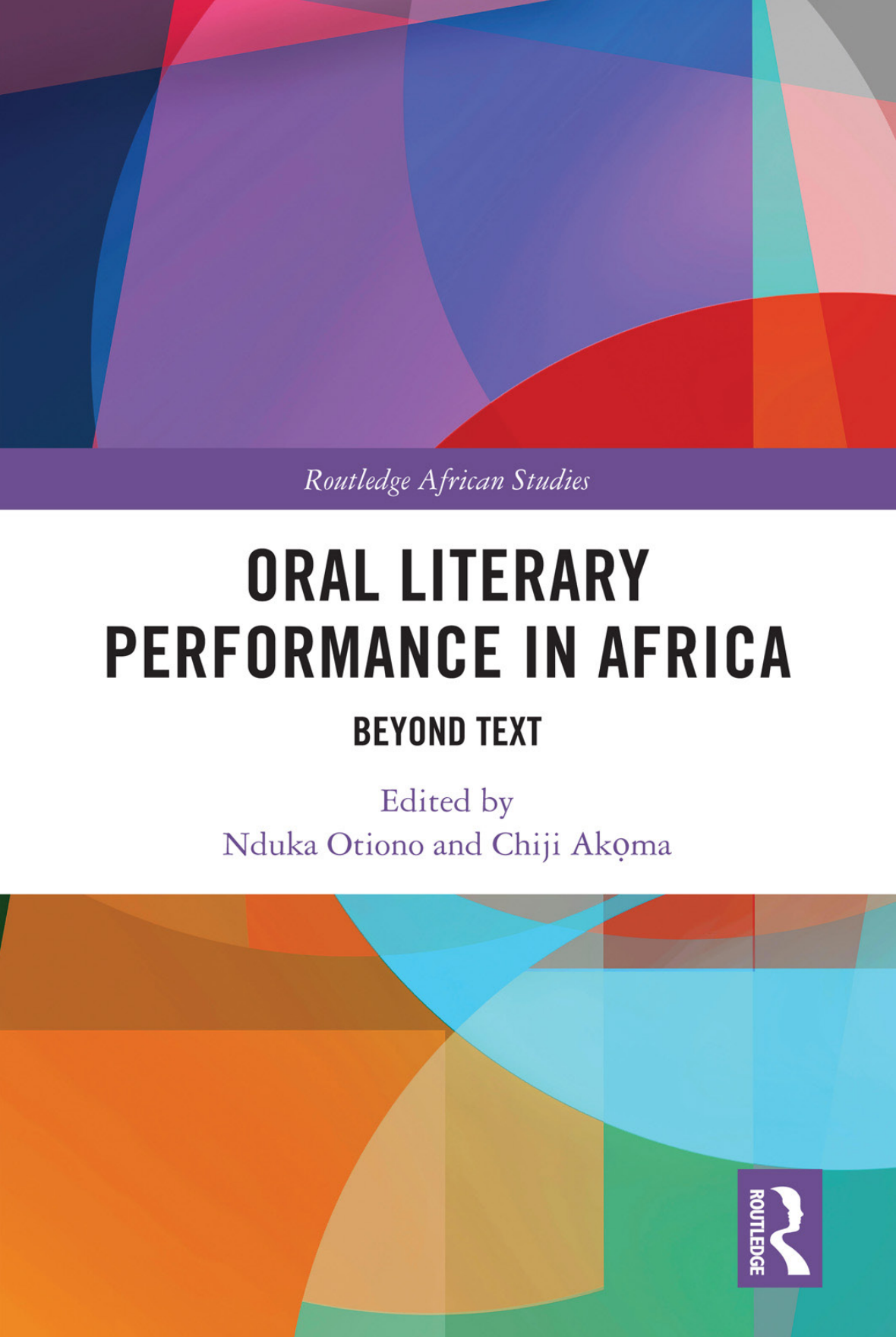
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ORAL LITERARY PERFORMANCE IN AFRICA
BEYOND TEXT
Edited by
Nduka Otiono and Chiji Akọma
ROUTLEDGE

"Of impeccable scholarship, this readable and thoroughly up-to-date book is an important contribution to the field."

Ruth Finnegan, *OBE FBA FAFS FRAI, Emeritus Professor at The Open University, United Kingdom*

"Vital and deeply engaging, this book brings to date 50 years of scholarship in African oral literature and performance, presenting with fresh eyes key issues, debates, and developments in the field. Otiono and Akọma offer a rich platter of exciting studies which every lover of African oral arts, teacher or student, would be happy to dip into to taste its varied intellectual delights. This book is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding African oral literary performance from traditional perspectives to its intermedial transformations in the global digital moment. It honors and continues the intellectual legacy of my former colleague Isidore Okpewho and his amazing breakthrough scholarship on African oral literature."

Carole Boyce-Davies, *Frank H.T. Rhodes Professor of Humane Letters, Cornell University, USA, and Former President of the African Literature Association*

"Reading *Oral Literary Performance in Africa: Beyond Text*, edited by Nduka Otiono and Chiji Akọma, one is impressed by the comprehensive nature of the contributions from some of the most important oral performance scholars. This is a robust addition to the literature on African oral literary performance and takes its place alongside the best works of Ruth Finnegan and Isidore Okpewho. Simply, intensely historical and artistic; a job well done!"

Molefi Kete Asante, *author of* An Afrocentric Manifesto *and Professor and Chair of the Department of African American Studies at Temple University, USA*

"The publication of *Oral Literary Performance in Africa: Beyond Text*, edited by Nduka Otiono and Chiji Akọma marks a seminal moment in the project of rethinking Africa and African knowledge in the 21st century. With its eminent range of contributors, its interdisciplinary approach, and its keen attentiveness to the dynamic relation between oral literary performance and everyday life, this collection fills a crucial and indispensable gap in African literary and cultural history. The book returns us to forgotten moments of literary expression in Africa and shifts the center of our debates and reflections on the nature and meaning of the literary."

Simon Gikandi, *Robert Schirmer Professor of English, Princeton University, USA*

"In this book, Nduka Otiono and Chiji Akọma curate some of the major scholars, themes, and highlights of Africa's fascinating oral literary performance tradition. Beyond the engaging thematic focus and scholarship, the book celebrates the exemplary work of the doyens of the study of African oral literature – chiefly, our departed dear colleague, Isidore Okpewho, to whom the book is dedicated. The essays in this collection invoke with reverence, Africa's past oral performance heritage, summon its complex present, and shine light on its future trajectory. A remarkable achievement."

Mbye B. Cham, *Professor and former Director of the Center for African Studies, Howard University, USA*

"This is a most relevant book on orality and the modern electronic age, a compendium of great authors, exceptional research and methodological lessons. It is a great source for those who seek to update their knowledge on African oral performance studies in the global century."

Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah, *author of* African Discourse in Islam, Oral Traditions, and Performance, *and Vice-Chancellor of University of Abuja, Nigeria*

"*Oral Literary Performance in Africa: Beyond Text* presents dynamic and innovative discussion on oral literary nomenclature. This is skilfully done against the backdrop of how 'orality' manages to interact with globalisation, modernity, transition and transformation, as reflected in the four sections of the book … This collection of essays on African oral literatures and performance is ground-breaking and unique. It belongs in every library. It is a 'must-read' for anyone interested in African oral literature and its conceptualisation – from past to present."

Russell H Kaschula, *Senior Professor, African Language Studies Department, University of the Western Cape, South Africa*

"Scholars of African oral literature and performance on both sides of the Atlantic will find in *Oral Literary Performance in Africa: Beyond Text* manifestations of unimpeachable legacies of their mentors and founding fathers. For half a century, African literature has been waiting for this book!"

Ernest N. Emenyonu, *Professor Emeritus of Africana Studies, University of Michigan-Flint, USA; Editor,* African Literature Today

Oral Literary Performance in Africa

This book delivers an admirably comprehensive and rigorous analysis of African oral literatures and performance.

Gathering insights from distinguished scholars in the field, the book provides a range of contemporary interdisciplinary perspectives in the study of oral literature and its transformations in everyday life, fiction, poetry, popular culture, and postcolonial politics. Topics discussed include folklore and folklife; oral performance and masculinities; intermediated orality, modern transformations, and globalisation; orality and mass media; spoken word and imaginative writing. The book also addresses research methodologies and the thematic and theoretical trajectories of scholars of African oral literatures, looking back to the trailblazing legacies of Ruth Finnegan, Harold Scheub, and Isidore Okpewho.

Ambitious in scope and incisive in its analysis, this book will be of interest to students and scholars of African literatures and oral performance as well as to general readers interested in the dynamics of cultural production.

Nduka Otiono is Associate Professor and Graduate Program Supervisor at the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University. He is the author and co-editor of several books of creative writing and academic research including *Polyvocal Bob Dylan: Music, Performance, Literature* (2019) and *Wreaths for a Wayfarer* (2020).

Chiji Akọma is Associate Professor of African and African Diaspora Literatures with joint appointments in the Department of English and the Department of Global Interdisciplinary Studies at Villanova University. He is the author of *Folklore in New World Black Fiction: Writing and the Oral Traditional Aesthetics* (2007).

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Oral Literary Performance in Africa

Beyond Text

Edited by Nduka Otiono and Chiji Akọma

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Despite all kinds of claims made for literacy, there's really a sense in which they can just be seen as claims; that they have not supplanted the validity of oral testimonies, of oral traditions, in the representation of reality.

– Isidore Okpewho, Interview, *Beyond Text*

It would not be overstating the matter to note that in … Africa, *art* is life and vice versa, not a mere reflection of humanity and community, but a directly engaged commentary on how things are or should be; rather than just imitation, they heighten and intensify humanity's most important concerns.

– Roger D. Abrahams (1983:9)

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To Isidore Okpewho:
mentor, teacher, and quintessential artist-as-a-scholar

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Contents

Acknowledgements

This book has grown out of a commitment to memorialise the immense contributions of Isidore Okpewho, the foremost scholar of the oral literatures of Africa and award-winning writer, in shaping the field of African oral literary performance studies. Both editors of this book are former students of Okpewho, and like Ruth Finnegan and some other contributors to this collection, are members of the International Society for the Oral Literatures of Africa (ISOLA) which Okpewho had led as President. Some of the contributors are colleagues of Okpewho and Finnegan, and their essays here demonstrate their remarkable interest in exploring new ideas or revisiting older ones with the view to injecting new tools of scholarship into them. A key aspect of this book is an exclusive interview with Okpewho in his twilight years. The interview offers rare insights into his contributions to the field while tracking the evolution of the discipline.

This book, therefore, could not have been possible without the endorsement and contributions of Okpewho and his generation of eminent scholars – Finnegan, Abiola Irele, Harold Scheub, and Ernst R. Wendland. Their works have lighted our paths and enriched this volume. We are privileged to publish them here and are indeed indebted for their vote of confidence. Incidentally, the book has been long in coming. During its long gestation period, three of the eminent contributors passed on: Okpewho, Irele and Scheub. This book is thus a tribute to their indelible intellectual footprints.

The book has also benefited immensely from the contributions of other outstanding scholars. Without their commitment to refining their submissions and their forbearance through the production process this project may not have been completed. We are most grateful to our contributors.

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Finally, to our respective families: We cannot thank you enough for your loving support which ventilated this intellectual endeavour. We are grateful for your encouragement towards the publication of this book.

Contributors

Raphael d'Abdon is Honorary Research Fellow at the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Pretoria. He has published several articles on South African poetry, and is the author of three collections of poems: S*unnyside Nightwalk* (2013); *salt water* (2016); and *the Bitter Herb* (2018). He is the editor of the volumes *I nostri semi/Peo tsa rona. Poeti sudafricani del post-apartheid* (2007) *and Marikana: A Moment in Time* (2013). d'Abdon serves on the editorial board of the international literary journals, *Le Simplegadi* and *Oltroceano*. He is co-founder and member of the executive board for the International Music and Literature Festival of Migrant Cultures Udine Solidale, and member of ZAPP (The South African Poetry Project) and IPP (International Poetry Project) – two international research projects whose chief aims are to promote poetry in schools in South Africa and beyond, and to instil knowledge, understanding and a love of poetry in young learners.

Chiji Akọma is an Associate Professor of English specialising in African and black diaspora literatures, with a joint appointment in the Department of Global Interdisciplinary Studies, Villanova University, USA. He is the author of the book, *Folklore in New World Black Fiction: Writing and the Oral Traditional Aesthetics*. He recently completed two terms as the President of the International Society for the Oral Literatures of Africa (ISOLA). Akọma's essays have appeared in such journals as *Tydskrif, Caribbean Writer, Oral Tradition, Research in African Literatures, African Literature Today*, and *Wasafiri*.

Femi Euba is Louise and Kenneth Kinney and Distinguished Professor of Theatre at Louisiana State University (LSU) in Baton Rouge. Playwright, theatre director, scholar and novelist, he teaches playwriting and dramatic literature at LSU. His published works include: *The Gulf, The Eye of Gabriel, Dionysus of the Holocaust* (plays); *Archetypes, Imprecators and Victims of Fate: Origins and Developments of Satire in Black Drama*; *Poetics of the Creative Process: An Organic Practicum to Playwriting* (books); and *Camwood at Crossroads* (novel). Forthcoming, *Experiencing WS: The Making of an Artist/Scholar* (a memoir).

Chris Dunton is Professor of Literature in English and former Dean of The Faculty of the Humanities at The National University of Lesotho, Roma. Born in the UK and educated at Oxford University, where he took his BA and PhD

degrees, he has worked at universities in Libya, Nigeria, and South Africa, and as a cultural journalist in Cameroon and Peru. Amongst his publications are three books on Nigerian theatre, a forthcoming critical biography of the Cameroonian novelist Ferdinand Oyono, and (with Mai Palmberg) *Human Rights and Homosexuality in Southern Africa*. He has also published a collection of short stories, *Boxing* (2000).

Abiola Irele was a Visiting Professor of African and African American Studies and of Romance Languages and Literatures at Harvard University and Provost at Kwara State University, Nigeria. He was Professor of African, French, and Comparative Literature at Ohio State University, and Editor of *Research in African Literatures* (1992–2003). He was Overseas Fellow at Churchill College, University of Cambridge, and has been a contributing editor to the *Norton Anthology of World Literature*. His other publications include *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, a collective volume co-edited with Simon Gikandi and published in two volumes; *The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*; an annotated edition of Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*; and *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora* (Oxford UP 2001). Professor Irele died on July 2, 2017.

Daniela Merolla is Professor at the *National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations* Sorbonne Paris Cité (USPC). Her research focuses on African oral literary productions as well as on written literatures in African and European languages. She has published, among others, *Transcultural Modernities, Narrating Africa in Europe, Elisabeth Bekers* (with Sissy Helff as co-editor); *Migrant Cartographies: New Cultural and Literary Spaces in Post-Colonial Europe* (with Sandra Ponzanesi as co-editor).

Rosaleen O. B. Nhlekisana is Associate Professor in the Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Botswana, Gaborone. She holds a PhD (2005) in Folklore from Indiana University-Bloomington, USA, an MA (1996) in African Languages and Literature from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA and a BA (1992) in African Languages and Literature and English from the University of Botswana. Her main research interests are in folklore, including but not limited to Setswana traditional and popular songs, proverbs and oral narratives. Her other research interests are in gender studies, cultural studies, performance studies, popular culture and translation and interpretation.

J. O. J. Nwachukwu-Agbada is Professor of English at Abia State University, Nigeria. He has published four novels, a collection of short stories, and book of poetry. He has contributed to over a hundred publications on various aspects of African literature, including *The Igbo Proverb* (2002).

Obiwu teaches English in the Department of Humanities, Central State University, Ohio, United States. He had been Director of The Writing Center at Central State University, Ohio, and has won the Charanjit Rangi

Leadership Award for Faculty Professional Excellence in 2008. His publications include *Unspeakable Protocols* (2009), *Tigress at Full Moon* (2009), and *The World of Barack Obama* (ed., 2009).

Nduka Otiono is Associate Professor and Graduate Program Supervisor at the Institute of African Studies, Carleton University. He is the author and co-editor of several books of creative writing and academic research including, most recently, *Polyvocal Bob Dylan: Music, Performance, Literature* (2019) and *Wreaths for a Wayfarer* (2020). Prior to turning to academia, he was for many years a journalist in Nigeria. His research has appeared in *Journal of Folklore Research, African Literature Today, Canadian Journal of African Studies, Canadian Review of Comparative Literature, Journal of African Cinema*, *Transfers: Interdisciplinary Journal of Mobility Studies, Wasafiri*, and so on. His professional honours include a Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship, Capital Educator's Award for Excellence in Teaching, Carleton University Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Early Career Award for Research Excellence, Carnegie Africa Diaspora Fellowship, and 2018 Black History Ottawa Community Builder Award.

Uta Reuster-Jahn is Lecturer for Swahili at the Asien-Afrika-Institut, University of Hamburg, Germany. Her research interests include Swahili language and literature, including urban youth languages, oral literature, and popular culture. Her PhD research on the oral storytelling of the Mwera in Tanzania appeared in 2002. She has published widely on oral literature, popular literature (including popular music), and urban youth language in Tanzania. She is the author (with Roland Kiessling) of *Lugha ya Mitaani in Tanzania: The Poetics and Sociology of a Young Urban Style of Speaking* (2006), and she co-edited, among others, *Beyond the Language Issue: The Production, Mediation and Reception of Creative Writing in African Languages* (with Anja Oed, 2008), and *Bongo Media Worlds: Producing and Consuming Popular Culture in Dar es Salaam* (with Matthias Krings, 2014).

Aaron L. Rosenberg is Associate Professor at the Centro de Estudios de Asia y África, El Colegio de México. He teaches African literature and coordinates the Swahili language programme at the Centre. In addition to his scholarly work, Rosenberg has worked on music programming for the Africa Bureau of the Voice of America. His publications include books with Africa World Press, The Center for Research on Poverty (CROP) and El Colegio de México Press as well as essays on East African literature and popular songs for the journals, *Research in African Literatures*, *The Journal of the African Literature Association* (*JALA*) and *Wasafiri* amongst others.

Harold Scheub was retired Evjue-Bascom Professor of Humanities, University of Wisconsin, Madison, and author of numerous books in oral literature. His publications include *African Images* (1972); *The Xhosa Ntsomi* (1975); *The Tongue Is Fire: South African Storytellers and Apartheid* (1996); *Story* (1998); *A Dictionary of African Mythology: The Storyteller as Mythmaker* (Oxford, 2000),

The Poem in the Story (2002); and *Trickster and Hero: Two Characters in the Oral and Written Traditions of the World* (2012).

James Tar Tsaaior is Professor of Media and Communication and Alexander von Humboldt Experienced Researcher in Berlin at the University of Potsdam, Germany. Between 2010 and 2011, he was Isaac Newton and Leverhulme Trust Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre of African Studies of the University of Cambridge, UK, and a participant in the International Faculty Programme of the University of Navarra's IESE Business School in Barcelona, Spain. He has also been a visiting scholar at the Centre for African American Studies at Princeton University and at Columbia University's Barnard College. His academic publications include books and articles in refereed journals such as *Africa, Research in African Literatures,* and *Proverbium*. He is the author of three monographs: *African Literature and the Politics of Culture* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), *Nigerian Film Culture and the Idea of the Nation: Nollywood and National Narration* (London: Adonis and Abbey, 2017) and *African Literature and the Poetics of Exile* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021 forthcoming). Tsaaior's research interests include African literatures, postcolonial studies, media/film and cultural studies. His current research focuses on stand-up comedy and the Nigerian postcolonial imaginary.

Ernst R. Wendland is a retired United Bible Societies Translation Consultant who still serves as Professor Extraordinary in the Department of Ancient Studies at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, a dissertation examiner in Zambian languages for the University of Zambia's Department of Literature and Languages, and as Adjunct Professor at several other universities. He earned a BA in Classics and Biblical Languages from Northwestern College (Wisconsin), an MA in Linguistics and a PhD in African Languages and Literature from the University of Wisconsin, and a Master of Sacred Theology in Exegetical Theology from Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. Wendland has lived in Zambia since 1962 and has been an instructor at Lusaka Lutheran Seminary since 1968. He is the author of *Sewero! Christian Drama and the Drama of Christianity in Africa* (2005) and *Poceza M'Madzulo ('Evening Story Time'): Some Chinyanja Radio Plays of Julius Chongo (with English Translations)* (2004).

Hein Willemse is Professor of Literature and Chair of the Department of Afrikaans at the University of Pretoria, South Africa, and editor-in-chief of the peer-reviewed journal, *Tydskrif vir Letterkund*. He had been President of the International Society for Oral Literatures of Africa (ISOLA). Willemse has edited five books on journalism and literature and published *On the Other Side: Black Afrikaans Writers in Afrikaans Literature* (2007), among other scholarly works.

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Introduction

A heritage of African oral literary performance studies

Nduka Otiono and Chiji Akọma

> Africa is celebrated…for the treasure of her voiced and auditory arts, and as the home of oral literature, orature, and orality, and the genesis and inspiration of the voiced traditions of the great diaspora. Commentators from all sides concur on the significance of the oral and the spoken word. Africa has been termed "the oral continent par excellence". (Ruth Finnegan, 2010: 1)

> The study of the African epic was born in denial. (Okpewho 2004: 98)

Introduction

When Ruth Finnegan published her seminal work *Oral Literature in Africa* in 1970, it unarguably marked the first sustained examination of the gamut of African expressive forms – from speech arts to drum language to various oral narratives. Unlike the previous predominantly Western scholarship on African cultural and artistic expressions that was heavily anthropological with a tinge of racial or paternalistic bias, Finnegan's work signalled a conscious effort to locate the vastly unwritten or oral "literatures" in African – societies within a literary aesthetic by highlighting performance contexts.

Finnegan's approach to African verbal arts was notable for its pioneering status in the field. Significant as the publication of the book was, its canonical place in African oral literary scholarship was profoundly challenged when in 1979, a young Nigerian scholar, Isidore Okpewho, published *The Epic in Africa: Toward a Poetics of the Oral Performance*. Okpewho's ground-breaking work on African epic was a direct rebuttal of one of the most problematic claims in Finnegan's book that the epic, as a literary genre, did not exist in Africa (Finnegan 2012: 109).[1] Okpewho's work became influential not only in offering an exhaustive reading of various African epics, but in redefining the oral performer as more than a mere transmitter of communal ethos and history. Instead, Okpewho sought to establish the oral artist as the consummate *artist*, drawing deeply from the repertoire of the community and aesthetic realism to showcase their distinctive creative talents in the context of every performance. Okpewho's work was also comparatist as he examined similar performance styles as documented by other scholars on the

epic, notably Albert B. Lord (*The Singer of Tales*). Justifiably then, Okpewho would later aver oxymoronically – in the second epigraph above – that "the study of the African epic was born in denial" (Okpewho 2004: 98).

In the intervening four decades since *The Epic*, considerable scholarship on various aspects of African oral literature and performance has emerged. And even though Finnegan has since recognised the mistake in her earlier assertion[2] and gone ahead to publish other equally important books on African oral literature, including her retrospective work, *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa* (2007), and more recently, *Time for the World to Learn From Africa* (2018) and *Where is Language?: An Anthropologist's Questions on Language, Literature and Performance* (2020), Okpewho emerged as the most agenda-setting scholar and teacher on African oral literature. Following *The Epic in Africa*, he published *Myth in Africa* (1983), *African Oral Literature* (1992), *Once Upon A Kingdom: Myth, Hegemony, and Identity* (1998), and *Blood on the Tides: The Ozidi Saga and Oral Epic Narratology* (2014), his final work on the epic before his passing in 2016.

It can be confidently argued that no other scholar better *redefined* the study of African oral literature and performance than Isidore Okpewho. From his initial seminal and ideological argument that the epic and myth existed in Africa and that they have echoes in modern-day African literature and politics to the contemporary explorations of the transformations in African expressive forms in the Black Diaspora, Okpewho was at the very hub of those discourses, untangling, shaping and provoking new debates around orality and African literary and performative forms. So robust and all-embracing were Okpewho's commitment to the study of oral performance in Africa and beyond – even informing his engagement with the art of modern storytelling through fiction – that his inaugural lecture as Professor of English at the University of Ibadan, titled *A Portrait of the Artist as a Scholar* (1990), may well be regarded as defining the overarching scope of his intellectual productivity in several acclaimed books.

Okpewho's scholarship not only constitutes a beacon for rigour and depth, but through his teaching, he also mentored a coterie of younger scholars who continue to expand the boundaries of oral literature and performance studies both in Africa and in the Diaspora. Although this collection is dedicated to Isidore Okpewho's memory – and indeed a section of this book celebrates his life and work and includes the last major interview he granted[3] – the collection is not conceived as a Festschrift for Okpewho. Instead, it is a collection of original essays that testify to the astounding grounds covered in the five decades following the publication of Finnegan's *Oral Literature in Africa*. Both editors of the book are former students of Okpewho, and like Finnegan and some contributors to this volume, are members of the International Society for the Oral Literatures of Africa (ISOLA), which Okpewho had led as President. Indeed, two contributors in this volume, Willemse and Akọma, at different times served as Presidents of that flagship professional body committed to the study and promotion of the oral literatures of Africa. A few of the contributors are of Finnegan and Okpewho's generation, and their chapters here demonstrate their remarkable interest in

exploring new ideas or revisiting older ones with the view to injecting new scholarly perspectives into them. With contributors affiliated with universities in Africa, Europe, and the United States, and materials rich in their comparative breadth and depth, *Oral Literary Performance in Africa: Beyond Text* gives evidence of the popularity and dynamism of African oral literature studies in interdisciplinary humanities worldwide. And as some of the chapters especially bear out, it offers innovative discourses on the emerging spoken word genre and everyday culture in modern Africa and the African diasporas.

This book is a multi-contributor, interdisciplinary collection of essays exploring contemporary issues in the study of oral literatures of Africa and intentionally follows the trailblazing legacies of Ruth Finnegan and Isidore Okpewho. Contributors to this anthology work in a broad range of fields such as oral literature, cultural studies, African studies, popular culture, postcolonial studies, ethnography, anthropology, globalisation, and diaspora studies. The volume aims to promote further interdisciplinary and intergenerational conversations in the study of texts and contexts of oral performance in Africa, orality and African modernities, popular culture, urbanisation, postcolonial politics, and diaspora experience. The collection also addresses research methodologies that have pedagogical implications: not only do readers encounter different approaches to the study of oral performance traditions afield; teachers in the discipline are presented with a slate of essays on subjects that they can integrate into a comprehensive university course on oral literature.

Perhaps, we should also point out that we are mindful that some existing books in the field privilege the *spoken word* for different reasons. While some are essentially sociological, others pertain more to the spoken word as history and ethnography. Nevertheless, there are several texts that point to the versatility of the oral performance in Africa. Our project looks beyond these texts primarily through the consideration of the evolution of oral performance aesthetics and praxis.[4] Our collection is thus distinguished by the eclectic range of its inter-related chapters and the high calibre of the contributors – accomplished scholars whose works stand out for their rigour in the study of oral literary performance in Africa.

In choosing the title of this book, we at once try to navigate a slippery terrain about how best to qualify the rich oral literatures and performances that Finnegan so glowingly writes about in the above epigraph. Otiono (2011) outlines "the terminological controversies that have trailed the use of orality and related terms by scholars of oral literature in Africa" (71) and notes that "[a]mong the various but related keywords that have been associated with the term 'oral' are: orality; orature; oracy; oralism, aurality; oral narrative; oral literature, folk literature; folklore; and more recently, *spoken word*" (71). The choice of *Oral Literary Performance in Africa: Beyond Text* as the title of our book then is an attempt to bridge the often-complicated orality-literacy binary, while embracing our dilemma on the conceptual terms that also include: "Oral culture," "orality," "oral tradition," "oral story-telling," "oral literature," and "orature." Regarding the latter we recognise that "[n]ot everyone agrees with the coinage" (Ngugi 111), and that the wide array of associative words – or some kind of loose synonyms – is

important for appreciating the complex nature of the cultural material and the oft-silent sentiments of the scholars using them. So important is this *naming* in the field that Okpewho devotes the first section of his incisive book *African Oral Literature* to intervening in the debate by answering the question: What is "Oral Literature"?[5]

We do not pretend that our title settles the controversy over the conceptual terms. However, we hope that the title *Oral Literary Performance in Africa: Beyond Text* offers some kind of truce, while embracing the evolving dimensions of the field, beyond textuality, temporalities, spatialities, and the interstices of cultural geographies. In brokering the "truce," we hope to bring to bold relief, the indubitable declaration of Roger D. Abrahams (1983) in the second epigraph to this book that: "It would not be overstating the matter to note that in … Africa, *art* is life and vice versa, not a mere reflection of humanity and community, but a directly engaged commentary on how things are or should be; rather than just imitation, they heighten and intensify humanity's most important concerns" (9). Indeed, an understanding of this epigrammatic overview of Africa's oral literary heritage has guided us in structuring this anthology of essays.

Structure of the book

The book is divided into four sections: (1) Recapturing tradition: the oral performance in transition; (2) The word made flesh: intermediated orality and modern transformations; (3) Orality at crossroads: folklife, modernity, and globalisation; (4) The scholar as artist: Isidore Okpewho and African oral performance studies.

Part 1, "Recapturing the tradition," presents four chapters addressing different critical studies of traditional oral texts, from Hein Willemse's profile study of a Namibian female storyteller to Otiono's return to the oral narrative impetus propelling the weaving of the classical *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. Chapters in this section are characterised by their focus on the oral text in performance, be it the examination of political campaign songs in Lesotho and Nigeria or the transformation of a folktale composed in the mould of a radio drama performance. Each contributor follows the best practices in the study of oral texts by paying close attention to performance dynamics in play: the idiosyncrasies of the performer, the context of performance, and, perhaps, most important, a recognition of the artistic context in which these texts are generated.

The section opens with Hein Willemse's chapter entitled "Elfrieda Binga's Berseba: Constructing history and identity in a rural Namibian village." This chapter draws from Willemse's fieldwork in southern Namibia spanning more than five years during which he observed that men tended to tell historical tales, tales of war and conquest, whereas women were inclined to concentrate on animal stories and other folktales. The most significant exception to this observation was Elfrieda Binga, a shopkeeper. The performance examined here is Binga's reconstruction of a rival community's founding narrative, her accounts of subjugation and resistance as well as the past injustices visited upon her people by "Berseba's Namas *who are still alive*" (line 611). Willemse uses Binga's performance as a case

study for addressing contemporary identity theorists who argue that identities "are constructed within, not outside discourse" and that these "emerged with the play of specific modalities of power"; and are therefore "the product of the marking of difference and exclusion" (Hall 4). For the purpose of this chapter three features of Binga's tale are discussed: her telling and re-telling of history, her characterisation of the Berseba people and her narrativisation of the invention of Herero victimhood and, lastly the collaboration between the coloniser and the colonised in early German South West Africa. Readers may do well to pay attention to the ways Binga's gender colours her performance of this nationalist narrative.

The second chapter in this section is Ernst R. Wendland's "'The Crocodile's Wife': Content and Communication Strategy in A Tale of Transformations." Wendland's study documents certain key aspects in the complex transformative process that led to the creation of a popular Nyanja radio drama in Zambia from a traditional oral precursor that was originally presented before a live audience in a rural dialect of the same language. He demonstrates how the crucial factors of narrative form, content, and function are carefully manipulated by an expert storyteller to confront the exigencies of a new performance setting, audience constituency, and medium of communication, as an ancient vernacular tale is verbally and technologically reborn. Importantly, Wendland's essay highlights the significance and challenges of preserving such oral heritage which he recorded during his fieldwork in Zambia. As Wendland writes rather sadly,

> For years, right up to the time of finalizing this essay in December 2020, I had been trying my best to find a dependable institution that would digitalize, store, and make available to the scholarly and general public hundreds of my cassette tapes containing Chongo and Chewa village recordings that go back to the 1970–80s. Unfortunately, to date I have failed in my quest to find a reputable repository for the secure preservation of this national treasure of verbal artistic performances.

The regrettably parlous state of Africa's cultural archives and its consequences for Africa's oral and intangible heritage constitute part of the inspiration for this book and the title of this introductory chapter. In recent years, the debate has focused more on the return of Africa's precious artefacts looted by colonialists and whether, indeed, the returned artefacts would be well preserved on the continent.

While the answer to the above question falls outside the purview of this introduction, the third chapter in this book further justifies the necessity of archiving Africa's rich and diverse oral literature through scholarly projects such as the present book. In the third chapter entitled "'The aged, the infirm and the effeminate': Rhetorical strategies in election rally songs from Nigeria and Lesotho," Chris Dunton examines election rally songs from Nigeria and Lesotho dating from the 1950s to 2012. These songs depend in part for their rhetorical impact on boast, warrant, and pseudo-warrant; the chapter focuses especially, however,

on their use of another rhetorical strategy, invective, and explores the question whether the use of invective can be regarded as being socially divisive, a question that can only be satisfactorily answered by taking into account the reception of the songs at the point of performance. Beginning with texts from southern Nigeria in the 1950s, the discussion moves to Lesotho (2012) and then to northern Nigeria (1983), a structure that is designed to demonstrate progressively more extreme instances of invectives. The theoretical underpinning of this paper is drawn from the works of Raymond Williams, Norman Fairclough and V. N. Volosinov. While there is a discussion of the pitfalls involved in applying an epistemology drawn from the global North to texts from Africa, the chapter is essentially a contribution to a growing body of work that applies rhetoric studies to African texts.

Although Dunton was not able to carry out appropriate ethnographic field recordings during an election period in Lesotho, in his words, this chapter underscores the importance of such a project, "regarding value systems and their erosion, and, in respect of the contents of the invective employed in election rally songs, the introduction or entrenchment of assertions that are socially divisive." Of course, interest in election songs is not limited to Africa. A fascinating study of American politics dating back to the nineteenth century entitled "Songs of Politics and Political Campaigns" rightly notes that "Campaign songs and songs of political parties can help to spread particular points of view and build solidarity around candidates and platforms."[6] But in the African context, it is crucial to acknowledge that with election songs "[t]he way tradition is constructed is very much conditioned by the wider political context," to appropriate Karin Barber who points out that "The Mau Mau and Chimurenga songs of the Kenyan and Zimbabwean liberation wars deliberately reclaim pre-colonial culture for the present struggle" (1987: 22). The comparative approach thus allows us to appreciate the geographical and historical connections in the political song genre that Dunton focuses on in his chapter.

Nduka Otiono's chapter, "Orality, masculinities and narrative strategies in *The Arabian Nights*," rounds off the first part of this volume. Otiono extends the socio-cultural and geographical comparatist perspective in Dunton's essay and provides a bridge to the comparative scope of intermediated orality and modern transformations which the chapers in Part 2 explore. Otiono's chapter connects the classic tales collection, *The Arabian Nights*, with the emergence of one of the longest-running stand-up comedy shows in Nigeria, Opa Williams' *Nite of a Thousand Laughs*, as well as to the stunning narrative artistry of the female Xhosa Ntsomi-performer of South Africa studied by Harold Scheub (1970, 1975, and 1977). The chapter explores the rich, magical tapestry of *The Arabian Nights* in the context of "verbal art as performance." It also unravels the elements of masculinities and oral narrative strategies which the heroine of the text Shahrazad literally manipulates to cast a spell on the vengeful autocrat, Shahrayar, thereby lengthening the nights and postponing her execution, and by extension, saving her gender. Otiono is struck by "the parallels between the versatile Middle Eastern Shahrazad and her South African storytelling sisters" evident in Scheub's

memorable portrait of the Ntsomi-performer. The essay further identifies the ways that Shahrazad reminds us of the artistry and narrative agency of the Ntsomi-performer of South Africa and the Ozidi Saga, an epic of the Ijaw people of Nigeria performed over seven days and recorded by the renowned poet and playwright, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo.

The second part of this book titled "The word made flesh: Intermediated orality and modern transformations," opens with a chapter that focuses attention on the significance of the "translation" of oral narrative performance to the written word. In this chapter titled "Translation of African oral narrative-performances to the written word," Harold Scheub, a pioneer scholar of Africa's oral performance studies, revisits his earlier canonical work of same title published in 1971 within the context of his five-decade fieldwork experience and in his own words, "also in the context of the work of Professor Isidore Okpewho in this realm." In doing this, Scheub "rewrites and updates" his seminal ideas on the translation of African oral narrative-performances into written texts "on the basis of continued research trips to southern Africa and on the continued deepening of [his] understanding of oral traditions in African and non-African societies." In this chapter, Scheub delicately navigates what he identifies as the four "important characteristics of that tradition": the verbal elements of production; the "untranslatable" non-verbal elements of production or the context of a performance; characterisation; and "the epic matrix" – including the entire repertory of images.

Scheub's essay has assumed greater significance for us the editors as possibly the coda of his lifetime intellectual productivity. For as we finalised the manuscript of this book for publication late in 2019, we contacted Scheub's office for his approval of the final version. Aleia I. McCord, Associate Director of the African Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, where Scheub had worked, responded with a moving mail that is worth quoting at length:

> I write with some good, but very sorrowful news. Harold has given his permission for you to publish the article in question.
>
> This will be a poignant contribution, as it most likely will be his final publication. The professor's health is rapidly failing and hospice will be called for shortly. He has become very frail in the past month and we do not believe he is long for this world.
>
> If you or your colleagues would like to offer any final words, now would be the time to do so. I can ensure that someone reads your notes to Harold. I can also try to get you a phone number, although I am not so sure he will be able to speak on the phone.
>
> I am so glad you reached out when you did as it has been an opportunity for us to check in on our dear professor and to give our community the chance to offer their final farewells.

Two weeks afterwards, Aleia sent an uplifting message informing us that Margaret Gardner, one of Professor Scheub's colleagues who visited him regularly and whom she (Aleia) had left a voice mail for, "called back while she was visiting the prof" and "he actually voiced his approval on the phone." But only a few days after his verbal approval, the celebrated scholar whose ground-breaking and definitive study of the Xhosa Ntsomi-performer of South Africa has shaped oral performance studies, died on October 16, 2019. His dozen or so influential books covered African oral narratives, storytellers, the hero, and a broad range of genres including myth, proverbs, riddles, poetry, and song.

It is most fitting that Scheub's chapter in this volume is a retrospective of sorts, cycling back to one of his earliest publications, "Translation of African Oral Narrative-performances to the Written Word" (1971). He returns to that conundrum which confronts scholars of oral literary performance engaged in fieldwork and translation and declares, in one of the most memorable lines in this chapter, "It is impossible to consider the verbal aspects of the performance in isolation from the non-verbal, yet there is no useful way of transferring the non-verbal elements to paper." He adds that "[t]he unique tensions of the live, oral, public performance and the many non-verbal aspects of the work of art cannot be rendered in any precise way on paper. One must seek a solution by developing a hybrid art-form, neither the original narrative-performance nor a short story, yet borrowing from both art-forms."

In the end Scheub concludes with words that ring like a valedictory memo to all those engaged in fieldwork and translation:

> One of the greatest injuries that can be done to the original work is simply to retell it without making any effort to give it a dynamic and artistic context. The words and structures alone, the matrix alone, these are not enough. The translator is doing more than translating a work of art; he is rebuilding it in a new and foreign context, he is recasting it; he must therefore be something of an artist himself, for the only way an oral narrative-performance can survive the translation into the written word is as a new work of art.

Beyond the conventional understanding of the "translation" of oral narrative-performance discussed by Scheub and other scholars including Finnegan and Okpewho, the essays in the collection draw attention to the tertiary forms of translation. By this we mean the ways by which cultural producers adapt or "translate" original works into new contexts. This is partly exemplified by the adaptation or "translation" of *The Arabian Nights* by Opa Williams as articulated by Otiono above. In fact, the complex interface in the translation of tradition into modernity is further explored in the second chapter in the Part 2 of this volume titled "Asiyefunzwa na Wazazi Hufunzwa na Mzuka: Swahili supernatural homiletics in an age of promiscuity." Here, Aaron Rosenberg grapples with three texts that express concepts fundamental to Tanzanian communities, as they employ supernatural phenomena to tackle potentially destructive expressions of sexuality in urban contexts. Rosenberg asks: Why and how do themes of sexuality

figure so prominently in these Tanzanian narratives? How are conceptualisations of gender, as linked to sexuality and socio-political arenas, iterated? Finally, what does the presence of paranormal beings in these texts tell us about the intentions of authors and their fabrication of messages regarding the dangers of sexuality in the socio-cultural context upon which the tales have been formulated?

Part of the revealing strands of Rosenberg's study is that deployment of the *deus ex machina* schematic in the stories doesn't appear to be so much about resolving conflict as much as a narrative move that literally inserts a higher, deific moral order or presence as a check on the rapacious sexual appetites of the male characters. Rosenberg's essay examines the intriguing interface of religion and popular culture in the oral and aural imagination of the Tanzanian artists he identifies, a category of artists, he notes, that have not been given their fair share of critical attention.

The mononymous writer Obiwu adopts a rigorous modernist theoretical examination of the popular South African heroic narrative on Chaka, the Zulu King. In the essay entitled "History, Mofolo's *Chaka*, and the Postcolonial 'Bastard,'" Obiwu adopts a Lacanian approach in analysing the character of the Zulu king, Chaka, as represented in Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka*. Finding similarities between the Greek warrior and poet Archilocus and the South African warrior king, Obiwu argues that both figures are haunted by the questionable circumstances of their birth – their "bastardy" – and that it is that nagging doubt about their legitimacy that drives them to violence, endless wandering, and self-invention. Beyond the exploration of the laudatory heroic tradition, especially of the epic hero, Obiwu's essay makes an important contribution to postcolonial discourse as he shows how Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress rehabilitated the figure of Chaka from the image of the monster as depicted in Mofolo's work to the symbol of African warriorhood and resistance.

The retrieval and rehabilitation of the epic hero Chaka in contemporary political rhetoric brings to the fore Okpewho's compelling argument in his final monograph, *Blood on the Tides*: even when not overtly stated, the oral artist is consistently reinventing the well-established text for contemporary pertinence. The book marks Okpewho's one and only dedication of an entire scholarly work to the examination of a single oral text, this time, the Ijo Ozidi oral epic cited above. Calling the study "a labor of love in admiration" of Clark-Bekederemo's singular accomplishment in documenting the epic traditionally performed over seven days, *Blood on the Tides* is vintage Okpewho, cerebral in the delineation of the gamut of creative choices made by the three artists whose performances of the epic form the thrust of the study. But in a signal moment in the book, Okpewho turns to the Marxist political theorist Fredric Jameson's discourse on the "unmasking" of a "cultural artifact"[7] to drive home his own argument on what artists must do with such "artifacts" as the Ozidi saga. In Okpewho's words:

> I am … attracted to [Jameson's] view that literary texts – and here I include *oral* literary works – are best seen in the context of their dialogic or dialectical interface with the consumer's location in time. I would indeed go so far

> as to offer a slight revision of his theoretical mantra – "always historicize!" (*Political Unconscious* 9) – to one that puts a greater emphasis on what I judge the most urgent function of criticism for the region of the world (Africa) most in need of it: "always contemporize!" (183)

Okpewho proceeds to sift through the contemporaneous socio-political and cultural forces at work in the Ozidi performances; he also delves into a reading of two contemporary Nigerian poets from the same world of the epic and those oral artists, Tanure Ojaide and Ogaga Ifowodo. Thus, a classic oral epic, rarely performed in its "original" exacting seven-day timeline, finds resonances in new volumes of poetry and written dramatic adaptations.

Femi Euba's contribution to this collection titled "Globalisation of Sango: Wole Soyinka's Adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus*" advances the comparative perspectives to understanding the bridging of the past and the present through "translation" in African oral tradition. Here, we encounter an unusual association between translation and adaptation as the author analyses Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka's unpublished play, an adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus*, called *Oyedipo at Kolhuni* (2002). Quite fascinatingly, Soyinka's *Oyedipo* draws mythic parallels between Greek and Yoruba oral traditions and uses this to confront the contemporary issue of the plight of refugees and immigrants around the world. At first consideration, the dramatic affinities of ritual and political processes, especially in terms of resistance, may appear somewhat far-fetched. However, Euba robustly argues that the objectives of both preoccupations are often similar – that is, the objective need for some form of change.

Euba notes that in Soyinka's *Oyedipo*, "[t]he myth of Oedipus is revisited and updated into a modern situation and, by so doing, assumes a more political stance – that of the plight of refugees or exiles in general." Euba further observes that "[t]he parallel cultures that Soyinka uses to dramatise his adaptation give the plight its global dimension. What eventually becomes obvious is a dramatisation of a kind of politics of resistance through which Diorakos, the subject of the force of resistance, is able, like Oedipus, to gain sanctuary and transcendence."

Euba's bold ideological reading of Soyinka's *Oyedipo* becomes more obvious in relation to Coco Ferguson's traditional study of the same text titled "*Oedipus At Colonus* and *Oyedipo At Kolhuni*: The 'Tragic' Worlds of Sophocles and Soyinka." Being America-based, Euba's familiarity with the cultural politics of refugees and sanctuary cities especially under the anti-immigration policy of President Donald Trump confers more immediacy to his reading of Soyinka's advocacy for refugees. However, Ferguson's comparative analysis of the adaptation of Sophocles' original by Nigeria's Soyinka and Japanese director, Tadashi Suzuki, instructively acknowledges that both Soyinka and Suzuki's "'revival' of a Greek theatrical energy stems … as much from the dialectic between their performances and a modern audience as it does from a retrospective interaction with the text they are adapting" (34).

Notwithstanding the differences in Euba's and Ferguson's approach to Soyinka's adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus*, it is striking that their critique is