

transcript in transgressive ways, Chinese Canadian women writers have successfully transformed it into a *public* transcript, portending a turning of the tables. (148)

Given that these books were published between 1989 and 2000, the newness of the “feminist praxis” is questionable by 2013. However, *Transgressive Transcripts* provides intelligent and lucid, though somewhat predictable, readings.

Eleanor Ty

---

Ode Ogede. *Intertextuality in Contemporary African Literature: Looking Inward*. Lanham: Lexington-Rowman, 2011. Pp. xvii, 227. US\$65.00.

Ode Ogede’s *Intertextuality in Contemporary African Literature: Looking Inward* has recuperated the term *intertextuality* from its two decades of disuse in a detailed discussion of the intra-continental dialogues among major African writers. He argues that “in order for a more compendious understanding of the field [of African literature] to emerge, intertextuality must take a more central stage rather than the passing nod which it currently enjoys” (209).

The book is a significant study of disjunctions and continuities among African artists. Although its opening paragraphs might wrongly suggest that its subject is influence, its actual focus is on how African writers re-write one another creatively. Divided into five chapters and a short conclusion, it juxtaposes Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Jagua Nana* (1961) and his fellow Nigerian Flora Nwapa’s *One is Not Enough* (1981) in terms of the writers’ representation of prostitution; the Nigerian Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966) and the Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) as satirical representations of the post-independence situation; Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease* (1965) and the South African/Botswanan Bessie Head’s *Maru* (1971) for their representation of minorities within an ethnic group; and works by Okinba Launko and Chimalum Nwankwo for thematic echoes of their fellow Nigerian Christopher Okigbo. Ogede succeeds in showcasing the diversity of African literature and relocating it from what he considers regionalism.

Ogede reads individual works with great sensitivity and attention to detail. Handling a topic which could easily draw a critic to Franco Moretti’s con-

cept of “distant reading,” he does a superb job in offering the main novels under study granular critical attention. His approach is trans-disciplinary and deeply comparative, sometimes drawing on medieval studies and Elizabethan theatre to offer a fresh perspective on modern African cultural expression. Another major strength of the book is that it draws on some African scholarship and debates generated in African institutions, something rare in African literary studies in the West, where critics often cite only a coterie of colleagues in privileged institutions. He uses accessible language, a refreshing change from fashionable critical jargon. Ogede further includes writers who have not been canonized even in African critical circles. In a field in which discussions are limited to a clique of African writers published in Western venues, it is refreshing to read a sustained analysis of works by Launko and Nwankwo, which have rarely been studied.

While this book will be useful to students of African literature and comparative postcolonial studies in general, it has several weaknesses. Firstly, Ogede’s claim that “there has been a flat denial that influence exists among African writers” is an exaggeration. Scholars such as James Ogude have studied the intertextuality among Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Sembene Ousmane, and Pepetela, who share a socialist vision. Quite a bit of ink has also been spilled regarding the influence of the Ugandan Okot p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino* (1966) on the poetics of East Africa, where critics refer to the “song school” of poetry to register Okot’s influence on the region’s verse. There are several essays on the influence of Flora Nwapa on Buchi Emecheta, and recent scholarship has explored the intertextuality between Calixthe Beyala and Ben Okri. Indigenous-language criticism is alert to the way writers convivially borrow from one another. For example, K.W. Wamitila has noted the “*mwingiliano-matini*” (intertextuality) between works by Kiswahili writers S.A. Mohamed and John Habwe, whose characters travel across novels by different authors. And discussion of the influence on the modern African writer of the traditional oral artist is ubiquitous. One would expect the footnote punctuating this statement to list scholars who have disavowed intra-African influences, but it lists only critics who have conducted the supposedly weaker studies of Western influences on African literature. Ironically, a few pages later, Ogede cites Florence Stratton’s comment that African women writers should be read as responding to their more established male counterparts.

Secondly, although his title announces a work on “contemporary” African writing, Ogede focuses mainly on works published in the 1960s by foundational authors, writing that would better be categorized as “classical.” He squanders many opportunities to discuss twenty-first century writers. For instance, the chapter on the representation of minorities within African cul-

tures in Head's *Maru* and Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* could have included books such as *Groaning Passage* (2003) by the prolific Nigerian novelist Promise Ogochukwu Okekwe. Okekwe's work highlights the theme of the *osu* outcastes that Achebe subordinates to the grand theme of colonialism, anti-colonial struggles, and the nationalist disappointment with the post-independence condition. Okekwe is also remarkable in the way she responds to works by Achebe and other foundational Nigerian writers in treating the theme of lesbianism. The chapter on Okigbo could have been updated to cover the Nigerian female writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) not only cites a poem by Achebe dedicated to Okigbo but also has an Okigbo-like character, Okeoma. Adichie features in a hurried footnote in Ogede's book but not in relation to Okigbo. Being predictably West African (nay, Nigerian) despite its skepticism about regionalism, the book ignores the Kenyan Ali Mazrui's novel *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*. Ogede may have omitted Mazrui and Adichie because he does not consider cross-genre references, although he mentions their importance in the concluding chapter. It would also be interesting to study the influence of the Nigerian foundational writer Amos Tutuola's English on writers like his countryman Ken Saro-Wiwa (*Soza-Boy*) and Saro-Wiwa's influence on twenty-first century writers of child-soldier novels, such as the Nigerian Uzodinma Iweala, especially in their use of non-Standard, Pidgin-like English. The influence of the Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah is also clear in the South African S. Kello Duiker's novels, including *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001), where one of the characters is reading Armah's novel. Duiker's departure from Armah's homophobia would be interesting to explore.

Thirdly, Ogede's book traps itself in the old-fashioned Afrocentric "moving the center from Europe" paradigm. Although Ogede borrows eclectically from Western and African theories, he encourages a limited vision of African texts as dialoguing exclusively with fellow texts from Africa. Such an approach would occlude African literature's influences on other cultures. For example, there are echoes of Achebe not only in books by fellow African writers but also, for example, in the Maori novels by Witi Ihimaera. Nevertheless, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is replicated most often in African novels about the African's encounter with colonial modernity. These other "Things Fall Apart" open with scenes reminiscent of Okonkwo's wrestling match; in the Ugandan Arthur Gakwandi's *Kosiya Kifefe* (1997), the eponymous character is at one moment in his youth declared, like Achebe's Nwoye in *Things Fall Apart*, to be "old enough to impregnate a woman."<sup>1</sup> By limiting himself to dialogue only between African texts, Ogede does not consider instances in which African texts re-purpose differently the same colonial text, such as

the ways Achebe and Ama Ata Aidoo both revise Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

Lastly, if we accept that African cultures are cosmopolitan and open to the rest of the world, doesn't focusing solely on the dialogue between pairs of African writers promote reverse racism? Ogede could have mentioned the dialogue between J.M. Coetzee and twenty-first-century black South African writers like Phaswane Mpe. African literature is no longer embarrassed about revealing its sources (Western or not) as Ogede suggests (2–3, 4–5, 205); it is we Western-based Afrocentric critics who are embarrassed on its behalf, probably because our area of study might appear belated in a discipline where supposedly competing sub-fields go back to medieval and Hellenistic times. As Ngugi admits in his latest collection of essays, “even if they wanted, the writers from the colony could not divest themselves of the literature and culture they had imbibed in the [colonial] master's classroom” (42). To me, inward-looking discourse should examine literary references, African or non-African, in terms of how they are relevant to internal governance and aesthetics. Ogede also does not give enough attention to the intertextuality that results from institutional networks, especially the African school system, which exposes future writers to certain kinds of literature.

Despite these conceptual weaknesses, Ogede's book is extremely useful in provoking debates about Africa's intra-continental influences, literary Pan-Africanism, and the value of Afrocentrism in a cosmopolitan Africa today.

#### Notes

- 1 Achebe's Okonkwo is expressing his worry that his son Nwoye is lazy and immature (58); in Gakwandi's work, a government official points out in the same words that Kifefe is big enough to start going to school (36).

#### Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann, 1958. Print.
- Gakwandi, Arthur. *Kosiya Kifefe*. Nairobi: East African Educational, 1997. Print.
- Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Globalectis: Ngugi wa Thiong'o: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*. New York: Columbia UP, 2012. Print.

Evan Mwangi