⁵² Arthur Monroe, ‘FESTAC 77-The Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture: Lagos, Nigeria’, in, *The Black Scholar*, 9(1), BLACK LABOR, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1977, pp. 34-37, (Online) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41066961> [Accessed: 30 July 2018]

³⁵³ Denis Ekpo, 2007

artists whose works speak to the Pan-African ideals from the point of view of valorising the African past have also approached their modernity by a direct engagement of Western values in their creative expressions.



With the kind permission of the artist.

Plate 30

Title: *FESTAC 77*

Artist: Abayomi Barber

Medium: oil on Barber board

Size: 122cm x 244cm

Year: 1977

Location: In the collection of Mike Oodua, Victoria Island Lagos

In the portrayal of the magnificence of Africa's artistic and cultural splendour Barber aptly presents a painting titled *FESTAC 77* (see plate 30). In a surreal expression of the ideals of the FESTAC celebration, he brings to life some Yoruba deities in a creative reformation of their characters, deploying symbols as means of communicating information. He contrasts the warmth of the African sunset against the cool effect of the ocean. As the evening dawns, the gods emerge from the land and the sea in celebration of the rediscovered pride in the African culture. The Obalufon mask is depicted in the heavenly realms with glee and contentment which emanates from observing his descendants propagating his values.

Mother Africa is depicted in the lower left-hand corner of the composition watching as the children of Africa woke up to the revitalization of the African values with joy. The emergence of the spirits from the ocean also refers to the 'Black Atlantis'. This serves as a memorial to all the Africans who were killed in transit, while being transported across the Atlantic Ocean during the slave trade.

The festival was not only used to determine the expression of African art, it was also used in negotiating the scope of who the African was. During the years prior to the event, the planning degenerated into a contentious debate over the meanings and horizons of black cultural citizenship. The question of the African origin and identity of the lighter-skinned North Africans became a bone of contention. Lieutenant General Olusegun Obasanjo, the military Head of State of Nigeria (patron of the event) supported the full participation of North Africans. Léopold Sédar Senghor the president of Senegal (co-patron of the event) on the other hand maintained that the North Africans should simply be allowed to observe the activities of the colloquium.

Identified with its accent on 'Black Power and Black identity', this period coincided with the peak of the 'back to the root' campaign by some Black movements.³⁵⁴ However, by the late 1960s most African countries had realised the unsustainability of the primitive route to modernity. This caused a 180 degrees turnaround from the perceived primitivist ideology embedded in the *négritude* philosophy, as these nations thought that it would be better to embrace a forward-facing ideology rather than a backward-looking one.

According to Apter, the disregard of the *négritude* philosophy and all its offerings at the Pan-African Cultural Festival hosted by Algeria from 21 July to 1 August 1969, positioned

³⁵⁴ Ademuleya, & Fajuyigbe, 2015, 24

the North Africans in a rather suspicious light to Senghor and the adherents of his idea of négritude. He argues that the situation degenerated to an ideological fracas between Senghor and Obasanjo over the Arab question in the composition of the 1977 FESTAC celebration. He analyses that Senghor had interpreted the censoring of the négritude philosophy at the Pan-African festivals in Algiers 1969 as a sign of the North Africans' unwillingness to associate with the history and culture of Sub-Saharan Africa, as their fraternisation was more with the nations of the Middle East. This position was however negated by majority of the African leaders headed by Obasanjo who were negotiating for a more inclusive Africa.

The disapproval of Senegal's position was supported by the countries within the North African linguistic and cultural channel into much of Sub-Saharan Africa.³⁵⁵ By this point however, there seem to be some apprehensions among African states about the viability of the négritude philosophy's capability to facilitate Africa's modernity by going back to the past instead of looking forward. It appears that most Africans were dissatisfied with the results of the négritude philosophy like they eventually went against Nkrumah. There arose great suspicion about the plans of their former colonisers and their puppet that had been left in power after independence.³⁵⁶

However, Senghor states that the main reason for the symposium at FESTAC 77 was the failure of the Algiers symposium. He maintains that the African Cultural Society, which was the organiser of the pre-symposium had admitted that the failure was not due to the Algerians nor the Berber brothers. It was rather due to the black Africans who had sent more politicians than men of culture to attend the festival. 'Indeed, the negro-Africans who were

³⁵⁵ Apter, 2016, 315

³⁵⁶ Gerits, 2015, 11

busy lashing out, not against a particular concept but against a particular word, stuck at the heart of the matter: Negro-African civilisation.’³⁵⁷

These reactions against the *négritude* philosophy in Algeria may have not necessarily been expressed to undermine the politics of the assertion of Black pride. It was organised in solidarity with the Black Panther movement of the African Americans and Palestinian refugees, demonstrating their common ordeals with subjugation and prejudice. The Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers 1969 constructed a united, progressive, and revolutionary image of the Black culture in its shared struggle against Euro-American racism and imperialism.

The last recorded attempt at a Pan-African festival was the Festival of Black Arts, also tagged FESMAN held from 10th to 31st December 2010 (thirty-three years after FESTAC 77) in Senegal, the host country of the first event. It was funded to the tune of around £52m by the African Union, the government of Brazil (the festival’s guest of honour) and several corporate bodies. It bordered around the theme ‘African Renaissance’, re-echoing Africa’s and its diaspora’s need to reconceptualise Africa.

The contention over North Africa in FESTAC 77 demonstrates the political negotiations involved in the authentication of Black cultural citizenship as revealed in the genealogy of these postcolonial Pan-African festivals.³⁵⁸ Through its various forms of articulation, the *négritude* movement indicated an emergence of race consciousness for Blacks in Africa and the African Diaspora. Its healthy primitivism of Black awareness conflicting with the

³⁵⁷ Leoplod Sedar Senghor, *West Africa*, 7 June 1976, [Qtd.] in, ‘The task before Festival Colloquium,’ in, Chimurenga (ed.), *FESTAC ’77: The 2nd World Festival of Black Art and Culture. Nigeria. Lagos, Kaduna, 15th January -12 February 1977*, Cologne: Afterall, 2019

³⁵⁸ Apter, 2016, 315

programmed desolation of White civilization; the essential oneness of Black identity and the sense of rhythm at its base, locating Africa as the original source of authenticity.³⁵⁹ With this new race consciousness, rooted in a rediscovery of the authentic self, Black people all around the globe initiated their denunciation of Western domination, anti-black racism, enslavement, and colonisation in unison.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁹ Philipson, 2006, 155

³⁶⁰ Bertrade Ngo-Ngijol Banoum, 'Négritude in AFRICANA AGE; African & African diaspora transformation in the 20th century: Schomburg Center for research in Black Culture', 2011

Chapter Four: Négritude, a performative Pan-African expression

Introduction

The widely accepted definition of the nature of Black people's global experience originates in the casting of slavery as the commencement of the history of Black folks in America. An act which brought about anti-slavery and subjugation agitations in the African Americans, thereby escalating to the response of the Blacks to similar conditions globally. This type of organised resistance had its initial manifestation in the successful revolution under Toussaint Louverture (1743–1803, Haiti) resulting in the establishment of Haiti as the first Black republic.³⁶¹

The subjection of Africans around the globe to various degrees of oppression, discrimination, and apartheid, initiated by the practice of the Transatlantic slavery and later the scramble for the continent which instituted colonialism on all Africans, came with grave consequences. These repercussions include the devastation of African values in religious convictions, philosophies, languages, and other cultural practices. It also resulted in the provocation of the African consciousness, which as a reactionary effect was organised as resistance to racial segregation. This act was fuelled by the rise of various ideological and political Pan-African and nationalist movements in defence of the label of the African/Blacks as inferior, primitive, backward and savage. Africa was forced to carry out an inward evaluation for the negotiation of a more appropriate global stance.³⁶²

³⁶¹ Irele, Abiola, 'Negritude or Black Cultural Nationalism', in, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 3(3), 1965, pp. 321-48

³⁶² Babasehinde Augustine Ademuleya, & Michael Olusegun Fajuyigbe, 'Pan-Africanism and the Black Festivals of Arts and Culture: Today's Realities and Expectations', *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 20 (3), 2015, pp. 22-28, 23

Within Africa's struggle for autonomy from colonial hegemony and Eurocentric values, a modern African identity was being shaped as a response to traditional African values and the continent's engagement with colonialism. Perhaps the most prominent movement of the colonial agitation between the 1920s and the 1960s when most African countries gained their independence from their formal colonisers was the *négritude* movement.

The *négritude* movement as a philosophy is a principal Pan-African ideology in its ideation of the assertion of the African pride. The political engineering of the movement was activated by Black students studying in France around the early 1920s as a revolt against the French colonial assimilation policy.³⁶³ Enwezor and Zaya describe *négritude* as the leading identity theory of the era and of the founding movement of African Modernism, which held that what is essentially African is to be found in the continent's pre-colonial traditions.

Therefore, the 'authentically African' attributes on the continent and among the millions of African dispersed worldwide must be re-esteemed and rebuilt.³⁶⁴ Its conceptual reference is hinged on the negro's 'being' in its sociocultural, spiritual, psychological, and physical characteristics. Even though it is not a racist idea, it is however based on racial consciousness, with political emancipation as an objective.³⁶⁵ It was therefore a movement of identification and promotion, which was at once backward-looking and forward-looking.³⁶⁶

³⁶³ Alexandra A. Onwumere and Florence Egbulonu, "The influence of Negritude movement on modern African literature and writers: A study of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*", *An African journal of new writing*, 51, July 2014, pp. 148-167

³⁶⁴ Okwui Enwezor, & Octavio Zaya, 'Négritude, pan-Africanism, and postcolonial African identity; African portrait photography', in, Elaine O'Brien et.al. (Eds.), *Modern art in African, Asian, and Latin America: an introduction to global modernisms*, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2013, pp. 49-57

³⁶⁵ Onwumere, & Egbulonu, 2014, 154

³⁶⁶ Leopold Sedar Senghor, 'The task before Festival Colloquium,', in, Chimurenga (ed.), *FESTAC '77: The 2nd World Festival of Black Art and Culture. Nigeria. Lagos, Kaduna, 15th January -12 February 1977*, Cologne: Afterall, 2019

The movement was instituted by the triad of Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal (1906–2001), Aimé Césaire of Martinique (1913–2008) and Léon-Gontran Damas of Guyana (1912–1978). Its postulation was based on the integrated freedom of all of Africa. Its appellation of *négritude* was fabricated by Césaire out of the disparaging French word, *nègre* and defined to connote ‘Blackness’ by the trio.³⁶⁷ In its veritable sense it is a concept that is rooted in the specificity and unity of black people as historically derived from the Transatlantic Slave Trade and their plight in the New World plantation system. The movement was animated by the collective sense of suffering by these men. ‘Ideologically, it is the simple recognition of the fact that one is Black, the acceptance of this fact and of our destiny as Blacks, of our history and culture.’³⁶⁸

The *négritude* movement was established to create an identity which honours the struggle of all those people who became disenfranchised under colonialism, and who continue to endure this subjugation under the prevailing neo-colonial conditions.³⁶⁹ This is owing to the age-long construction of the idea of being Black as a signifier of a derogatory racial and cultural distinction. A situation which the *négritude* philosophy seeks to appropriate in a positive redefinition of Africanity, by suppressing Eurocentric definitions of Africa through concerted efforts of racial affirmation. Consequently, Black intellectuals converged around issues of race identity and black internationalist initiatives to combat European imperialism, starting with France.

Onwumere and Egbulonu, characteristically define *négritude* as both a movement and an ideology. As a movement, they position its roots deeply in Pan-African congresses,

³⁶⁷ Onwumere, & Egbulonu, 2014, 154

³⁶⁸ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et malgache de langu francaise*. [Qtd.] in, Irele, Abiola ‘*Négritude or Black Cultural Nationalism*’, 1965

³⁶⁹ Irele, 1965

exhibitions, organisations and publications produced to challenge the theory of racial hierarchy and Black inferiority developed by the philosophers such as Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831, Germany) and Joseph de Gobineau (1816-1882, France/Italy). As an ideology, they locate it as a defining milestone in the rehabilitation of Africa and African diasporic identity and dignity.³⁷⁰

Since the movement provides a unifying, fighting, and liberating instrument for Black Francophone students in the first half of the twentieth century in search of their identity, Onwumere and Egbulonu, examine it as an expression of a new humanism which positions Blacks within a global community of equals. Despite the grave challenges and criticisms that the movement had to sail through, it has remained relevant because of its significant role and influence in the development of African literature and art.³⁷¹

Araeen however, perceives it as having a tendency to be contemplated as formulating way beyond rescuing the movement's ideas (rhythm, harmony, cohesion, symbiosis, etc.) from its racial context to legitimise its universal significance.³⁷² In objectifying this idea, Irele further scrutinises the movement as not just the philosophical idea of a Black essence, which appears not only abstract but quite untenable. He argues that Senghor himself has moved far away from this point of view. He rather finds it to be a historical phenomenon, a social and cultural movement closely related to African nationalism. Irele acknowledges it as an important historical phenomenon, that still requires examination for a full appreciation of its significance.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Onwumere & Egbulonu, 2014, 156

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Rasheed Araeen, 'Why 'Beyond' négritude?', *Third Text*, 24(2), 2010, pp. 167-176, 168

³⁷³ Irele, 1965, 322

This chapter positions the *négritude* philosophy as a major catalyst in Pan-African activism for the attainment of independence in Africa and its diaspora. It locates Léopold Sédar Senghor in the centre of the narrative, because of the centrality of the role that his version of the movement played in the idealisation of African post-colonial nationalism. The chapter narrates the process through which the movement politically legitimised the mystification of the African past and its essential contrarities to a colonially ordered modernity with the aim of positioning it as a tool for Africa's modernisation process.

The arguments are located within the purview of writers like Abiola Irele, Alexandra Onwumere and Florence Egbulonu, Rasheed Araeen, and Denis Ekpo whose works express a grounded understanding of the deployment of the ideals of *négritude* as intended by its founding members and its reinvention for cultural nationalism over the years. Ekpo positions the notion of cultural nationalism as capturing the whole gamut of ideas and anxieties, from the Negro Renaissance movement in America to and Pan-Africanism, through which Black master-thinkers consistently sought to redeem the Black race from the civilizational nonentity where Europe had it dumped since Hegel.³⁷⁴

The terms Black and African are used interchangeably throughout this chapter to represent the Black and all African diasporic nationalities. Ademuleya and Fajuyigbe illustrate Africa as comprising of three categories of peoples. First, the people residents within the continent of Africa, from Cape to Cairo, Senegal to Somalia, including Madagascar and the islands. The second category of Africans they describe as those forcefully migrated through slavery, with reference to the migration through the Middle Passage. Hence the name Diaspora or Black/African descents. These group can be found all over the Americas, the

³⁷⁴ Denis Ekpo, 'Culture and modernity Since Festac 77', 2007

Caribbean Island, Cuba, Europe, and Jamaica, being addressed by Afro/Negro appellation in their present place of abode. The third set they define as those who willingly migrated out of Africa, as the explorers for economic, academic, and other reasons.³⁷⁵

The Institutors of the Négritude Movement

By 1931, Césaire, Senghor, and Damas had instigated a collective study of their multifaceted cultural identities expressing their being as Black, African, Antillean, and French. They inaugurated the pioneering journal *L'Étudiant noir* (The Black Student) in 1934, as an attack on nationalistic barriers imposed on Black students in France. Deployed as a tool for synthesising their various enunciations of the movement, the publications became greatly significant for the movement's political and cultural articulations. Despite the agreement of the triumvirate on the movement's Pan-Africanist assignation for the affirmation of their Blackness through literary and artistic expression, their strategies and styles, however, revealed their differences.³⁷⁶

Due to Senghor's activities, the ideology developed into an organised movement, as it initiated the development of a new orientation in ideas around 1960, which signalled a critical moment in the relationship between the West and African peoples. This activated the return of majority of négritude's advocates to their new countries.³⁷⁷

Senghor like Césaire and Damas promotes the idea of a quest for the authentic self, knowledge of self, and a rediscovery of African beliefs, values, institutions, and civilizations. He however advocates for a form of assimilation that allows association, a 'cultural métissage' of blackness and whiteness, thereby standing at variance with Césaire and Damas who

³⁷⁵ Ademuleya, & Fajuyigbe, 2015, 22

³⁷⁶ Bertrade Ngo-Ngijol Banoum, 'Négritude in Africana Age; African & African Diaspora Transformation in the 20th Century', Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, 2011

³⁷⁷ Irele, 1965, 347

vehemently disapprove of assimilation.³⁷⁸ Through his distinct ideology of the African soul, intuition, irrationalism, and crossbreeding he purposed to rehabilitate Africa and establish his theory of black humanism. This theory which was largely influenced by Leo Frobenius' idealistic allure to Negerheit, was fashioned for their own anti-colonial purposes.³⁷⁹

The historian Suzanne Marchand positions Frobenius' work as a significant tool in négritude's assault, as a critique of the value placed on African lives by the West and in crafting the methodological weapons that helped to destroy Eurocentric historiographies.³⁸⁰ It was based on this that Senghor was able to envision the idea of Western reason and the soul of the Black folks as instruments of research to fashion 'une Civilisation de l'Universel, une Civilisation de l'Unité par symbiose' (a Civilization of the Universal, a Civilization of Unity by Symbiosis).³⁸¹

It can be deduced that Senghor's ideology highlights a new race consciousness which establishes a give-and-take situation between Black and White cultural backgrounds. A situation where African input can also be beneficial in solving some problems that have challenged the West, as a symbiotic relationship will be mutually beneficial to both sides. He must have thought that this idea would lay the foundation for challenging enslavement and colonisation of Blacks.

Senghor's poems portray an intermingling of his childhood cultural memories of his ancestral lands, with anti-colonialist rage which is palliated by his request for reconciliation and God's forgiveness of France's role in mortifying Africans through enslavement and

³⁷⁸ Onwumere & Egbulonu, 2014

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Suzanne Marchand, 'Leo Frobenius and the Revolt against the West', in, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 32 (2), Apr. 1997, 153

³⁸¹ Banoum, 2011

colonisation. His impact on the scene is of great significance in inspiring the contributions of African intellectuals in the fields of literature, poetry, and the arts. Through his expression of the movement, he pursued the rejuvenation of the erstwhile disempowered races and cultures of Africa purposing the establishment of symbiotic relations among the races and cultures of the world.³⁸² Senghor's efforts represent Africa's first discourse of its modernity-consciousness based on its attempt to recover and integrate native African world views into the modernity heritage through poetry.³⁸³

Among the three of them, Damas recorded the initial success in publishing his book of poems titled *Pigments* in 1937. The book avidly castigates racial division, slavery, and colonialist assimilation in its style and overtone, while defining the course of action for the movement. It is occasionally discussed as the manifesto of the movement due to its accentuation of the necessity of purifying Africa of the ills of Western society.³⁸⁴

Damas asserts his *négritude* as a resistance to colonialism and European hegemony from his position as a Black man who is Guyanese and as a categorical rejection of the French concept of assimilation which negated the ability of the Black folks to produce novelties. This is expressly enunciated in his poem titled 'Limbe'. Here he decries the idea of becoming French as demanding from Africans their loss, repression, and rejection of self as well as adoption of a civilization that robs indigenous cultures, values, and beliefs of the African.³⁸⁵

His works are characterised by a fusion of rebellion, torment, the repudiation of the intellectual obliteration of the negro, the avowal of Black and African values and self-esteem. His expressions adapt stimuli from modules of African oral traditions, Caribbean calypso,

³⁸² Araeen, 2010b., 171

³⁸³ Denis Ekpo, 2007

³⁸⁴ Banoum, 2011

³⁸⁵ Ibid.

Harlem Renaissance poetry, rhythms and tunes of Afro-American blues and jazz, as well as French Surrealist ideas. He produced other works such as *Retour de Guyane* (1938), *Poèmes nègres sur des airs africains* (1948), *Graffiti* (1952), *Black-Label* (1956), *Névralgies* (1965), and *Veillées noires* (1943).³⁸⁶

Césaire articulates his *négritude* for the galvanization of the rejection of the French colonial system of assimilation and the reclaim of African racial heritage and qualities in response to the centuries-old hostility against Blacks. His *négritude* takes the form of a rebellion, and the acknowledgement of his answerability for the fate of his race. Césaire calls for the exposition of the explicitness of the Blacks to the world through the articulation of their experiences by Black cultural workers, to revalidate the Black folk's history and achievements. He assessed these actions as being capable of restoring Africa's lost humanity, dignity, integrity, and the subjectivity of Black identity: a required condition for antagonising colonialism, racism, and Western imperialism by Africans.³⁸⁷

The Evolution of the *Négritude* Movement

The colonial era left its prints of cultural fluctuations which as expected produced nationalist provocations all over Africa, bringing with it a drastic re-ordering of African societies in the way each region in Africa related with the other. Consequently, crisis erupted within African communities, due to the introduction of this type of domination and its implications. This resulted in the replacement of social organisation and individual life with new standards, which were often in discord with traditional ways.

³⁸⁶ Banoum, 2011

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

The Negro Renaissance in the USA is absolutely significant in the evolution of the movement, as writings of American Negroes like Langston Hughes (1902–1967), Claude McKay (1889–1948, Jamaica/USA), and Countee Cullen (1903–1946, USA) travelled in France, giving their writings the opportunity to inspire commentary by Black intellectuals in France and the Caribbean.³⁸⁸ The *négritude* movement was also animated by W.E.B. Du Bois' Pan-African Congress, which was facilitated in liaison with Blaise Diagne (1872–1934), an influential Senegalese deputy in Paris in 1919.³⁸⁹ After which, Sengor put together the first lyrical verbalism of the crusade in his *Anthologie de la nouvelle poesie negre et malgache de langue franfaise*, in 1948, expounding on the concept in the introduction. However, the consecration of the term on the movement was activated by Jean-Paul Sartre's contribution to the publication in the essay entitled 'Black Orpheus'.³⁹⁰

The Second Congress with the theme 'The Responsibility of the Intelligentsia' was characterised by a greater political attitude addressing the colonial situation. This was captured in Césaire's position, as he called for the fast-tracking of the process of decolonisation, by employing whatever was required to accelerate the development of a general consciousness.³⁹¹ Its initial outcome was the attainment of independence by Ghana as the first African nation to become independent after the Second World War. This engendered other nations in Africa and its diaspora to situate the end of colonialism at the top of their agenda.

³⁸⁸ Onwumere & Egbulonu, 2014

³⁸⁹ Irele, 1965, 335

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 346

³⁹¹ Aimé Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to Native Land, 1947*, [Trans]. Clayton Eshlemeg & Annette Smith (Eds.) USA: Wesleyan University press, 2001

In many African countries, the nationalist urge continuously reverberates long after independence. It produces a type of cultural nationalism connected to feelings of common racial and cultural heritage which is articulated as a distinctive part of their liberation movement. To understand certain aspects of African nationalism and of its carry-overs. It is important to consider the fact that colonial rule was not only a political and economic affair, but that it also imposed a specific social framework for the African's experience of the world and of himself. Racial and cultural differences were persistently emphasised by the conditions of political domination in the relationship between Africans and Europeans across the continent.³⁹² Colonial rule in Africa can therefore be perceived as a distressing experience with inevitable consequences to the colonised.

One can locate the origins of the *négritude* philosophy as a symbiotic amalgamation of both African and Western values to the adaptation of the negro's disposition and construal of the religion of the slave master to the expression of the negro spirituals. This act signifies the earliest examples of the black folk's indirect defence against the conditions of subjugation by the white folks through an art form. A process that can be perceived as a direct ancestor of the *négritude* poems.

The Africanist literary scholar Abiola Irele draws an analogy between the history of the Jews of the Old Testament Bible and that of the Black enslaved people in spirituals like 'Go Down, Moses', which gave the enslaved Blacks feelings of exile, an appropriate and socially acceptable expression.³⁹³ Many of the Pan-African movements developed against this background, as these elements of subjugation and segregation consequently instigated definite structured expressions of the negro's demand for independence.

³⁹² Irele, 1965, 321

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 327

The demand for independence by Blacks produced differing expression from place to place. The anti-slavery tradition in Cuba sited Blacks in prime position of Cuban literary concerns, a position that was supported by writings geared towards the Cuban independence struggle. The assertion of the Afro-Cuban sub-culture as a fundamental part of the idiosyncratic national heritage of Cuba, was produced by the philosophical position of the Cuban revolutionaries against slavery, in reaction against Spain. This instigated the rise of the Afro-Cuban school, or *negrismo* in the years 1920-40s. In Brazil however, *negrismo* was analysed by its primitivism as it was basically an affair of white writers, depicting Black folks as a mere stereotype producing disapproving expressions of themselves and their African origins in their poetry,³⁹⁴ like the primitive and the 'authentic naïve' in modern African art.

These ideas produced certain notions which acted as guidelines for their engagement of *négritude*, with the colonial barriers. These have been articulated by Onwumere and Egbulonu as follows:

First, the mystic warmth of African life, gaining strength from its closeness to nature and its constant contact with ancestors, should be constantly placed in proper perspective against the materialism of Western culture. Second, Africans must look to their own cultural heritage to determine the values and traditions that are most useful in the modern world. Third, committed writers and artists should use African subject matter and poetic traditions and should excite a desire for political freedom. Fourth, itself encompasses the whole of African cultural, economic, social, and political values. Fifth, the values and dignity of African traditions and peoples must be asserted.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁴ Irele, 1965, 331

³⁹⁵ Onwumere & Egbulonu, 2014, 152

Another major influence on the movement was the development of the Marxist concept which was deployed by Black intellectuals probing social analysis applicable to the colonial and 'para-colonial' situation. Their research revealed the adoption of 'the principle of contradiction, alienation, and the class struggle in the Marxist concepts which they found in tandem with their struggles. Their fraternisation with Marxism produced their promotion of anti-imperialism as an important part of the Marxist ideology, furthermore, their attraction to Marxism's revolutionary character and its idealisation sustained the writing of numerous négritudist poets. As it professed the immediate decolonisation and dis-alienation of the colonised people as soon as the capitalist system was ousted, and rights to the mechanisms of production were transferred to the workers.³⁹⁶ This they hoped, would permit their recovery of the ownership of their material wealth and the autonomy to promote the values of their civilisation and their independence.

A prime stimulus of the philosophy was the Harlem Renaissance movement, which occurred as a blossoming literary and artistic group of Black thinkers and artists, especially poets and novelists in the United States, city of New York in 1920s. The movement involves some literati who fled to France to escape racism and segregation in the United States. These include writers and poets like Claude McKay, James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938), Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright (1908–1960). Senghor took a cue from McKay's *Banjo* for the determination of his own version of négritude. It was McKay's belief that a writer should deal with important political subjects, as he illustrated his ideas and abhorrence of institutionalised racism in his novel, *Banjo*.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Irele, 1965, 341

³⁹⁷ Onwumere & Egbulonu, 2014, 149

The Harlem Renaissance' proclamation of a Black identity which eclipsed White labels of African, Negro, West Indian, conferred upon it a position of respectability within the Black community. Although it was American, it objectified the capacity of a diasporic consciousness which was contained in Black identity and that would later pose a historic encounter to the leading standards of national identity, colonial centres, and literary traditions defined by the languages of the west, as it became a cultural movement of significant Black autonomy.³⁹⁸

The years prior to World War II saw the further dedication of literature emanating from the philosophy to political causes, as it acquired great motivation during the French Resistance. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980, France) came up with the concept of literature analysing the association of the writer to society after the war, in an era dominated by the works of literary figures such as Paul Eluard (1895–1952, France), and Jacques Prevert (1900–1977, France). Their prominence inevitably influenced the Black writers in Paris, especially Sartre, who was the first European apostle of *négritude*, as the literature of *négritude* reflects the prevailing atmosphere in France of that era. The cast of both Black and White writers of the period were introduced to the discovery of their sacrificial situatedness within the society. This consciousness of sacrifice appears to have developed around two opposite poles: the poles of collective consciousness for the Blacks, and of individual consciousness for the Whites.³⁹⁹

The contributions of the early Pan-Africanist cannot be overlooked in analysing *négritude*'s sentiment of alienation. Chief among these characters was W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, an outstanding figure in Black intellectual life in the USA during this period. His seminal

³⁹⁸ Robert Philipson, 'The Harlem Renaissance as Postcolonial Phenomenon', *African American Review*, 40(1), Spring, 2006, pp. 145-160, 159

³⁹⁹ Irele, 1965, 341

pioneering analysis of the ambiguous social position of the Black folks in the USA brought clarity to the early Pan-Africanists and therefore aided the fashioning of their defensive stance against the issue. Du Bois analyses the state of ambiguity of the existence of the Black folks in America, a situation where he exists in his state of 'two-ness'. 'An American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals, in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.'⁴⁰⁰

Based on these sentiments of alienation, Du Bois embarked on a rigorous investigation to connect the Black folk's African heritage to the distinctive aspects of Black life and history in the USA. Du Bois' ideals produced a sense of pride in the race and origins for the African-Americans. It aroused emotions for the expression of total racial solidarity constructed not only on a communal social experience, but also on a shared spiritual feeling and the development of a cultural, social, and political African identity.

The strength of the counter-offensive of the Black folks in their quest for equity and justice was animated by the re-evaluation of the image of the Blacks in modern anthropology. Western ethnography acquired a more considerate view of non-western cultures due to the evolution of the idea of 'cultural relativity' resulting from a more impartial and methodical approach of study. Of great significance to this reassessment was the work of Leo Frobenius in his attempt to acknowledge the Black race as a part in ancient Egyptian civilization and position the Black race as one with a capacity for evolving more than rudimentary cultural institutions. Frobenius brought to European consciousness the shift of focus from the familiar ethnological discussions to European understanding of the geographies and cultural historiographies of the rest of the world. From the inception, Frobenius was persuaded of a

⁴⁰⁰ W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 1930

central point of creation of most of humanity's significant innovations before spreading to neighbouring regions, being reconstructed along the way.⁴⁰¹ His writings and that of several French ethnographers gave credence to the arguments of the writers contending against the grave undervaluation of the African cultures and the Black African's worth.

This re-evaluation has produced a ternary effect on the projection of Pan-African ideals at the time. The situation gave an important booster to the Black African's self-esteem. It provided scientific arguments for the intellectuals to undermine the ideology of Europe's civilising mission, which was one of the principal justifications for colonial rule. It also promoted a new appreciation of African culture in the West.⁴⁰² This is recorded in the West's search for new directions in art and thought, through the appropriation of none-Western forms, particularly in African sculpture.

The Performative Translation of the Movement and Ideology

The analysis of the performative translation of the philosophy reveals the conceptual core of *négritude's* engagement with politics and art in its acts of cultural nationalism as Senghor's philosophical reflections on the Black soul, African emotion and the recognition of Africa's contributions to the world. For Senghor, culture is the most pertinent basis and the aim of politics, as he finds that both respond to one another.⁴⁰³ However, the most dynamic theoretical negotiations of the philosophy and its most fundamental Afrocentric ideologies such as unconditional race pride were derived from Césaire rather than Senghor. Césaire's writings evince his vehement rejection of the French colonial assimilation ideology.

⁴⁰¹ Marchand, 1997, 158

⁴⁰² Ademuleya, & Fajuyigbe, 2015, pp. 22-28

⁴⁰³ Léopold Sédar Senghor, *On African Socialism*, New York and London: Praeger, 1964

Ekpo alternatively positions *négritude* as a coalescence of Senghor's most performative views on politics, culture, and modernity. A philosophy directed at Africa's modernisation, centred first in a self-reassuring re-description of Africa and Africans. Second, in a politics of friendship and collaboration with the European holders of modernity's powers and skills. This position he notes is common to several progressives in Africa including Kwameh Nkrumah of Ghana who sought to regain the former glory of African societies by reforming political traditions as the basis of an indigenous path to modernisation.⁴⁰⁴

Ekpo locates the ideals of cultural nationalism within the antithetical domain to Senghor's call for Africa's modernism, even though its motivation is often connected to Senghor. He illustrates cultural nationalism as merely pirating specific ideas appearing to resonate with a reactionary anti-modern escape into the past as well as anti-Europe antipathies from Senghor's repertoire.⁴⁰⁵

Indicators of the Négritude Movement in African art

The reinvention and appropriating of African traditional arts and culture by Africans has nevertheless created a dominant thought of African art which automatically positions the discourse of African art within the purview of the tribal arts, establishing the characterisation of modern African art as tribal and primitive.⁴⁰⁶ African art in history has often been said to belong to the realm of the past and therefore has been labelled as part of static indigenous traditions. In the context of West Africa, modern art is usually analysed through the lenses of the Independence decade and the urgency to decolonise the mind.⁴⁰⁷ This historical approach

⁴⁰⁴ Ekpo, 2010, 178

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Partha Mitter, 'Decentring Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the periphery', *The art bulletin*, 90(4), 2008, pp. 531 – 548, 532

⁴⁰⁷ Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, Duke University Press, 2015

situates négritude as providing a national alternative, as African artists sought to integrate the philosophy into their artistic language.

Négritude in its emphasis as the assertion of self-worth and identity, a return to original cultural roots and a correction of misconceived ideas about the Black continent and Black people, is principally geared towards changing the negative images or misrepresentations of Africa. It tasks African artists involved in cultural explorations to focus on the representation of Africa as active, in an African milieu where the setting is indigenous and culture-specific and the refutation of western stereotypes of Africa and Africans.⁴⁰⁸

The London based artist and curator Rasheed Araeen scrutinises négritude's modernism from the perspective which implies a revaluation of the world's structure, and the terms with which all comers are engaged in the discourse of global modernism. He contends that within the colonised world, modernity's colonial imposition was accepted with some degree of suspicion and was therefore deployed in art to contest the readdress of the dominant notion of modernism.⁴⁰⁹ The cultural and literary thoughts of négritude and Pan-Africanism, became major stimuli on postcolonial creative modernism. This brought about the connecting of the political and cultural ideologies with the ideals of Pan-Africanism to form the guiding light for the works of numerous Nigerian and African artists who rejected the adaptationist ideas of colonial era's indirect rule educational policies. Contrary to how Senghor's has been espoused, for Senghor, liberation from colonialism did not mean a return to pre-colonial structures but a redefinition of modernity, and a Third World claim to its own

⁴⁰⁸ Onwumere, & Egbulonu, 2014, pp. 148-167

⁴⁰⁹ Rasheed Araeen, 'A new beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics', *Third Text*, 14 (50), 2000, pp. 3-20, 6

modernising and progressive ideas, as modernity must not remain confined or trapped in the European body.⁴¹⁰

One of the ways he purposed to do this was by identifying and highlighting some of Africa's high traditional cultures as stimuli for the renegotiation of Africa's quest into modernity. Among others the Ife culture was identified, because of the finesse of its qualities and its suitability for deployment as a case against the West's insinuations of Africa's inability to create fine art. To also make a case against the positioning of Africa by Europe in the crude and naïve, judging all African art without understanding the context within which they had been created.

On his visit to the University of Lagos, Nigeria in 1973, he specifically requested the commissioning of a replica of the *Ori Olokun*. Thus, the University management commissioned Abayomi Barber to reproduce a copy of the *Ori Olokun* for Senghor and another one for the university's collection. This was presented to Senghor as a gift by General Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's head of state from 1966 to 1975. Subsequently, this image has been deployed by Senghor in the expression of his idea of *négritude* in books, and even on the walls of institutions within Senegal (see plates 31, 32 & 33).

This led Barber to conduct further studies on the theme which produced the full-figured sculpture of the 'Olokun' which he titled *Yemonja* in the National Gallery of Art's collection (discussed in chapter two). The choice of this piece as a gift to President Senghor and its various reinterpretations on the walls of institutions as far as Senegal can be linked to Africa's craving for perfection. The archaeological finds from the ancient Ife civilisation are proof positive of a sub-Saharan tradition which sought perfection in the rendition of their

⁴¹⁰ Okeke-Agulu, 2015, 18

artistic expressions long before Africa's contact with Europe. This has led researchers to postulate a direct link between the Ife and indeed the Yoruba speaking people of West Africa and ancient Egypt.



Above left
Plate 31
Title: *Ori Olokun*, from the Ife art tradition.
Medium: Brass
Date: 1200 - 1400 A.D.
Location: Ife National Museum, Ile-Ife, Osun state Nigeria.



Above right
Plate 32
Title: *Ori Olokun* (With kind permission of the University of Lagos Museum)
Artist: Abayomi Barber
Medium: Plaster of Paris
Height 46cm
Year: 1973
Location: The University of Lagos Museum

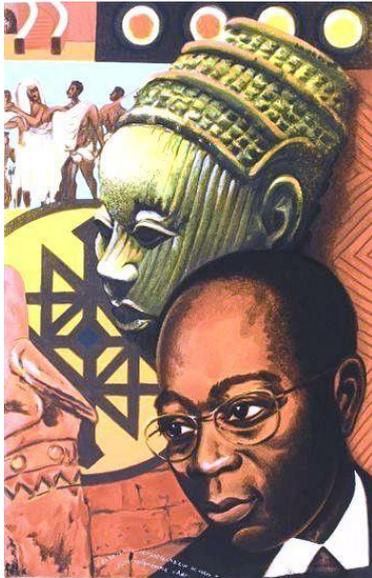


Plate 33

Title: POEMS, Leopold Sedar (Lois Mailou JONES) SENGHOR

Artist: unknown

Medium: Book cover⁴¹¹

Size: unknown

Year: unknown

Location: N/A

Following in the line of Barber's experiments with the image of the Ori Olokun is the oil painting on Barber board by the artist Toyin Alade,⁴¹² which he titled *The Search* (see plate 34). The painting was created in 1986 as an expression of the artist's search into Yoruba art, history, and culture, using the Ife heads as a take-off point for his exploration into issues surrounding the Nigerian identity. He purposed to find out who the Nigerian was in the past and who the Nigerian of today is. He navigates this topic via the analysis of the attributes of the Yoruba nation in the country.

⁴¹¹ Google images, (Online), Available from:

[https://www.google.com/search?q=Leopold+Sedar+\(Lois+Mailou+JONES\)+SENGHOR+-+Charles+Agvent&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=6niJ4-4zL0Kj6M%253A%252C3y6PcoMuWHyKDM%252C &vet=1&usg=AI4 - kQrAwRq7Hkr5pW8FtwtxESvpFOqRQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjn8Omu6ffhAhVIWRUIHZANChOQ9QEwAnoECAkQBA#imgsrc=6niJ4-4zL0Kj6M](https://www.google.com/search?q=Leopold+Sedar+(Lois+Mailou+JONES)+SENGHOR+-+Charles+Agvent&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=6niJ4-4zL0Kj6M%253A%252C3y6PcoMuWHyKDM%252C &vet=1&usg=AI4 - kQrAwRq7Hkr5pW8FtwtxESvpFOqRQ&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjn8Omu6ffhAhVIWRUIHZANChOQ9QEwAnoECAkQBA#imgsrc=6niJ4-4zL0Kj6M) [Accessed: 30 April 2019]

⁴¹² The barberboard is a typified painting ground created by Abayomi Barber for the right kind of texture for his preferred sfumato effect.

The artist illustrates the progress made in this quest by the depiction of the steps in the painting as the distance covered in this quest. These steps he codifies as leading to the river, but the answer to his questions lie beyond the shores at the other side of the river. In the skies, he represents the image of Mahatma Gandhi as wisdom from afar, signifying the absence of sound political ideology in the country at the time the painting was executed.

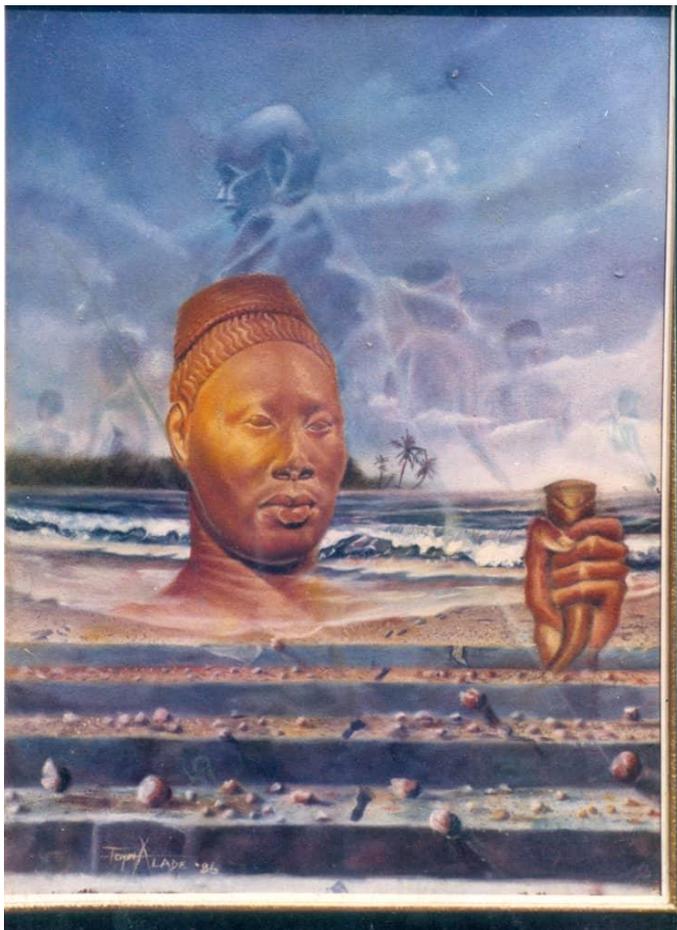


Plate 34
Title: *The Search* (With Kind permission of the artist)
Artist: Toyin Alade
Medium: oil on Barber board
Size: 120cm x 240cm
Year: 1986
Location: private collection

At the lower right-hand section of the painting is the representation of the late sage and first republic Nigerian politician chief Obafemi Awolowo (1909–1987). The artist depicts

him with his back turned to the viewers of the painting, to signify his exit from Nigerian politics after his quest for the office of the president of Nigeria had been severally thwarted by forces from both within and outside the country. Chief Awolowo's death the next year was considered by many as Nigeria's loss of the best president that the country never had. Without being able to reach the other side in his mission, the questions remain unanswered. Therefore, the search is a continuous one.

Contrary to how Senghor's *négritude* has usually been enunciated within the 'culturally pure' appellation of the manipulators of Africa's weakness by cheering the manufacture of the exotic under the guise of a quest for the 'authentic/pure' art by Black folks in Africa. His request for art grounded in an exquisitely fine culture speaks otherwise. The protracted external cultural influences on cultures around the globe from several millennia make it illogical to think of an untainted human essence in any culture today, whether African, Asian, or Western. The acculturative process of the African is irremediable, since his dissociation from his culture makes a return to any kind of complete authenticity impossible.⁴¹³ This therefore debunks the tenability of the idea of a pure African which has been the guise with which African art has been negotiated as primitive.

Ecole de Dakar School of Fine art

As the Senegalese president, Senghor made it his responsibility to facilitate the development of national consciousness for the Senegalese by positioning the *négritude* philosophy as a tool for decolonising the mind. Referencing Picasso's appropriation of traditional African art, he encouraged African artists to recognise the symbiotic nature of Picasso's act, as the artist used a modernist approach in his encounter with African art, while drawing on his Andalusian

⁴¹³ Irele, 1965, 338

ancestry. He therefore demonstrates that Picasso was drawing on tradition while implementing and creating new modernism. In Senghor's idealisation of the movement, that was what the *négritude* philosophy stood for.

Senghor devoted 25% of the national budget to culture, established the Ecole de Dakar school of Fine Art, resulting in the mentorship of several artists in Senegal by his narrative.⁴¹⁴ This therefore helped to produce the national narrative of Senegalese art. The Ecole de Dakar consisted of two art departments which reflected the *négritude* philosophy. One department looked at student's knowledge of classic European art, while the other conducted research into plastic art from Africa.⁴¹⁵ The merger of the two directions in art produced an idealised African past, which was propagated and manifested in the art of the *négritude* artists.

Some of the artists spoke about the African tradition using the mask, but those masks are of an independent reality and cannot be linked to any specific heritage. Here the artists represent apotheosised African traditions as a reinterpretation of the past. Another characteristic of art from the Ecole de Dakar is their rhythmic flow, where the form gives the reason for the work, expressing the interlacing of poetry and art in their works. The stimuli were not restricted to artworks from Senegal alone, as it extended to artworks from across Africa. Although they were strongly influenced by the reasons inherent in *négritude*, their mode of expression, nevertheless differed from one artist to another. They all adopted a Western modernist approach, which tried to place Senegalese/African art in the universal.

⁴¹⁴ Elizabeth Harney, 'In Senghor's shadow: Art, politics, and the avant-garde in Senegal, 1960–1995', Durham: Duke University Press, 2004, 49

⁴¹⁵ Elizabeth Harney, 'The Ecole de Dakar: Pan-Africanism in Paint and Textile', *African Arts*, 35(3), 2002, pp. 12-31, 88-90

Along the line, Senegal's position as one of the most vocal African nations of that age and the foundation of the *négritude* movement in Africa had its reflections on national art flowing from two divergent currents. The first was the state-sponsored art directed at socialist reforms in Africa, while the other was in antithesis to this. Due to his thought that African art just like art from other regions should conform to the standards of the best global practice, Iba N'Diaye (1928 - 2008) was invited by Senghor to establish the country's *Département des Arts Plastiques* at the *École Nationale des Beaux-Arts de Dakar* in 1959. In contrast to the existing curricula based on instinct at the intuition, N'Diaye's teaching involved formal studio techniques and studies in African and Western art history. For him, modern African artists should not only be aware of traditional African art but should also aim to exceed them. N'Diaye felt that the responsibility of the artists of new Africa is to assist their compatriots in leaving the 'cultural ghetto' where certain others would like to trap them.⁴¹⁶

Another prominent figure in counteraction to the nationalist art in Senegal is Issa Samb (1945 – 2017). Issa Samb and his group *Laboratoire Agit Art* disparaged Senghor for his advancement of national aesthetics in Senegalese art. They found Senghor's idea of strict national aesthetics in art which portrayed Africa in a pleasing light to be very restrictive. Hence, they thought it necessary to also show the ugly side of Africa in their art. They therefore created their art by extemporising and adapting their performance art in critiquing the national aesthetics of Senegal. Drawing their influence from genres like performance art from Austria, they directed their art towards criticising Senghor and his *négritude* philosophy as a revolt against the institutionalisation of *négritude*.

⁴¹⁶ Joseph Underwood, *Post War art exhibition*, München: Haus der Kunst, 2016

Even though, *négritude* at the Ecole de Dakar aesthetically invites the African artists to tap into the resources made available of for their inspiration, the movement had limited impact in terms of aesthetics. The Ecole de Dakar appears to have also been the limiting factor for most of the artist of the school. *Négritude* seems to have been vilified as presenting a glamorised image of Africa associated with the primitive perception of Africa by the West and the school was criticised for its overt officiality.

***Négritude* in the Liberation of Africa and Postcolonial Advancement**

One of the *négritude* philosophy's tools for the advancement of the yearnings of Africa for freedom from colonial and postcolonial oppression were the Pan-African festivals. In his bid to put to practice the enactment of the theories of cultural renaissance, Senghor accepted to host the first World Festival of Black Arts in his country's capital Dakar. Ademuleya, and Fajuyigbe note that this idea was initially declared at the 1956 Conference of Black Writers in Paris, summoned to discuss the revival of the African culture by the Paris-based Pan-African cultural society. It was redeliberated upon at the Second African Congress in Rome in 1959, where it was agreed upon to convene the festival. It, however, did not occur until nine years later.⁴¹⁷ Senghor's plan in executing the 1966 first World Festival of Black Arts, also referred to as World Festival of Negro Art (1er Festival Mondial des Arts Negres aka FESMAN) was to deploy the festival as an anchor for a proper political launching of the *négritude* philosophy on the African soil.

The event's occurrence at the cusp of independence in many African nations, was designed to illuminate the tenacious agitations of Black people against colonial imperialism. With part funding by UNESCO for the opening conference and the construction of a new art

⁴¹⁷ Ademuleya, & Fajuyigbe, 2015, 26

museum (Musee Dynamique) in Dakar to display the cultural materials of the participating countries, the event was carried out under the directorship of Alioune Diop, with the assistance of Aime Cesaire. The festival comprised of activities such as poetry, sculpture, painting, music, cinema, theatre, fashion, architecture, design, and dance from creative minds across Africa and its African Diaspora.⁴¹⁸

Négritude and Nationalist Movements in Africa

Nationalist movements are generally accompanied by parallel movements of ideas that make it possible for its leaders to mould a new image of the dominated people.⁴¹⁹

The association between the colonised and the coloniser over time produces re-formations of foreign and indigenous elements into new cultural structures, which offers new opportunities for self-expression. These new possibilities incited nationalist movements which were characterised by a negative gesture of refusal, a denial of an imposed world-order attributed to the coloniser, and the wish for a cultural 'differentiation' which gives rise to a nascent political awareness, or a nationalist consciousness in the raw state in Africa as counter-responses to colonialism.⁴²⁰

Within the philosophy's classification as an uninhibited determination for the realisation of cultural, political, religious, psychological, and physical emancipation.⁴²¹ Its activities in the realms of cultural nationalism basically adapt ideas which seem to resonate with an intransigent anti-modern escape into the past as well as anti-Europe antipathies from Senghor's *négritude* repertoire.⁴²²

⁴¹⁸ Ademuleya, & Fajuyigbe, 2015, 23

⁴¹⁹ Irele, 1965, 321

⁴²⁰ Ibid.

⁴²¹ Onwumere, & Egbulonu, 2014

⁴²² Ekpo, 2010, 178

Political leaders in Senegal espoused the idea of moulding a new image for the erstwhile dominated Senegalese in various ways. Among them was the efforts of Alioune Diop (1910 – 1980), who established the seminal literary magazine, *Présence Africaine*, in 1947, to endorse other Black writers and proselytize the canonisation of the philosophy. This was sanctioned by reformists like André Breton (1896 – 1966), Jean-Paul Sartre, Pablo Picasso (1881 – 1973), and Albert Camus (1913 – 1960) in France. An act which inevitably positioned Black writers in reputable French creative domains in the process.⁴²³ At this point, *négritude* and its Black intellectuals were expressed as representing an exhaustive investigation of Black condition in its historical background and its movement towards an ultimate significance. Their works revealed their feelings of exile and suffering, as a consequence of their encounter with European colonisation.⁴²⁴

Négritude and the Reconstruction of the African Identity

Going by his socialisation as cultural hybrid, the African assumed that the only way out of the peculiar form of alienation was to lean on traditional allegiances. The perception that no matter how well the African was able to sit courteously on the dining table and eat with the fork and knife, would never translate to the African's true acceptance as French. This drove Africans from France's former colonies to strive for the expression of their identity within their history and the limitations of the independence that was bestowed on them.⁴²⁵ Senghor analyses the assimilation policy as concerning the African as a failure, as the Black folks could

⁴²³ Irele, 1965; & Banoum, 2011

⁴²⁴ Onwumere, & Egbulonu, 2014, 156

⁴²⁵ Frank Gerits, 'When the Bull Elephants Fight': Kwame Nkrumah, Non-Alignment, and Pan-Africanism as an Interventionist Ideology in the Global Cold War (1957–66), *The International History Review*, 2015, 3

assimilate mathematics or French language but could never strip off their Black skin as a response to this situation.⁴²⁶

The psychological effect which ensued because of the colonial domination and the political and societal restructuring of the African communities created a state of impending crisis within African communities.⁴²⁷ Its articulation was negotiated through the ideals of the *négritude* philosophy in its expression as the culmination of the complete range of reactions provoked by the impact of western hegemony on the African. This therefore situates the origins of the *négritude* philosophy as encompassing the whole gamut of the historical experience of the contact of Blacks with the Euro-Americans.

Négritude in Socio-cultural Reconstruction

The *négritude* philosophy was deployed in the negotiations of socio-cultural realities in Africa, by constructing the history of Africa with the purpose of locating African pride and identity. However, a misinterpretation and misrepresentation of this construction appear to have sent Africa on a free-fall roller-coaster ride to nowhere. Ekpo finds that the misrepresentation of these ideals can arguably be traced to the misconception of the idea by the earliest critics on the matter, which has however informed the direction to which it has been negotiated. He notes that this caused most analysts of the idea to perceive it from a scornful standpoint, which has bred the idea of an exclusively African route to modernity.⁴²⁸ The concept of Pan-African ideals concerning symbiosis is highlighted in both Nkrumah and Senghor's thoughts and activities before and after decolonisation. The rationale behind Léopold Sédar Senghor's valorisation of lost old African kingdoms' poetry was subject to and motivated by the

⁴²⁶ Senghor, 1964

⁴²⁷ Irele, 1965

⁴²⁸ Ekpo, 2010, 179

determination to include Africa in the discourse of global modernity. He reasoned that Africa's road to modernity was not in its past, but in its future. He, however, deploys the past achievements in traditional Africa as therapeutic reassurance for the confused, racially disqualified, colonised people of Africa.⁴²⁹

For Senghor, the African past was to be mobilised in reassigning Africa's cultural aesthetics to an essential foundational role of revolutionising the past for encouraging and enlightening Africans of the intrinsic value of their own civilisation. Thus, central to Senghor's performative political thinking was his policy of engagement with Europe through strategic partnership, calculated relationship, and prudent agreements. He saw no intellectual or moral impediments in making strategic use of the resources of imperialism and later neo-colonialism, provided these could be deployed to aid and hasten Africa's transition to modernity.⁴³⁰ Senghor opted for the Europe facing wisdom for Africa's modernity, knowing that there is nothing new under the sun, all we have are variants of the old.⁴³¹ Consequently, the philosophy of African cultural specificity adopted by cultural nationalist in Africa, and their disavowal of European formulae for modernity, positioned Africa on an impracticable path. Africa's provoked desire for retaliation against Europe and an overstated idea of African dignity in charting the path to modernity has had ominous repercussions on Africa's projected transition into modernity.

After the 1969 Pan-African Festival of Arts in Algiers where the ideals of *négritude* were systematically rebuked, as weighing too heavily to the side of cultural renaissance in favour of a more scientific and technological approach to Africa's rebirth. In the euphoria of independence and nationalism, *négritude* took on a new meaning, where its adherents opted

⁴²⁹ Ekpo, 2010, 179

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Discussion with Abayomi Barber in Ijoko, Ogun state, Nigeria on 18th of August 2017

to do away with anything that was European or reminiscent of the colonial experience. The misunderstanding of the concept of *négritude* became further complicated from that point onward.

However, some artists thought it would be rather difficult for Africa to chart its path to modernity based exclusively on what Africa possesses. They reason that Africa still requires the understanding of how modernity works. This presumably can only be acquired from those who currently practice it well. For some of these artists who were driven by this ideology, it was thought that the artist has to perfect the technicalities of his/her craft before any meaningful creative activity can be engaged: technical competence comes before innovation for it to be meaningful.⁴³² Those reasoning within this line of thought, believe it is wrong to have put creative expression before the acquisition of technical proficiency. The result therefore is Africa's inability to hit its target of the desired modernity.

The excessive glorification of the cultural nationalism agenda in Africa has proven to be the undoing of Africa's modernisation project. Ekpo argues that the consequences of the cultural nationalist ethos that got triumphantly dramatized and normalised in FESTAC and other Pan-African festivals appear to have gotten in the way of Africa's social, economic, and technological modernisation project. Otherwise stated, allowing the essence of the traditional masks' cultural nationalist spirit to act upon the goal of Africa's modernity project, produced detrimental results. Ekpo states that this was because of Africa's pompous disconnection from the mind-set, the thought patterns, the strategic humilities, and other best practices, through which other ex-colonies were successfully cracking the modernisation

⁴³² Discussions with Abayomi Barber.

code. In all these, Africa was ignorantly congratulating herself during the All African Festivals on her unearthing of the ancient tribal formulas for Africanising modernity.⁴³³

Nigerian Artists Experimenting with Direct Engagement with their Culture

The previously colonized demanded a moral right to largely define humanism universally, as a counterforce to general Western humanism, to free it from its retraction by the West as a consistently ore positive, future-oriented concept of humanity.⁴³⁴ They negotiated their claims through the cultural process as defined by Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity. Here the culture of the colonised meets with the culture of the coloniser at a confluence point described by Homi Bhabha as the 'Third space'. At this point Bhabha holds that a hybrid culture is created.⁴³⁵ Odibo attempts a demystification of the concept of hybridisation, by defining it as a natural occurrence which is based on the environmental influences that the artists in colonial and post-colonial Africa were subjected to.⁴³⁶

In Araeen's perspective, the theory of hybridity is not based on a recognition of the reality of the historical encounter between the peoples of non-western cultures and western culture, and what this encounter historically produced and achieved. He laments the theory of hybridity's negation of this history, concluding that without this negation, this theory cannot seek legitimation from the system which has suppressed this history. He holds that the bogusness of this theory becomes clear with a scrutiny of the art produced by the so-called artists from other cultures in this century.⁴³⁷

⁴³³ Denis Ekpo, 2007

⁴³⁴ Okwui Enwezor, Et.al. *Exhibition Guide: Postwar: Art between the Pacific and the Atlantic 1945-1965*, Munchen: Haus Der Kunst, 2016, 103

⁴³⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, 'The other question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism', in, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 2012, pp. 94-120

⁴³⁶ Odibo, 2018, 1

⁴³⁷ Araeen, 2000, 9

Although most writers have pitched Aina Onabolu's and Kenneth Murray's ideologies as two opposing tents, I would like to propose that both their efforts be looked at from a complementary perspective in the negotiation of the idea of a Nigerian identity through art. Even though there seemed to be some type of misunderstanding and contest for relevance between Nigerian modernist painter Aina Onabolu (1882–1963) and the British art teacher Kenneth Murray (1903–1972) within the conflicting imperialist and anti-colonialist views. These ideas were not just on the issues of modernity and subjectivity, but also of the role of art in their articulation.⁴³⁸ A combination of their ideology seems to prevail in the articulation of Nigerian identity through art in varying degrees. Due to the eminence of the roles that these two figures play in the construction of modern art in Nigeria, their perspectives have been the driving force for most modern art in Nigeria.

However, there appears to be very little known about Aina Onabolu's students and how they fared on the Nigerian art scene. Kenneth Murray on the other hand would have had the full support of the colonial government, being an actor in the government himself. Hence, he was able to organise exhibitions for his students both in Nigeria and in England. Chief of these was Ben Enwonwu whose later works reflected strong influence of the *négritude* movement in the articulation of his Nigerian and Pan-African identity.

Art Society, Zaria, 1957-1961

The Zaria art society was the coming together of a group of students at the art department of the Nigerian College of Art, Science, and Technology, Zaria (NCAST). Their art was aimed at rejecting and redefining the colonial constructions of African subjectivity. Its championing of

⁴³⁸ Okeke-Agulu, 2015, 16

a national identity for the work of contemporary Nigerian artists under the banner of what Uche Okeke (1933-2016) called Natural Synthesis remains the society's major contribution to Nigerian art.⁴³⁹ The idea holds that the development of the creative artist's confidence can only be guaranteed within an extensive understanding of the past and a thorough comprehension of the present.⁴⁴⁰

In the negotiation of the authenticity of the imagined nation, Uche Okeke the secretary and the spokesman of the 'Zaria Art Society' designates their project as 'natural'. This endows it with the predisposition of political nationalism which asserts the naturalness of the desired nation to the artists, as their cultural traits should be allowed easy expression in their works. The group's purpose was to rhetorically contrast that which was natural in their cultural expressions with the compulsory union and artificiality of the Western art traditions that were associated with the Zaria art school at the time.⁴⁴¹

Ogbechie stresses the importance of analysing the Zarianist project in historical terms to understand what was unique about their work. He contends that their militant adherence to 'Nigerianess' was quite a cliché by 1958 and was already enunciated to perfection by Nigerian politicians like Mbonu Ojike (1914-1956). He maintains that their idea of appropriation of indigenous Nigerian culture and the synthesis concept itself derives not from Zarianism but from K.C. Murray and was first put into cultural practice by Enwonwu.⁴⁴² He however grants that the Zaria Art Society's main achievement was that they directly engaged

⁴³⁹ Okeke-Agulu, & Picton, 2006, 35

⁴⁴⁰ Sereba Agiobu-Kemmer, 'A Survey of Modern Art' in, Chimurenga (ed.), *FESTAC '77: The 2nd World Festival of Black Art and Culture. Nigeria. Lagos, Kaduna, 15th January -12 February 1977*, Cologne: Afterall, 2019

⁴⁴¹ Okeke-Agulu, & Picton, 2006, 35

⁴⁴² Ogbechie, 2009, & Filani, 2014

the need to define an intellectual framework for the postcolonial context of modern and contemporary Nigerian art.⁴⁴³

Okeke-Agulu, and Picton describe the general tenor within the Zaria Art Society as a clear, programmatic striving for a nationalistic art, which drew upon the work of contemporary African writers and politicians. They find that the period of the Zaria Art Society's establishment was marked by a sustained attempt by the members to learn as much as they could about Nigerian cultural traditions. Without this awareness, their project of consolidating their self-esteem in the face of colonial snobbery could not succeed.⁴⁴⁴ They analyse the concept of Natural Synthesis as a conscious attempt to create art that is both modern and Nigerian. Art that addresses the fundamental circumstances of power in political independence. This connotes an awareness and assertion of the artists' twofold heritage as Nigerians who inherited rich African artistic traditions and as beneficiaries to colonial/European and postcolonial cultural practices.⁴⁴⁵

The expressions of the artists engaged with the natural synthesis idea took two paths. The first was by artists such as Bruce Onabrakpeya (b. 1932) and Demas Nwoko (b. 1935) who engaged with local local traditions different from their own. The other was by artists like Uche Okeke who developed their art around their own ethnicity and tradition. It can be perceived as an indigenised version of the *négritude* philosophy, as *négritude* drew more from a broader perspective of the Africa tradition.

The members of the Zaria Art Society learnt about European art and artists from their teachers in the lecture theatres and engaged in independent research for information about

⁴⁴³ Ogbechie, 2009, 9

⁴⁴⁴ Okeke-Agulu, & Picton, 2006, 28

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 35

the ancient art of Nok, Igbo-Ukwu, Ife, and Benin. For Uche Okeke, the ideal of natural synthesis is produced by the conscious, critical deployment of the technical expertise learned from the art classes as the animator of their experimentation with indigenous art forms.⁴⁴⁶ The association stressed the importance of the knowledge of one's roots to the understanding of the individual's identity. The Zaria Art Society, therefore, was founded primarily to give its members a sense of direction as Africans. It was apparent to its members that there was an unavoidable problem of culture conflict, as their teachers were mostly expatriates who had their own culture and their own ideas.⁴⁴⁷

Even though several Nigerian artists adapted a synergy of art forms from Nigeria and other pre-colonial African cultures, the bearing of their discoveries did not critically affect the formal appearance of their works. Its reformation was more in the area of the context of their art. Filani notes that while the naturalists of the early period waxed stronger and continued to initiate other artists into photographic realism, other artists became interested in the revival of culture in their art as a weapon to fight racism and colonialism. He finds that after independence, many Nigerian artists became romantic and reverted to exuberant naturalistic style in their synthesis. These artists included Abayomi Barber (b. 1928) a surrealist, Agbo Folarin (1936-2010), Chike Aniakor (b. 1939), Erabor Emokpae (1934-1984), Igboanugo Paul (1940), Kolade Oshinowo (b. 1948), Ibitayo Ojomo (b. 1944), Dele Jegede (b. 1945) and Obiora Udechukwu (b. 1946) to mention just a few. Other West African artists working and residing in Nigeria at the time like El Anatsui and Larry Nelson-Cole indigenised their forms and content within Igbo and Hausa-Fulani aesthetics respectively.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁶ Okeke-Agulu, & Picton, 2006, 28

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁸ Filani, 2014

Regional interpretations of the Modern in Nigerian art

Nigeria is one of the largest, most diverse and one of the richest nations culturally in Africa today. With a landmass of about 923,768 km² and diverse ethnic groups that possess distinctive social beliefs and expressions, which some accounts have estimated at about 250.⁴⁴⁹ One of the first striking things about the order of establishment of the higher institutions for art learning in Nigeria is the regional negotiations that took place even when Nigeria was still under colonial rule. Chinedu C. Chukueggu of the Department of Fine Arts and Design, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria points out how another campus of the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology was established at Enugu (a city in the South Eastern region of Nigeria) in the 1955/56 academic year, to satisfy the agitation of the then Eastern region led by Dr Michael Okpara.⁴⁵⁰ Hence it is no surprise that the art training provided by these schools evinced the specific regional interpretations of the directors of the school.

The various geopolitical zones in Nigeria were amalgamated in 1914 as a British protectorate, and the country to a large extent was governed as one unit. However, Okeke-Agulu finds that the post-independence political crises, the military intervention in 1966, and the civil war the year after, all adversely affected the sense of cultural nationalism that earlier inspired the Art Society and other artists in Lagos. He observes that this brought about the resurgence of regionalism in the post-independence era, which reached a climax by the middle of the decade, leaving its mark on the art and culture sector.⁴⁵¹ These developments

⁴⁴⁹ Akin Adejuwon & Shina Alimi, 'Cartoons as Illustration: Political Process in Nigeria', *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4 (3), Mar., 2011, pp. 57-64 (online)

<http://www.ipan african.org/docs/vol4no3/4.3%20Cartoons.pdf>

⁴⁵⁰ Chukueggu, 2010, 504

⁴⁵¹ Okeke-Agulu, 2015, 19

fuelled the dramatic shift in the style and themes of politically conscious artists who had become increasingly disappointed about the expectations of the new nation. The strong presence of this politicised regionalism by the early 1970s Nigeria, saw the Nigerian enunciation of nationhood change from the Pan-Nigerian to the local.

Since art has similar manifestations in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa at least, the purpose here is to pinpoint how the location of production acts as a qualifier for the national identity in the art through the identification of those things that make the art specifically Nigerian. The use of geographically specific ideas, materials, and other local content in the formulation of art. This inadvertently reveals that what relates all the arts from different regions of Nigeria is the political drive for the expression of the Nigerian national identity and pride.

In the analysis of regional negotiations of art and culture, Virginia Nixon grants that regionalism involves man and culture, and it is connected to the sense of identity nurtured in a particular environment.⁴⁵² In America where the phrase was coined, an exhibition organised by Maynard Walker in 1933 for the Kansas City Art Institute brought the phrase 'Regionalist movement' to national awareness.⁴⁵³ While Knell relates the idea to the process where internationalism redefines small and provincial art museums as conveyors of nationhood.⁴⁵⁴

In his approach to the address of the issue of regional negotiations in art, Rasheed Araeen in his analysis designates the idea of the culturally specific as leading to the

⁴⁵² Virginia Nixon, 'The concept of Regionalism in Canadian art history', *Journal of Canadian Art History / Annales d'histoire de l'art Canadien*, 10 (1), 1987, pp. 30-41, (Online) Available from: https://spectrum.library.concordia.ca/6563/1/Concept_of_Regionalism.pdf

⁴⁵³ Rachel B. Perry, 'Indiana Realities: Regionalist Painting 1930-1945 from the Robert L. and Ellen E. Haan Collection', Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009, (Online) <http://tfaoi.org/aa/9aa/9aa622.htm>

⁴⁵⁴ Simon Knell, 'National museums and the national imaginations' in Knell, Simon, Et.al. (eds.), *National museums: new studies from around the world*, New York: Routledge, 2011, 16

celebration of the 'other'. He contends that the problem here is not the cultural identity of one's work, but within the context of multiculturalism and its ideology, the idea of a culturally specific route leads to a celebration of the Other. He holds that the mode of production should be an essential content of the work.⁴⁵⁵ Likewise, Abikayeva-Tiesenhausen looks at how the idea of regional negotiations in the arts of Central Asia played out, vis-à-vis its relationship with Russia. She describes it as the negotiations of power and the creation of differences between coloniser and the colonised by launching nationalist sentiments (towards the coloniser) which drove component parts of the colonised nations apart. This results in the division of a territory once united by a common past, language, and traditions.⁴⁵⁶

Connecting the idea of regional negotiations in art to the Nigerian art scene, Okeke-Agulu and Picton find that the history of Nigerian nationalism shows two trends: a federalising initiative that drew from the rhetoric of Pan-Africanism and another described as the regionalisation of nationalism. They note that nationalist politicians aspired to national office based on their ethnic mandates and in the process reified Nigerian ethnic diversity and difference at the expense of a unified national spirit.⁴⁵⁷

Lord Frederick Lugard, the colonial governor of both the Northern Nigeria Protectorate and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria signed a document merging the two protectorates, thereby creating the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria on New Year's Day 1914.⁴⁵⁸ At the time, Northern Nigeria Protectorate was governed as one block due to the regions predominantly Muslim faith and the existence of an emirate system of rulership

⁴⁵⁵ Araeen, 2000, 10

⁴⁵⁶ Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, 2016, 23

⁴⁵⁷ Okeke-Agulu, & Picton, 2006, 27

⁴⁵⁸ Jack McCaslin, 'Lord Lugard Created Nigeria 104 Years Ago', Jan, 2018, (Online)

<https://www.cfr.org/blog/lord-lugard-created-nigeria-104-years-ago>

before colonialism was instituted on the region. The Protectorate of Southern Nigeria on the other hand consisted of Eastern region, the Midwest region, the Western region, and Lagos Federal District which was formed in 1954.⁴⁵⁹ However, over one hundred years after the creation of the Nigerian state and almost seventy years after Nigeria became an independent state, the country is still contending with its national identity and recurrent pro-autonomy agitations within its borders.

Jack McCaslin in the article 'Lord Lugard Created Nigeria 104 Years Ago', records the existence of several different civilizations whose presence is still felt today in the territory that is now Nigeria before Europeans arrived. He cites the example of the predominance of Islam in the north, stating that, in the nineteenth century, there were two Islamic empires, the Sokoto Caliphate and the Bornu Empire. He describes the Southwest as comprising of numerous Yoruba city-states which generally shared animist religions and were only occasionally united. To the Southeast he illustrates the presence of an Igbo kingdom, Nri, and a collection of semi-autonomous towns and villages in the Niger River delta. These regions he described as being linguistically, religiously, and politically unambiguous.⁴⁶⁰

The most unfortunate inheritance bequeathed to Nigeria in this amalgamation was the problem of a unifying national identity, as the diverse peoples, forcibly united into single states, sometimes turn to separatism.⁴⁶¹ The ethnic and cultural differences between protectorates and their constitutive groups were evident to the British colonial administration, even at the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of

⁴⁵⁹ Ben Cahoon, 'Provinces and Regions of Nigeria', [n.d.] (Online) http://www.worldstatesmen.org/Nigeria_regions.html

⁴⁶⁰ McCaslin, 2018

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

Nigeria.⁴⁶² The series of events after the Nigerian independence of 1960 will see the country go through a coup on 15 January 1966, which further brought about intensified ethnic concerns. There was a rise of twelve states in the country by 27 May 1967 following the dissolution of the regions.⁴⁶³ This gave way to federalism in Nigeria with greater power apportioned to the centre, but the regional allegiance and identity have proven very difficult to erase from the minds of the average Nigerian.

By the end of the civil war, Nigerians assumed isolationist tendencies creating an appreciation for their ethnic values. Artists began to assess their immediate environments from new perspectives, by documenting the land, mores, myths, and their history from oral tradition. This renewed interest in the locale strengthened the movement toward individually subjective artworks. This brought their art works closer to their communities, as the general public could relate to the artistic idioms deployed in documentation of familiar attributes of their cultural milieu and the sentimental metaphors charmed a rising nationalism in them. At this point, the fundamental ideals of place, history, politics, and social change were substituted for individual consciousness as sources of artistic motivation.⁴⁶⁴ Art schools encouraged trends of artistic forms and stylistic peculiarities of individuals, thereby consolidating an important paradigm of classification.⁴⁶⁵

The ethnic consciousness aggravated by the Nigeria civil war along with the practice of concentrating and limiting certain ethnic populations to specific areas heightened the Nigerian population's understanding of one's place within a shared country. This situation engendered mutual suspicion among the various ethnic nations within Nigeria.

⁴⁶² Okeke-Agulu, & Picton, 2006, 36

⁴⁶³ Cahoon, [n.d.]

⁴⁶⁴ Perry, 2009

⁴⁶⁵ Filani, 2014

Regionalisation of nationalism was the prevalent political perspective adopted by postcolonial nationalists for whom ethnic identity preceded their quest for national sovereignty.⁴⁶⁶

Consequently, modern art was variously negotiated from place to place in Nigeria, owing to the difference in language and culture. The Mbari workshop led by Austrian professor Ulli Beier (1922 – 2011), the Austrian-Nigerian artist Susanne Wenger (1915 – 2009), and the artist Georgina Beier (1938 -) took on different meanings when held in the Yoruba towns of Ibadan and Osogbo from what it was interpreted as in the Mbari art society in Igbo land. Similarly, the concept of natural synthesis also produced varied forms in the hands of artists in Nsukka differing from what it turned out like in the hands of the Ona artists. This phenomenon highlights the geographic specificity of art and culture, as culture is deemed to be unique within definite geographical demarcations. This as exemplified in the idea of natural synthesis from Uche Okeke's point of view was an aesthetic program which presents the prospect of proclaiming, repossessing, and rediscovering native creative and cultural heritage. In the situation where an artist studies an indigenous art form to recreate an avant-garde aesthetic and formal style based on that art.⁴⁶⁷

There are several Nigerian groups which rose to prominence because they began to conceptualise contemporary art, using traditional elements. They carried the synthesis idea to new vistas of articulation in groups and movements such as the Eye society in Zaria, the Uli influenced Aka group from Nsukka, and the Ona movement with its base in Ife. These groups based their experiments on the exploration of cyphers, elements and themes reminiscent of the traditions peculiar to their local and ethnic origins.⁴⁶⁸ The adoption of ornaments and

⁴⁶⁶ Okeke-Agulu, & Picton, 2006, 36

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid. 26

⁴⁶⁸ Filani, 2014

motifs connected to the Nigerian culture in the creation of Nigerian modern art perform as implementors of the illustration of Nigerian art. It is therefore necessary to locate these activities within the offshoots of the Pan-Africanist movement and the later *négritude* philosophy of the early 1920s.

Regional negotiations in art from Eastern Nigeria

The outbreak of the Biafra civil war of secession which was a reactionary effect of Nigeria's first military coup in January 1966, is illustrated by Sidney Kasfir as causing the estrangement of the Igbos from the rest of Nigeria. She notes that at its inception, the new University of Nigeria at Nsukka, which is located in Northern part of Igbo land had adopted an American style curriculum as an alternative educational model to the British one in the early 1960s. However, the pogroms of 1966 forced the Igbo students studying in Zaria to return to the safety of Nsukka, while non-Igbo students at Nsukka did the opposite and returned to their home regions.

This scenario she states, quickly 'Igbo-ized' what had been an American-style art department and brought the natural synthesis idea to it. Kasfir observes that the civil war forced these artists, along with everyone else within the region to quickly come to terms with their Igbo identity. The closure of the university from 1967 to 1970 due to the ravaging of the war did not deter the local artists from engaging actively in the Biafra war propaganda. At the end of the war, Uche Okeke was made the acting head of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts of the gravely vandalised university at its reopening.⁴⁶⁹ Okeke's management of the

⁴⁶⁹ Sidney Kasfir, *Contemporary African Art*, London: Thames & Hudson Inc, 1999, 181-82

school ushered in the era of the idea of natural synthesis which he had propagated as the secretary and spokesman of the Zaria art society a few years back.

Due to the momentous loss that the Igbos had to handle from of the civil war, it was not too difficult to develop an artistic dialect which spoke specifically to the Igbo ethnic and cultural sentiments. Several artists from the region embraced the local Igbo Uli traditional art of body and wall painting, experimenting on its forms and motifs as an expression of pride in their culture. The act of a return to the ethnic-specific art was reciprocated in the Southwest as the Ona (Yoruba word for Creativity) art movement and in the Northern parts of Nigeria, specifically in Zaria as the EYE movement. Producing a situation where each geopolitical zone in Nigeria embarked on distinctive art styles born out of their traditional art styles.

Concerning the idea of regional negotiations in art, the efforts of the group of artists based mainly at the University of Nsukka, in Southeast Nigeria loosely known as the Nsukka group is worthy of mention in the making of the Nigerian nation through art along the ethnic definitions. This development was facilitated by the encounter of the artist of the Nsukka school with their ethnic identities and ancestral past.⁴⁷⁰ Being the central figure of the movement while he was a student at Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria, Okeke became spokesman for the Nigerian Art Society's (Zaria Art Society) position which he states thus:

Nigeria needs a virile school of art....Whether our African writers call the new realisation *négritude*, or our politicians talk about African personality, they both stand for the awareness and yearning for freedom of Black people all over the world... I disagree with those who live in Africa and ape European artists... Our

⁴⁷⁰ Kasfir, 1999, 181

new society calls for a synthesis of old and new, of functional art and art for its own sake.⁴⁷¹

The Nsukka group's interest was centred on a revival of pre-colonial Igbo art forms, especially the uli designs painted by women on the female body and on the walls of house and shrines. Okeke restricted the form and content of the school to specific Igbo forms. These changes were hailed by the students and staff of the university. Uli aesthetics became a platform for the realisation of the school's assertion of their ethnic-based nationalism. The art historian Godwin Iriwieri defines Uli as graphic imagery traceable to the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria (see plate 35) and characterises it by broad lines, calligraphic forms, linear, curvilinear, visually precise, space emanating and greatly elemental art with highly romantic appeal and culturally implied symbolism.⁴⁷² In the mixed media painting titled *Ulism 1*, Vincent Amaefuna deploys the use of locally found materials such as cowry shell, beads, sea shells and sand in the articulation of the rhythmic lines and design of Uli painting.

The loss of the war by the region meant that the Igbos were not allowed to secede. They had to remain as part of Nigeria. Things eventually calmed down and many of the works emanating from the artist's studios were geared at recording the ills of the war. Some of the more prominent among these group of artists are Tayo Adenaike (b. 1954), Chris Echeta (b. 1953), Ndidi Dike (b. 1960), Nsikak Essien (b. 1957) and Chris Afuba (b. 1947).

⁴⁷¹ Uche Okeke, in, Kasfir, 1999, 181

⁴⁷² Godwin Iriwieri, 'Onaism: An Artistic Model of Yoruba Civilization in Nigeria', *Africa Research Review*, 2010, pp. 234-246, 245 (Online) Available from: <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/afrrrev/article/viewFile/60180/48429>



Plate 35
Title: *Ulism 1*
Artist: Vincent Amaefuna
Medium: Mixed media painting
Size: 122cm x 80.5cm
Year: 1980
Location: Collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art

The effects of the war took the centre stage of the thoughts of most Nigerians at the time. It is no surprise that several images were created to depict the effects on the people and society. The paintings were deployed as social commentaries on the plight of the casualties of the civil war. In Chuks Anyawu's (1937-1980) painting titled *Refugee* (see plate 36), the artist illustrates a displaced victim of the war, gaunt and frail in appearance. The mood of the painting is sombre, the character is depicted in deep pain and sorrow, revealing his vulnerability. The reflection of light on his face is not enough to hide his despair and hopelessness, as he is lost in thoughts with little or no hope for survival.

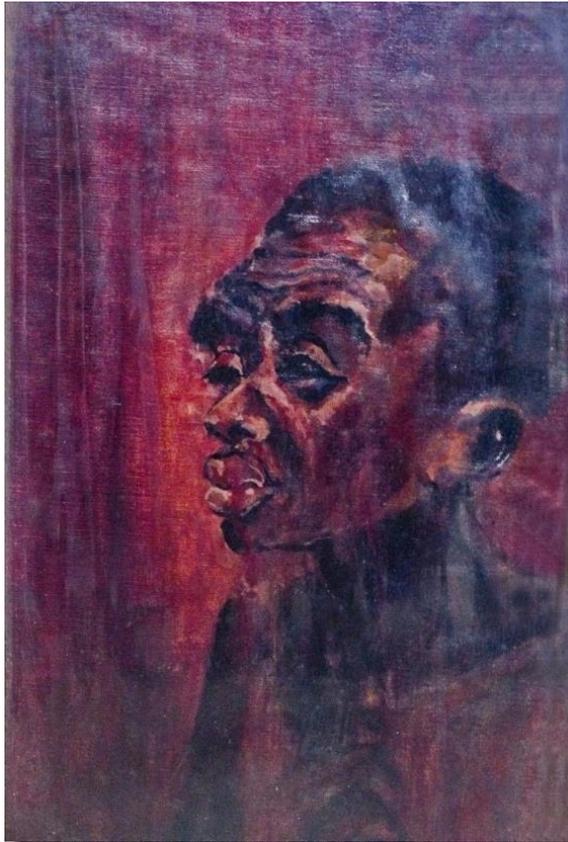


Plate 36
Title: *Refugee*
Artist: Chuks Anyawu
Medium: Oil on Canvas
Size: 34cm x 55cm
Year: date unknown
Location: Collection of University of Lagos Museum

In the painting titled *The Aftermath* by Tonny John Kamen (see plate 37), the artist portrays the toll that the war had taken on the Igbo family. He depicts a badly malnourished woman and her children, as this was the case after the civil war. As the war progressed, food became increasingly difficult to reach for the teeming population of the people. When the bite of hunger and starvation became intolerable for the people, a surrender was negotiated. However, that was not before the war took its toll on the people as evident in John Kamen's painting titled the *Aftermath*. There was hardly a Nigerian who did not feel the brunt of the war in one way or the other. This narrative had its manifestations in varying creative

endeavours for many years after the end of the civil war in Nigeria. The feeling of despair and melancholy would hover over the whole country until the celebration of the FESTAC 77.



Plate 37

Title: The aftermath

Artist: Tonny John Kamen

Medium: Oil on Canvas

Size: 40cm x70cm

Year: 1971

Location: Collection of University of Lagos Museum

Regional negotiations in art from Western Nigeria

In the negotiations of Nigerian modern arts, the major contenders are the South-Eastern region and the South-Western regions of the country. The geographical position and nature of the Southwestern people of Nigeria have opened it up to various types of influences which are evident in the plethora of expressions that have been witnessed in the region over the

years. This region is predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba speaking people of Nigeria and therefore, its art and culture are influenced by the Yoruba philosophical standpoint.

Filani expresses the indigenous Yoruba concepts of aesthetics as being of extreme importance to contemporary analysis and understanding of African art. The Yoruba people of West Africa are progenies of great culture who constitute one of the largest cultural groups in Africa, South of the Sahara.⁴⁷³ He points out that the Yoruba culture which is acknowledged for her artistic feasts primarily through the classical Ife head, Owo art (around 15th century), Esie Soap Stones (date unknown), and the excellent wood carving traditions among other finely crafted artefacts is known to have spread beyond the boundaries of Africa.⁴⁷⁴ This is due to the fact that Yoruba customs and ethics were transmitted to the New World through Transatlantic Slave Trade, with its predominance in Brazil and Cuba. Yoruba art is among the earliest known by the West, as this genre consists of some of the best-studied African works in the field.⁴⁷⁵

Concerning the issue of ethnic and regional negotiations in art from the Western region of Nigeria, the 'Ona' movement which was developed by the students of the University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, instantly comes to mind. It was initiated in the later part of 1988 and early 1989 as extended exploration of their search for local content in their artistic expressions.⁴⁷⁶ The movement appears to be a Yoruba response to the négritude ideology in its exploration of culture-specific art and cultural materials and ideas in the formulation of an ethnic national identity through the creation of modern art. This generation of Yoruba artists commenced with the revival of Yoruba artforms, motifs and

⁴⁷³ Filani, 2004, pp. 81-94; & Iriwieri, 2010, 235

⁴⁷⁴ Filani, 2004

⁴⁷⁵ Iriwieri, 2010, 235

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 236

philosophy through experimentation with local materials, images and patterns rooted in modern styles using Yoruba idiom.⁴⁷⁷

The art department at the Obafemi Awolowo University is characterised by its leaning towards art education and African studies training in its investigation of postcolonial negotiations through Nigerian art. By 1976 it developed into a Department of Fine Arts from its humble beginning as a series of art courses and cultural events in the early 1960s. It cultivated a new generation of students' ideas that fostered pride in African cultures and encouraged artistic work which displayed a synthesis between modern art techniques and indigenous aesthetic principles.⁴⁷⁸ At its inception, it was run under the British educational model, by European leaders (Michael Crowder from 1968 to 1971 and Ulli Beier from 1971 to 1974) whose influence were dominant at the early developmental stages of the Institute. By the mid-1970s however, the advent of a generation of Nigerian artists and professors onto the scene engendered a nationalist agenda which engineered the embrace of the diversity of Nigeria, and the growing orientation toward Yoruba cultural nationalism at the school.⁴⁷⁹

Ona is inspired by the profound Yoruba art and philosophy. It is dynamic and the Ona artists often make critical and crucial comments about contemporary issues.⁴⁸⁰ Ona which is the Yoruba word for art has a generic interpretation. It can be used interchangeably to connote art, design, and even the profession of the artist/designer, but when used in its creative context Ona means arts and aesthetics.⁴⁸¹ The Ona movement is characterised by the

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid. 236

⁴⁷⁸ Sarah Van Beurden, 'Art, the "Culture Complex," and Postcolonial Cultural Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa, Critical Interventions', in, *Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture*, 10 (3), Ohio State University: 2016, pp. 255-260, 258, (Online) <https://doi.org/10.1080/19301944.2016.1227216>

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁰ Interview with Kunle Filani on 4th August 2020

⁴⁸¹ Godwin Iriwieri, 'Onaism: An Artistic Model of Yoruba Civilization in Nigeria', *Africa Research Review*, 2010, 236; & Interview with Kunle Filani on 4th August 2020

preponderance of its patterns and ornamentation. Its imagery is symbolic and often requires closer attention in deciphering its content. Its motifs are characteristically geometric, organic, animals and bird motifs. They are sometimes also inspired by traditional Yoruba and African sculptural forms and inscription. The members of the group at its inception include Moyo Okediji (b. 1956), Don Akatakpo (1956-2011), Kunle Filani (b. 1957), Idowu Otun (1956-1988) and Tola Wewe (b. 1959) and Bolaji Campbell (b. 1958).

Among the group, Tola Wewe's motifs are allegorical to the theme of his works. His art deploys religious and traditional cultural icons and alternative art materials in the manipulation of indigenous art forms. His exploration of Ifa (Yoruba oracle) motifs and poetry in both the form and content in his painting is indicative of reverence for the traditional Yoruba art canon. As an apostle of the Ona creative movement, Tola Wewe is a versatile painter who deploys his works mainly as weapons of propaganda for social reforms, experimenting with colours, cubism, and pointillism. He is an intellectual and social commentator, a committed painter whose research into African masks produces new African rhythm and rich textural and tactile qualities.⁴⁸² His works are characterised by the use of vivid colours, birds and animals from Yoruba religions and mythology, there is also evidence of adaptation of ornamental codes from other African cultures like Adinkra cloth of Ghana and the hieroglyphs of Egypt.

Olakunle Filani is a skilled printmaker, painter, art teacher, and art administrator whose works depict a deft handling of intricate and decorative linear expressions in the oil medium and mixed media techniques. The character of his works is suggestive of constant evolution of thoughts, due to his influence by the global process of contemporary artistic

⁴⁸² Iriwieri, 2010, 236

development. His lines are elaborately positioned to each tell its own story. In the painting titled *Our Trophy is Our Sweat* (plate 38), Filani celebrates the winning of the Olympics football gold medal by the Nigerian team. His colour palette is derived from the indigo that is popularly used in the batik and adire (tie-dye) clothes worn in his Southwest area of Nigeria and the brown and yellow colours of the earth. He engages Ona design format to depict the stadium and the event, using various motifs that attest to the richness of art not just from the Yoruba, but also from other African and universal sources.



Plate 38
Title: *Our Trophy is Our Sweat*
Artist: Kunle Filani
Medium: Acrylic on canvas
Year: 1997
Size: 76cm 145cm

The politics of regional negotiations in art is advanced by Moyosore Okediji, one of the exponents of the Ona movement. Iriwieri quotes Okediji as arguing that, 'if Ulism could be

regarded as the most important movement in contemporary Igbo art today, Onaism could equally be considered as the most significant movement in contemporary Yoruba art.⁴⁸³

The Mbari art club at Osogbo was another venue where the negotiation of ethnic identity was quite pronounced, as the themes of the creative output from the club were very Yoruba centric. However, due to the strong presence and personal involvement of the European sponsors and directors of the workshop, it appears that the art produced within the workshop were more of a European construct of Nigeria, rather than the Nigerian impression of Nigeria. This act of authoring by these sponsors is easily located within the constructs of Edward Said's 'Orientalism' and Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'Otherness'.⁴⁸⁴ This, therefore, delegitimises Osogbo art produced under the supervision of Ulli Beier and Georgina Beier as appropriate examples of the negotiation of Nigerian identity through art.

There was also the negotiation of the Nigerian identity through Christian themes as discussed earlier in 'Negotiating the contemporaneity of traditional Nigerian art' in Chapter two. In a workshop organised by two Catholic priests, Fathers Kevin Carroll and Sean O. Mahoney at the Yoruba town of Oye-Ekiti in 1948, they purposed to deploy traditional methods to meet the artistic needs of the church.⁴⁸⁵ In this workshop, there was no pretext of the search for the 'authentic' Nigerian art. It was simply an experiment to create art for visual illustrations of Bible themes and stories. Unlike the Osogbo experiment where the 'artist' involved in the workshop were artisans from different backgrounds other than the arts, the participants of the Oye-Ekiti workshop were trained traditional carvers and their apprentices brought in service of the church. Bible stories were narrated to them to be

⁴⁸³ Moyo Okediji, Qtd. In, Iriwieri, 2010

⁴⁸⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 2003, & Bhabha, 2012

⁴⁸⁵ Filani, 2004, pp. 81-94

interpreted the best way they knew, with the hope that the familiar style of these artists would appeal to the new Christian converts worshipping in the catholic church in Nigeria of those days.⁴⁸⁶

The result was the expression of those themes in traditional Yoruba style, which meant that the biblical characters were also adorned in traditional Yoruba clothing and hairstyles. The aim was to bring Christian doctrines to the converts in the language that they would readily understand and also help them understand that God does not belong to any race, but He is a part of any race that accepts him in worship.



Plate 39
Title: *Nativity*
Artist: Lamidi Olonade Fakeye
Medium: Relief wood carving
Size: 61cm x 37cm
Year: Undated
Location: Collection of University of Lagos Museum

In plate 39, Lamidi Fakeye, though a Muslim by faith, depicts the nativity scene in relief wood carving, executed in the traditional Yoruba wood carving style. The carving is characterised by the classical African art proportions. In the composition the image of Mary

⁴⁸⁶ Adepegba, 1995, 80

the mother of Jesus is portrayed seated with the baby Jesus in her hands, Joseph is represented behind her as the guardian of the Holy family and the three wise men are depicted all bearing their gifts for the baby Jesus. All the characters are represented in Yoruba attire, with the Hallow around the head of the baby Jesus, Mary, and Joseph to distinguish them as the Holy family.

Adepegba describes the emergence of a different kind of workshop from the Centre for Cultural Studies of the University of Lagos in 1972. He records its method of training and orientation of forms as quite different from any other in Nigeria. This was based on the fact that it did not have stringent rules for admission, as every interested participant was admitted and taken on based on their individual level of development, which was honed by Abayomi Barber the workshop's instructor. The class of people trained in the school is not defined as it is more of a school of thought than a physical one. This allows for the admittance of people from the primary school leaving level to university graduates who believe in the basic tenets of the 'Abayomi Barber School of Thought'. In this school, individuals are not allowed to turn out works without technical competence. Rules and techniques of representation are rigorously taught, and the result is a kind of super-realism which some of the products of the school have employed particularly in religious, sociocultural and political compositions.⁴⁸⁷

Barber admired the innovative mind. He felt that the European facilitators of the primitive in Nigerian had been trying to pull a wool over the eyes of Nigerian artist's by offering them something different from what obtained in European. It was his reasoning that before Europe started to stylise, Europe had perfected that art of constructing straight lines and architectural precision. Therefore, Europe coming to Nigeria to tell Nigeria that

⁴⁸⁷ Adepegba, 1995, 84

architectural precision was no longer necessary would amount to a fraudulent negotiation in his judgement. He consequently rejected the idea at the cost of his popularity among his peers and the contemporary art scene in Nigeria. To a large extent, he risked the exclusion or his works or acceptance of his art as Nigerian/African art in most global art fora till date. His insistence that African art can only be genuinely authored by Africans, resulted in his rebuttal of any kind of qualification that he would not qualify his works.⁴⁸⁸

Adepagba finds that it is difficult to differentiate the works of the artist of the school from the European surrealist paintings in their attention to minute details shown under intense light. He refers to Barber as stating that the motivation for their true-to-life accuracy, was derived from his early exposure to Ife art.⁴⁸⁹ Odibo points out the relevance of the instruction of Abayomi Barber and the artists of the Abayomi Barber School of Thought, quoting Barber as asserting:

African art should be allowed to be free of western constraints and be at liberty to address Africa's situations and that it should be an authoritative expression of the African peoples according to their historical, socio-cultural, political and environmental experiences; and be accepted as such.⁴⁹⁰

These ideals can be found in Olu Spencer's 2008 painting titled *Peace and Plenty* (plate 41). Olu Spencer (b. 1956), is one of the first-generation artists trained by Barber in the 1970s. His dedication to hard work and a keen appetite for details is made manifest in most of his paintings. At the first glance, the painting *Peace and Plenty* merely depicts a seascape, but a more careful scrutiny reveals that the clouds have been rendered as doves and the entire

⁴⁸⁸ Discussions with Abayomi Barber

⁴⁸⁹ Adepegba, 1995, 84

⁴⁹⁰ Freeborn Odiboh, 2005

ocean is a configuration of a myriad of cowry shells all painted individually by the artist. The painting connotes of a prayer for peace and prosperity in the land. The doves in the composition symbolise peace, while the cowry shells represent money, wealth, and prosperity.⁴⁹¹



With the kind permission of the artist.

Plate 40

Title: *Peace and Plenty*

Artist: Olu Spencer

Medium: oil on canvas

Size: 4ft x 8ft

Year: 2008

Location: Private collection

The participants in these groups have made their contributions in the definition of the Nigerian identity along ethnic lines by deploying motifs from their various ethnic enclave in the transmission of cultural themes to modern signs and language. Thereby keeping these values in the consciousness of the Nigeria of today. The idea of art's inability to remain

⁴⁹¹ Olatunde Barber, 'The impact of Atelier training upon 21st Century Art,' in, Michael J. Pearce (ed.), *Kitsch & Beauty: The proceedings of The Representational Art Conference 2014*, California: California Lutheran University, 2014, pp. 132-144, 142

autonomous is quite perceptible, art must address its social responsibilities in a modern world where there is an abundance of anarchy including the collapse of aesthetic notions, the collapse of concepts of authenticity and critical language.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹² Freeborn Odiboh, 2005

Conclusion

The National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos (NGMAL) was established in November 1979 by the Federal Department of Culture at the National Theatre complex in Lagos.⁴⁹³ The institution was created to serve as a repository for the artistic creations since the birth of Nigeria as a nation, and promote research, education and appreciation in art and works of art.⁴⁹⁴ Within its display, it was able to create a narrative for the reorientation of the postcolonial Nigerian mind.

The cultural constructions in the National Gallery of Modern Art, Lagos are largely political in nature. They were created by a team of cultural negotiators in the institution who were surrounded by cultural advisers from the federal government of Nigeria, the Society of Nigerian Artists (SNA), members of the Federal Society for Arts and Humanities (FSAH), and academics from Art Departments of Universities across the country with a common understanding of Nigeria's postcolonial agitations.

The resulting cultural fabrication was then disseminated to the public as documentary evidence for the reorientation of the post-independence Nigerian mind. This, therefore, positions the NGMAL within the context of projects of nation-making. In this respect, it is not very different in nature from the act of nation-making in the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC in the USA. There, the collection of American art displays the founding fathers of the nation and their contributions to nation-making and is used to inform Americans of

⁴⁹³ Simon O. Ikpakronyi, 'The development of galleries, national studios of art, structures and functions: National Gallery of Art – Nigeria in focus', Dike, Chike, & Oyelola, Patricia, (Eds.) *The Development of the National Gallery of Art and the National Studios of Art in Nigeria*, Nigeria: National Gallery of Art Nigeria, 2002, 6

⁴⁹⁴ *National Gallery of Art (Amendment) Act 2004*, 12th May, 2004, 1

their common national inheritance. Indeed, these kinds of narrative are a feature of most national galleries around the world.⁴⁹⁵

However, unlike the cosmopolitanism embraced by Western art historians, national art narratives are not built around universal aesthetic discourses but instead connect directly to the characteristics and aspirations of the nation. This thesis has sought to understand this relationship between art and nation in the Nigerian context. It deploys the acute lenses of Pan-Africanism and the *négritude* movement to locate the distinctive characteristics of its discourse.

As this thesis has demonstrated, the NGMAL is significantly located in the Nigerian cultural field, between government and society. The NGMAL is characterised as an intermediary which organises dialogues on societal concerns. This it does in its capacity as an official art institution which deploys national resources to create narratives that are authorised by state power. With its position as a national institution, the NGMAL is situated at the top hierarchy of the art field in Nigeria. This permits the exhibitions displayed at the NGMAL to direct the officially recognised versions of modern art by the nation.

The research findings are summarised in this conclusion. It locates the main themes, narratives, and debates within this topic in relation to the aim and objectives of the research. The conclusion examines how the research has contributed to existing knowledge about the NGMAL.

⁴⁹⁵ Simon Knell, *National galleries: the art of making nations*, New York: Routledge, 2016

Research findings

This research has set out to investigate the use of modern art in Nigeria for the re-shaping of the Nigerian mind, with the purpose of locating the construction of Nigeria's national identity through its art. There are several reasons to analyse the National Gallery of Modern Art, Lagos: (i) the NGMAL performs the acts of negotiating the national identity and canonisation of modern art in Nigeria, (ii) the NGMAL deploys modern art in Nigeria to help citizens locate themselves in relation to the national story through its collection, (iii) the Pan-Africanism and *négritude* movements have been deployed for the construction of narratives for the rehabilitation of Nigeria/Africa and African diasporic identity and dignity in the institution.

This thesis contends therefore that several different internal and external agents or factors shaped the development, regularisation, and structure of the institution's narratives. The next two sections describe the core research findings, and each describes a particularly interesting narrative arc within the research. They assemble narratives into a story of how the NGMAL has emerged as an institution in which the memories of multifarious groups in Nigeria are embedded. The third section proffers recommendations for improving the NGMAL as identified during the research. The thesis has exposed, through a study of dialogues between related internal and external actors, the little-known reality of the NGMAL's trajectory.

Negotiations of national identity and canonisation of modern art in Nigeria by the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos

In its negotiations of the Nigerian national narrative and identity, the NGMAL has attempted a plural negotiation of the various cultures within the country, by facilitating their communication with each other and highlighting the importance of each local situation in the face of a multi-ethnic country. The institution has attempted the adoption of a local

significance, which permits it to continue its performance as an exemplary location and outposts of Nigerian culture.

The NGMAL depicts Nigeria from the geographically specific perspective, authoring the nation's collective qualities as it hints at what the desired virtues of individual citizens ought to be. This study shows how the dynamics of art nationalism in Nigeria lead to institutionalisation or non-institutionalisation of national art and how the national canon of art is articulated in Nigeria. It analyses the process of authenticating Nigerian art culture and politics by the NGMAL, as the institution creates perception for the viewers as they encounter the image. An act which produces the belief that positive imagery led to a positive perception of the situation and at the same time, any diversion from such imagery is considered dangerous.⁴⁹⁶

The research has discussed narratives of how modern art in Nigeria has been used as an essential part of both local and national socio-economic frameworks for addressing the recent past and present through the related discourses of Pan-Africanism and the *négritude* movement as key discourses to finding the national perspective in Nigerian art. It also examines the deployment of the Pan-Africanism movement and the *négritude* movement for the rehabilitation of Africa and African diasporic identity and dignity.

It examines Nigerian Modern art illustrating how the works have been used to re-educate and inspire to create a new Nigerian. It evidences the biographies of objects with the idea that objects have life histories just as people do, which can help visitors make

⁴⁹⁶ Aliya Abykayeva-Tiesenhausen, *Central Asia in art: from Soviet orientalism to the new republics*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2016, 173

connections with the exhibits.⁴⁹⁷ It interrogates the cultural, political, and economic potentials of this collection, with the aim of situating the institution into the Nigerian story. An analysis of the enactment of the relationship between the civil society, patriotism, power, identity and nationalism in the National Gallery of Modern Art, Lagos (NGMAL) is done to aid the understanding of the complexities of the relationship between the NGMAL and the societies it serves.

This research interrogates key concepts related to the negotiations of national identity and canonisation of modern art in Nigeria by the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos. It also considers the use of modern art in Nigeria to help citizens locate themselves in relation to the national story through the collection of the NGMAL. Due to its status as the pioneering branch of the NGA in Nigeria, and its location in the former capital and the most populous state of Nigeria, the NGMAL is rightly positioned to influence the socio-political dynamics of the country with its narration of the national identity politics of the nation. It reveals the shared as well as the distinctive aspects of the construction of the Nigerian national identity through art. It locates the geographic and cultural breadth of its expressions in Nigeria, as it recalls the memories of ancient Nigerian civilizations for restoration of the dignity and confidence of the people.

The findings of this study have built debates around the interpretations of art works in the collection of the NGMAL for the construction of the Nigerian national-identity and the reorientation of the mind of the citizens. The institution has been able to reorganise the works in its collection in the address of the societal concerns within the country's borders. It has put

⁴⁹⁷ Francesca Monti & Suzanne Keene, *Museums and Silent Objects: Designing Effective Exhibitions*, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013, 16

together works from the FESTAC celebration and works commissioned to address its purpose in the construction of this identity. The research positions the NGMAL as an institution of national collection and display, which articulates and negotiates the Nigerian national identity politics.

Nigerian Modern art and Identity constructions: The thesis analysis Nigerian modern art by connecting the role of pre-colonial Nigerian art traditions, the effect of colonialism on Nigerian art, the struggles for emancipation, and the actions of post-colonial governments to the concept of art and national identity in Nigeria in the 21st century. It also highlights the impact of changes in the economic status of the people, and the introduction of Western education, as producing a process of creolization. These factors had a profound influence on the creation of national identity in Nigeria.

Furthermore, this thesis identifies two trajectories from which it argues the philosophical base for the articulation of the Nigerian identity through art. It describes modern art in Nigeria as originating from both Aina Onabolu and Kenneth Murray's ideals. The artists were expressed as taking on Onabolu's zeal to assert the Nigerian identity and affirmation of the Nigerian artists' ability to create in globally accepted idioms. The thesis also analyses how the artists inculcated Murray's idea of a return to traditional art as a marker of their racial and geographical uniqueness. These they did with the hope that modern art in Nigeria could rise to the status of great art like Nigeria has done in its various pre-colonial art traditions.

Although most writers have pitched Aina Onabolu's and Kenneth Murray's ideologies as two opposing tenets, this thesis rather proposes that both their efforts be looked at from a complementary perspective in the negotiation of the idea of a Nigerian identity through art.

This study, however, contends that a combination of their ideology seems to prevail in the articulation of Nigerian identity through art in varying degrees. Due to the eminence of the roles that these two figures play in the construction of modern art in Nigeria, their positions have been the driving force for most modern art in Nigeria.

The findings of the study build debates around the activities of modern artists in Nigeria whose art was aimed at rejecting and redefining the colonial constructions of African subjectivity. It records the Zaria Art Society's championing of a national identity for the work of contemporary Nigerian artists through the idea of Natural Synthesis. The idea holds that the development of the creative artist's confidence can only be guaranteed within an extensive understanding of the past and a thorough comprehension of the present.⁴⁹⁸

In its exploration of the adaptation of indigenous art forms in Nigerian art modernism, the thesis evaluates the various methods of adapting indigenous art forms by Nigerian artists, revealing the championing of these creative reformations from varying sources. Some artists borrowed from the precolonial sculpture traditions in Nigeria, and they sometimes ventured into experimenting with traditional art forms indigenous to other African nations. Others formulated their art modernism through adaptations from native wall and body painting, symbols, and other craft traditions in the exploration of indigenous Nigerian form.

The works produced affirmed the significance of decolonisation politics to cultural production and modernist artistic performances in Nigeria. They echoed diverse politically engaged situations of the decolonisation process. The act of shaping modernism in Nigerian art at the time was itself a multifaceted political interpretation by Nigerian artists. These

⁴⁹⁸ Sereba Agiobu-Kemmer, 'A Survey of Modern Art' in, Chimurenga (ed.), *FESTAC '77: The 2nd World Festival of Black Art and Culture. Nigeria. Lagos, Kaduna, 15th January -12 February 1977*, Cologne: Afterall, 2019

artists demonstrated in their art that one could be from any region of Nigeria and appropriate the cultural identity of another region within the country. Both ethnic and national identities evolved as part of the modern world that comes into existence from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.⁴⁹⁹

Nigerian art nationalism: Postcolonial modernism as a global mid-twentieth-century phenomenon is categorised by connecting art and nationalist ideology.⁵⁰⁰ The thesis contends that addressing Nigerian modern art is inadequate without taking into consideration the socio-political processes that affect the creation of these works. It investigates and articulates the mythology of a national narrative, interrogating the implied constructions of an identity as characterised by these cultural materials exhibited as vestiges or paraphernalia of the constructed identity. Modern art in Nigeria is multifaceted and when considered and evaluated carefully, it presents a concise picture of the cultural, economic, and political dialogue in the address of Nigeria's post-colonial issues.

The neo-primitivist out-look of some modern artistic expressions in Nigeria can be quite troubling. Judging these artistic expressions and the artists based on the Euro-American standards of artistic production can only define them as failures, as the necessary ingredient for an understanding of these cultural constructs is missing. That is the context in which they were produced. The nationalistic context of their production beclouds the judgement of these works.

⁴⁹⁹ Chika Okeke-Agulu, and John Picton, 'Nationalism and the Rhetoric of Modernism in Nigeria: The Art of Uche Okeke and Demas Nwoko, 1960-1968', *African Arts*, 39(1), 2006, pp. 26-37, 92-93, 28

⁵⁰⁰ Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Postcolonial Modernism: Art and Decolonization in Twentieth-Century Nigeria*, Duke University Press, 2015, 2

Standing back to view them in the light of this thesis has therefore produced a better understanding of the cultural implications of these works and a better understanding of the reasons for their production in certain ways. In accordance with Mesch's summation that the process of national construction is an activity of the state which illustrates how delineations of national identity become cultural activity. She holds that this casting of political art within nation-building politics and of the collective nation is an aspect of modernism that animates culture today.⁵⁰¹

This thesis further reveals the artistic expressions in Nigeria of this era as deploying art in the depiction of the changing roles of generations and the construction of new heroes. The average Nigerian became more culturally sensitive as new cultural institutions were established in the capital city of Lagos and other cosmopolitan cities in the country. Within this new cultural expression, the idea of the new Nigerian was being constructed. This process of creation of identities was further advanced by the establishment of art schools where artists began to engage the concept of asserting the Nigerian pride.

The study agrees with Okeke-Agulu who argues that the nationalistic expressions which emanated from these artists' studios were inspired by the rhetoric and ideologies of decolonisation and nationalism initiated by early Black nationalists. These include Edward Blyden (1832-1912) and Herbert Macaulay (1864–1946) and later by advocates of *négritude* and Pan-Africanism. This therefore reiterates to us that it is impossible to imagine modernism in Nigeria (and Africa) outside a wider context of cultural nationalism.⁵⁰² It also reveals the application of definite and practical indigenous solutions to the requirements of nationalist

⁵⁰¹ Claudia Mesch, *Art and politics: A Small History of Art for Social Change since 1945*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2013, 1

⁵⁰² Okeke-Agulu, 2015

struggles in the country. The idea of the 'political' in modern Nigerian art cannot be exclusively ascribed to the depiction of political themes, but mainly the engagement by artists with the question of subjectivity.⁵⁰³

The study analyses the NGMAL's depiction of key nationalist figures from all the regions of Nigeria in its portrait section as a construct to act as a witness to the rich political past of the nation. The NGMAL organised these portraits to sensitise the populace about the labours of the early Nigerian nationalists to secure Nigeria's independence from colonial rule. In the NGMAL's negotiation of its international diplomacy, the findings of this thesis demonstrate that the National Gallery of art in Nigeria incorporates foreign art in its exhibition as a sign of goodwill towards the nations it exhibits.

In the process of defining the collection of the NGMAL for national consciousness and social stability, the research has interrogated how the exhibition was organised to begin with works which reflected past heroes from various ancient Nigerian traditions. Those myths were defined to anchor the nation into several eras of accomplishments. The NGMAL performed, historical and cultural experiences as a way of articulating past events for its national identity politics. These artefacts are not just evidenced as imaginary or mythological, but documents of history in an act to empower Nigerian modern art renditions over archaeological findings as a preferred medium for locating the contemporary cultural essence in the Nigerian identity. In the articulation of nationalism through religion, the research examines how the NGMAL connects the formalism of the art to the articulation of the essence and spirit of the nation.

⁵⁰³ Okeke-Agulu, 2015, 16

Regional negotiations in art: Africa is a continent of 54 nation states, more than 1,500 languages, and roughly 3,000 ethnic groups, making it the most diverse and culturally rich continent on earth. It is impossible to speak of it as a singularity. Therefore, many scholars on the continent refer not to African art, but to the arts of Africa when speaking of the visual and material cultures produced across a vast range of eras, spaces, and traditions.⁵⁰⁴

Since art has similar manifestations in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa at least, the purpose here is to pinpoint how the location of production acts as a qualifier for the national identity in the art through the identification of those things that makes the art specifically Nigerian. The use of geographically specific ideas, materials, and other local content in the formulation of art inadvertently reveals that what relates all the arts from different regions of Nigeria is the political drive for the expression of the Nigerian national-identity and pride.

The current political situation in Nigeria where all the geo-political zones are clamouring for a return to regionalisation makes it essential to measure the role played by art in the propagation of the nationalist ideas in the various regions of Nigeria. This thesis investigates the exploration of a common past to progress into a future that is socially inclusive for all Nigerians. The findings of this study have revealed the South-Eastern regions and the South-Western regions of the country as the major contenders in the regional negotiations of Nigerian Modern art for the construction of national Identities.

Within this thesis Nigerian artists are analysed as expressing their nationalism through the conception of art works that have brought cultural and geographic cohesion to Nigeria. It

⁵⁰⁴ Aruna D'Souza, 'Visual Activism in Africa: The New Storytellers', April 10, 2019, (online) Available from: <https://www.carnegie.org/topics/topic-articles/african-academics/visual-activism-africa-new-storytellers/> [Accessed: 19 august, 2020]

explores the activities of Nigerian artists borrowing from their indigenous art forms in the articulation of their national identity. It also discusses the intermarrying of cultural ideas across the various geopolitical zones of Nigeria, analysing the artists' adaptations with innuendos of the indigenous expressions of the artist's region. This tendency has given rise to variety and multi-cultural approach in the artworks produced by Nigerian artists, permitting the emergence of greater advancement in the study and practice of art based on the Nigerian multi-ethnic culture and tradition.⁵⁰⁵

The works produced affirmed the significance of decolonisation politics to cultural production and modernist artistic performances in Nigeria. They echoed diverse politically engaged situations of the decolonisation process. These artists demonstrated in their art that one could be from any region of Nigeria and appropriate the cultural identity of another region within the country, as both ethnic and national identities evolved as part of the modern world that comes into existence from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.⁵⁰⁶

The study locates the National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos in the construction of the Nigerian national narrative and social negotiations. It analyses how the NGMAL has unified diverse ethnicities by strengthening the national myth to help all ethnicities under the umbrella of the Nigerian nation to live in peaceful coexistence. It reveals how the NGMAL deploys its power in operation to provide official or dominant knowledge which impart power to those who know and speak them within the society. Thereby using its authority as a state-owned institution to direct the information that must be ingrained into the society.

⁵⁰⁵ Chinedu C. Chukueggu, 'The Origin and Development of Formal Art Schools in Nigeria', *African Research Review, Journal, Ethiopia* Vol. 4(2), 2010, 508

⁵⁰⁶ Kunle Filani, 'Of assumptions and realities: critical perspectives in contemporary Nigerian art' Hourglass Gallery: Lagos, Nigeria, 2014

The findings of the study reveal the process through which the NGMAL articulates the artist as one who is critical of the multiple realities in his society. Their artistic expressions provide the necessary insights for understanding the class struggles and how a critical mass of the Nigerian public interprets leadership, commerce, and culture. Their works created new metaphors of the Nigerian experience to ignite critical thinking and commentary. The thesis has examined how these critical engagements of the artists are reinvented in the address of the societal issues within the country by NGMAL. This is because the information contained within the images about the society are organised to brand crafted ideas rooted in Nigerian nationalism.

The NGMAL's Canon of Nigerian Art: This thesis contends that Africa's journey into modernity follows three trajectories:

- The route into modernity by understudying the West to encourage the transfer of knowledge to Africa.
- The effectively home-grown route in defiance of Western standards of modernity.
- The artists who have been able to work in a blend of these above paths.

These paths are largely responsible for the direction that Nigerian art takes, and some artists have successfully married the ideologies, even though they speak to Africa's modernity from disparate perspectives. Conceivably, the NGMAL has been recognised as the author of the canon of Nigerian art for quite a while. Apart from the fact that its exhibition performs the act of authenticating Nigerian art and artists in its collection by presenting them as the idyllic Nigerian artists. Its position as the most visible state-funded institution handling and exhibiting modern art in Nigeria creates in the mind of its visitors its right to author Nigerian art and artists.

The emergence of the NGMAL on the Nigerian art scene brought a sense of fulfilment to the artists who had long awaited its establishment. Its role in developing the national artistic canon in Nigeria, highlights how elements of the prevailing culture complex were decolonised and reanimated for the purpose of decolonising the Nigerian mind. This thesis contemplates the institution's offerings as tools for the decolonisation of the nation and for the re-education of its people through exhibitions of artistic production and the highlight of the country's cultures. It articulates the existing tensions between regional, ethnic, and national agendas.

The study has discussed the narratives of how Africa's true modern voice and its historical significance have not been properly recognised in its analysis of the authentication of the otherness and misrepresentation of Africa by African Elites in Pan-Africanist art. It holds Africa's postcolonial ruling elites responsible for the construction of a misguided notion of Africa's entry into modern history. The othering and the primitive label in African art cannot be ascribed to Western hegemony alone, it also involves the connivance of the African artists and the people who determine the denotation of African art. However, the significance of Africa's modern voice or identity lies centrally within the historical trajectory of modernism, not only in what it represents as art but as an allegory of what could have liberated and can liberate Africa from the legacies of both its own moribund, if not fossilised traditions and what has been imposed on it by colonialism in the name of modern progress.⁵⁰⁷

Consequently, the narratives illustrated through a historicised study of this institution positions it as an institution that is uniquely separate from those documented in the West, as

⁵⁰⁷ Rasheed Araeen, 'Modernity, Modernism and Africa's Authentic Voice', *Third Text*, 24(2), 2010, pp. 277-286, 277

the collection of the NGMAL reflects the peculiarities of the country's socio-cultural and political developments. This establishes it within the framework of an institution authoring the cultural identity of a particular people. Deriving their stimuli from the tenets of Pan-Africanism and the *négritude* movement, the collection reveals artist working in multifarious styles in the expression of their African identity, ranging from expressions in high realism to the completely absurd.

Rehabilitation of Africa and African diasporic identity and dignity through the Pan-Africanism movement and the *négritude* movement

The ideals of Pan-Africanism were honed for the contemplation of a general African worldview which advocates for a society which is a communion of souls instead of a horde of individuals. It sets an ideal rallying point for people of African origins despite coming from different ethno-cultures to unite with one voice against colonialism, neo-colonialism, and imperialism. In its expression as the yearning for unity, political independence, economic advancement, and the revival of cultural heritage, it was used as a springboard for native intellectual quest for nationalism on the African continent and in the African diaspora based on their common colonial experience.

This Pan-Africanist vision was that of restitution and re-engineering of racial psyche, the establishment of distinct African identity and the respect of its long-suppressed attributes. The acts of these Pan-Africanist activities challenge preconceived Western conception of Africa's historical relevance, which have tentatively been established by Western bias. They attempt to correct the opinions that racially segregates the Self from the Other. Thereby, positioning the innovation of free human creation above the politics of art and culture.

The findings of this study have built debates that highlight the Pan-Africanism movement and the *négritude* movement as key factors for the rehabilitation of Africa and African diasporic identity and dignity. It investigates the Pan-African movement's negotiations of the question of African nationalism. It evaluates the engagement with the issue of the African pride and the activities of African nationalists in their attempt to recreate favourable conditions for promoting nationalist interests across the various geographies of Africa.

This thesis has rather emphasised the significance of the movements of Pan-Africanism and its *négritude* offshoot in the address of the politics of modern and contemporary Nigerian art. It defines how the influence of these political movements have evolved and influenced the form and content of modern and contemporary art in Nigeria. It also reveals how these movements have directed the flow of the art narrative in Nigeria by locating the connections of modern art in Nigeria to the political implications of these movements.

The thesis deploys an Afrocentric approach as an alternate method to the usual tendency to appreciate African art on the basis of its ethnographic context, aesthetic quality, and origin by privileging this study through the lenses of African art rooted in African theories and philosophy, such as the Pan-African movement and the *négritude* philosophy. It is situated within the political ideologies of African leaders like Kwameh Nkrumah and Léopold Sedar Senghor to rid its contextualisation of the bias of ethnographic museums which merely situate the art of Africans within the limits of their colonial experiences. An act that accentuates the construction of otherness and strangeness of this genre of art.

It questions the complexity of the Nigerian and by extension the African identity from a resolutely politico-Afrocentric perspective, by contrasting the cultural multiplicity of the of

the nation, along the route of a study which traverses African nationalism in slavery, colonialism, and independence. It narrates this art as resisting all geographical and stylistic pigeonholes.

In the deployment of Pan-African art for the definition of African Identity, cultural objects are animated and reorganised into a powerful visual narrative of cultural heroes. This idealistic historic documentation focuses on recognisable themes such as social injustice, violence, political arbitrariness, and generational conflicts. They developed creative adaptations as direct stimuli for the resuscitation of the artistic tradition of their region as a response to the synergy propagated in the *négritude* philosophy.

The research examines the desire for self-governance to regain the former glory of pre-colonial Africa. It positions a selection of activities in Africa, the Caribbean and Europe, in demonstration of how Pan-Africanists of the 20th century used due diligence to develop their political response to the subjugation of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The Pan-African activities recorded in this thesis form some of the major stimuli for the liberation of Africa and its diaspora, and to a large extent, these events are also responsible for what Africa has become and where Africa is going.

The ideals of Pan-Africanism purpose the unification of Africa to ease the establishment of individual territorial movements aimed at the complete liberation of all Africa from foreign domination. Its exponents believe that the deprivation of freedom occasioned by Africa's over dependence on the West would be curtailed through unification of African States. The movement was therefore organised as both a philosophy and plan of action for liberating Africa to reflect the communitarian nature of African traditional society.

Its ideals were governed by the communal way of life observed in most traditional African societies, which should be preserved and propagated as the foundation of society.

These were expressed in the organisation of African traditional festivals and arts for sensitising modern-day Africans about their Africanity. They were used to assert the argument of Black pride as well as assert the Blackness and African pride of the African Americans. These activities especially helped to alleviate the issue of belonging for the African Americans as they were able to finally trace their roots and discover that they came from a place with a rich historical background where they were not always enslaved.

This discovery was translated into a sense of pride and the understanding of belonging to a community of nations of their homogeneity, and the continent which is the cradle of human civilization for the African Americans. A contemporary reworking of old themes were enlivened in the works of some Nigerian artists who inspired the focus and perspective of some Black American artists like Charles R. Searles during the FESTAC celebration.⁵⁰⁸

FESTAC 77 was the culmination of the many inventions, diversity of expression and the myriad of ways Black people are identifiable with African heritage. It is contained in the testament of talents, which were displayed as moving reaffirmations of an inspired humanity, despite slavery, colonialism, discrimination, apartheid, and genocide.⁵⁰⁹ FESTAC proved to be an assessment of the Black folk's contributions to human knowledge and civilization which was considered as the first step towards mental liberation for Africans globally. The festival renewed contact with the past and opened doors to the future.

⁵⁰⁸ Robert Ferris Thompson, 'Black art and culture: Outburst of creativity', in, Chimurenga (ed.), *FESTAC '77: The 2nd World Festival of Black Art and Culture. Nigeria. Lagos, Kaduna, 15th January -12 February 1977*, Cologne: Afterall, 2019

⁵⁰⁹ Arthur Monroe, 'FESTAC 77-THE SECOND WORLD BLACK AND AFRICAN FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND CULTURE: LAGOS, NIGERIA', in, *The Black Scholar*, 9 (1), BLACK LABOR (September 1977), Taylor & Francis, Ltd. pp. 34-37

When it comes to healing certain wounds, the arts are deployed in the service of a nation to deal with such situations for therapeutic and psychological healing. According to Irele, for the negro, suppression is an illness, requiring healing mentally and physically.⁵¹⁰ The thesis also describes this dilemma as providing an enabling environment for the emergence of the Pan-Africanist consciousness which has significantly influenced the Nigerian's perception of who s/he is. This was deployed in moulding their form of resistance to colonialism and other forms of neo-colonialism.

The socio-political translation of the *négritude* movement: The origins of the *négritude* movement can be traced partly to the activities of the Negro Renaissance movement in America as it sets the precedence in all the areas of feeling in which the movement would adapt its articulate expression.⁵¹¹ Emanating from very strong emotional conflicts, the movement evolved a framework of ideas, which privileged its literature and ideology with the perceptiveness of the inner workings and counteractions of the Black folks to the West. The movement politically legitimised the mystification of the African past and its essential contrarities to a colonially ordered modernity with the aim of positioning it as a tool for Africa's modernisation process.

This study has examined the *négritude* philosophy as a major catalyst in Pan-African activism for the attainment of independence in Africa and its diaspora. Léopold Sédar Senghor is located in the centre of the narrative, because of the centrality of the role that his version of the movement played in the idealisation of African post-colonial nationalism. The thesis navigates the process through which the movement politically legitimised the mystification

⁵¹⁰ Abiola Irele, 'Négritude or Black Cultural Nationalism', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 3(3), 1965, pp. 321-48

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, 335

of the African past and its essential contrarities to a colonially ordered modernity with the aim of positioning it as a tool for Africa's modernisation process.

This research analyses the performative translation of the philosophy to reveal the conceptual core of négritude's engagement with politics and art in its acts of cultural nationalism. It also expresses it as Senghor's philosophical reflections on the Black soul, African emotion, and the recognition of Africa's contributions to the world. For Senghor, culture is the most pertinent basis and the aim of politics, as he finds that both respond to one another.⁵¹²

Senghor championed the mobilisation of the African past for redesignating Africa's cultural aesthetics to an essential foundational role of revolutionising the past for encouraging and enlightening Africans of the intrinsic value of their own civilisation. Principal to Senghor's performative political theory was his policy of engagement with Europe through strategic partnership, calculated relationship, and prudent agreements. He saw no rational or moral hindrances in making tactical use of the resources of imperialism and later neo-colonialism, provided these could be implemented to aid and accelerate Africa's shift to modernity.⁵¹³

The négritude movement was made manifest in African art by identifying and highlighting some of Africa's high traditional cultures as stimuli for the renegotiation of Africa's quest into modernity. This thesis contends that the protracted external cultural influences on cultures around the globe from several millennia make it illogical to think of an untainted human essence in any culture today whether African, Asian, or Western. The

⁵¹² Léopold Sédar Senghor, *On African Socialism*, New York and London: Praeger, 1964

⁵¹³ Denis Ekpo, 'From Négritude to Post-Africanism', *Third Text*, 24 (2), 2010, 177-187, 179

acculturative process of the African is irremediable since his dissociation from his culture makes a return to any kind of complete authenticity impossible.⁵¹⁴

In the analysis of *négritude* in socio-cultural reconstruction of Africa, the thesis contends that the excessive glorification of the cultural nationalism agenda in Africa has proven to be the undoing of Africa's modernisation project. The thesis finds that allowing the essence of the cultural nationalist spirit to act upon the goal of Africa's modernity project, produced some detrimental results.

Research recommendations

A major significance of this thesis is that it has been able to capture the NGMAL in its act of nation building. This situation might not be so in a few years' time, as things are fast changing at the moment. At the point of the conclusion of this research the NGMAL had been closed, as the National theatre which houses the NGMAL is closed for repairs. The institution was seldom opened throughout the year 2020 and all of the exhibits have been removed from its display into the store. My experience of the institution during the course of this research reveals the NGMAL's steady decline in recent years.

Due to the internal politics of the Ministry of Culture and Information in Nigeria, the institution has been in a tussle with its landlord, the National Theatre for several years. If the institution does not secure a proper facility for its collection, most of its exhibits will go off the display. These ministries are usually comprised of political figures with little or no interest in the processes that govern the cultural sector. This results in cultural policies that are driven by the dictates of politics of the day. To salvage the Nigerian art and art professionalism, the

⁵¹⁴ Irele, 1965, 338

Nigerian government needs to play its role by putting proper infrastructures and policies necessary for the development of art in place.

Apart from all the issues outlined in the thesis as bedevilling the NGA, the reforms in the 2014 'White Paper on the Report of the Presidential Committee on Restructuring and Rationalization of Federal Government Parastatals, Commissions and Agencies', the federal government of Nigeria proposes the merger of the National Gallery of Art with the National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) in Nigeria.⁵¹⁵ This merger will further cripple an already crippled institution in terms of the funds that will be allowed to reach the institution. The NCMM in Nigeria is already better established and better funded than the NGA. Across the whole country, the NCMM only has a room dedicated to exhibiting modern and contemporary art. This is an indication of how much the modern and contemporary art will be able to thrive in such a merger.

Despite all its hiccups, the NGMAL has been deployed to act as vehicles for positive social change, as the patrimony of cultural wealth only belongs to those gifted with the ability of arrogating it for their use. There remains a lot of work left to be done in terms of articulating the purpose and the aims of the National Gallery. All indications in this study point to the idea that the state which happens to be the sponsor of the NGMAL is also responsible for stifling its growth and performance, by not making available the necessary infrastructure for its effective performance.

Whereas this research agrees that Africa should work within the understanding of the merger of the traditional African culture and what obtains in the global dominant cultures.

⁵¹⁵ Federal government of Nigeria, 'WHITE PAPER ON THE REPORT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMITTEE ON RESTRUCTURING AND RATIONALIZATION OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PARASTATALS, COMMISSIONS AND AGENCIES', Lagos: The Federal Government Printers, Lagos, March 2014

The research also finds that it is not expedient for Africa to be solely dependent on traditional African cultures as its route to modernity, as this has been the case since independence and the results are evident for everyone to see. What Africa has produced is a modernity that has not translated much to tangible progression into modern societies.

Therefore, the research suggests a receptiveness to the best global practices, as the cultures that we know as African today are cultures that have been influenced over the years and the centuries by various other cultures. The Islamic culture, the European culture, the Christian culture and so many other things that have actually produced what we know today as the African culture. The dynamic nature of culture in itself suggests that Africa will continue to evolve.

The research finds the need for the negotiation of Africa's desired quest for modernity, to be of necessity hinged on an appropriate approach, which entails the formulation of a well-balanced and structured adaptation of both the traditional African cultures and what is progressive in today's global modernisms. These adaptations should not appear to be tilted by any form of bias, as this would only return the project 360 degrees back to where it started from. The direction to which this evolution will take now depends on where Africa derives its stimuli. If the aim of Africa is an evolution into a modern society which benefits Africa and all its issues, then Africa needs to evolve along the set patterns of modernity. Threading the well-established routes that other successful regions have travelled.

All in all, it will be necessary for Africa to critically revisit the ideals of *négritude*, as it provides the needed avenue for collective healthy doses of self-esteem and a constant reminder of who the African really is. This will not only fill the gap but will afford future

generations of Africans the chance to understand their past, which will furnish them with the necessary tools required to mould an appropriate future for themselves.

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Appendix

No.	Name	Position	Date	Venue
1.	Okui Enwezor	Director Haus Der Kunst, Munich.	2 September 2016	Haus der Kunst, Munich Germany.
2.	Simon Ikpakronyi	Director, National Gallery of Art, Nigeria. (He referred me to his book).	9 August 2017	In Lagos via the telephone.
3.	Mr. John Egwatu	Curatorial staff, NGMAL.	9 August 2017	National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos
4.	Mr. James Itodo	Curatorial staff, NGMAL.	9 August 2017	National Gallery of Modern Art Lagos
5.	Freeborn Odibo	Associate Professor of Art History, University of Benin, Edo state, Nigeria.	10 August 2017	University of Benin, Edo state, Nigeria.
6.	Mike Omoighe	Art lecturer, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, Nigeria.	10 August 2017	University of Benin, Edo state, Nigeria.
7.	Ba'Sehinde Ademuleya	Associate Professor of Fine Art, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun state, Nigeria.	12 August 2017	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun state, Nigeria.
8.	Segun Ajiboye, Ph.D.	Fine Art lecturer, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun state, Nigeria.	14 August 2017	Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun state, Nigeria.
9.	Segun Adejumo	Artist and curator of One Draw Gallery, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria.	16 August 2017	Mydrim gallery, Ikoyi, Lagos, Nigeria.

10.	Dozie Igweze	Curator of Hourglass Gallery, Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria.	16 August 2017	979 Saka Jojo St, Victoria Island, Lagos.
11.	Afolabi Kofo-Abayomi	Art dealer and collector.	16 August 2017	Ikoyi, Lagos state, Nigeria.
12.	Akinwale Onipede Ph.D.	Fine Art lecturer, University of Lagos, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos state, Nigeria	17 August 2017	University of Lagos, Nigeria.
13.	Toyin Alade	Contemporary Nigerian artist	18 August 2017	Abayomi Barber's studio in Ijoko Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria.
14.	Abayomi Barber	Artist and retired Art Professor	18 August 2017	Abayomi Barber's studio in Ijoko Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria.
15.	Abiodun Olaku	Contemporary Nigerian artist. He declined to speak on the National Gallery of Art.	19 August 2017	Universal Studios of Art, National Theatre, Lagos.
16.	Olu Amoda	Fine art lecturer, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos. He refused to talk about the National Gallery of Art.	19 August 2017	Yaba College of Technology
17.	Paul Chike Dike	Former Director General of the National Gallery of Art, Nigeria.	6 September 2017	In Abuja via the telephone.
18.	Chika Okeke-Agulu	Professor at Department of Art and Archeology, Princeton University. He declined the interview and referred me to his book.	29 September 2017	Positioning Nigerian Modernism conference at the TATE Modern London.
19.	Oliver Enwonwu	President of the Society of Nigerian Artists.	29 Sept. 2017	Positioning Nigerian Modernism conference at the TATE Modern London.

20.	Olakunle Filani	Art lecturer, College of Education, Akoka, Yaba, Lagos state, Nigeria.	4 Aug. 2020	In Abuja on via the phone.
21.	Simon Ikpakronyi	Acting Director General of the National Gallery of Art, Nigeria.	9 Aug. 2020	Abayomi Barber's studio in Ijoko Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria.
22.	Simon Ikpakronyi	Director at the National Gallery of Art, Nigeria.	19 Sept. 2020	Abayomi Barber's studio in Ijoko Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria.
23.	Olumuyiwa Spencer	Artist and retired staff of the curatorial services, National Council for Arts and Culture, Nigeria.	19 Sept. 2020	Abayomi Barber's studio in Ijoko Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria.
24.	Mr Fatai Abass	Retired technical officer, National Gallery of Art, Nigeria	19 Sept. 2020	Abayomi Barber's studio in Ijoko Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria.
25.	Mr. Aminu	Curatorial staff, NGMAL	19 Sept. 2020	Abayomi Barber's studio in Ijoko Ota, Ogun state, Nigeria.

Table 1. The list of scheduled interviews