

Book Reviews

Title: *The Representation of African Humanism in the Narrative Writings of Es'kia Mphahlele*
(Johannesburg: Stainbank Associates, 2006; 392pp)

Author: Lesibana Jacobus Rafapa

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Reviewer: Osita Ezeliora, Witwatersrand University, Johannesburg/Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye.

The recent intervention of Lesibana Jacobus Rafapa in a brilliant exploration of the creative and philosophical output of one of Africa's finest minds, Es'kia Mphahlele, has finally filled a disturbing gap – or perhaps – re-resumed a serious dialogue towards our collective understanding of the concept and precepts of African humanism. The very ideological nature of the African humanist ideals is certainly not a new territory, having engaged a number of African intellectuals over several decades of rigorous scholarship, to such an extent that it is today often taken for granted. Yet, it is the seeming simplicity of its basic tenets that makes the concept a very troublesome field to tread. Scholars as diverse as Theo Vincent, Romanus Egudu, Fred Akporobaro, among others, have tried to establish either the basic thrusts of Africanness in Modern African literature, or to locate the nature of African identity with respect to the issues of form and originality in the modern African novel. Rafapa returns to this problematic territory through the course of history, as well as within the dictates of contemporary global demands. At a time in South Africa's post-apartheid politics when issues such as African Nativism, African renaissance, African Union, NEPAD, gender in/equality, and what has recently been described as 'Gay marriage' resonate in

South Africa's national debates, Rafapa's contribution authorises immediate critical attention, just as his study encourages us to engage with the entire creative and philosophical outputs of Es'kia Mphahlele for any serious interest in comprehending the mores and sensibilities of African peoples.

Of immense resonance in Rafapa's *African Humanism*, then, are the many facets of African life that subsume social etiquette, marriage customs, religion, compassion to the less privileged, love for humankind, the place of women in the family, society, and the nation, respect for elders, the role of fathers in the family, to mention just these few. In presenting these aspects of Africa's communal life, Rafapa is not insensible of his duty as a literary critic who must interrogate Mphahlele's narrative modes that enable his achievement of these ideals as writer and thinker. Language emerges as pivotal in Mphahlele's engagement as a writer: how he deploys language in his portrayal of African humanist consciousness is the preoccupation of Rafapa through the entire study.

In terms of structure, Rafapa's study is divided into six broad, but carefully segmentalised chapters that discuss Mphahlele's narratives across genres. The first chapter engages with issues of conceptual

clarifications and theoretical foregrounding of the study. While the second, third, and fourth chapters explore African humanism in the poetry, short stories, autobiographies, and novels of Mphahlele. The fifth chapter provides a refreshing perspective with respect to the attitude of the South African writer to the figuration of pastoral existence. That Mphahlele considers a non-romanticised consideration of rural life as a way of embracing our sense of compassion and love for the ordinary tells positively about his notion of a consciousness long denigrated in the Western imaginary, notwithstanding the admirable contributions of the indigenous cultures to human civilisation. The final and sixth chapter reads African humanism in the narratives of Mphahlele within the frames of its literary figurations and contemporary global challenges.

One significant dimension to Rafapa's *African Humanism* is the author's conscious attempt to locate the many efforts of many African nationalists and the cultural intelligentsia to define the distinctive character of the African. As would be expected, then, Rafapa returns to such resonant ideologies and movements as negritude, pan-Africanism, African renaissance, Black Consciousness, and so on. For this scholar, these concepts are clearly delineated in, but differ clearly from Mphahlele's notion of the African humanist consciousness that mark his years of academic and creative accomplishments. "Black Consciousness" he clarifies, "mainly focuses on building the consciousness of the individual black, while Pan Africanism goes beyond this to inspire collective resistance to social, economic and political oppression, whether by black or white leadership" (p. 17). Significantly, Mphahlele never used the concept 'African Humanism' early in life although evidence of his fascination with the issue of African identity appeared during his school days in 1949. But what does Mphahlele's idea of African consist? What does the influential writer and thinker say about tribalist politics and the quest for nationhood? Rafapa observes that Mphahlele's

humanism frowns seriously against tribalism and tribalist politics, but embraces a black nationalism with a continental outlook (24). It is a humanism implicit in "the zest for life-treating the present and the future with unflustered hope rather than despair" (27).

Rafapa delineates the development of Mphahlele as a theorist of African humanism, especially in his "absorption of current trends in Africanist intellectual debate" (29). What emerges is Mphahlele's attempt to codify two humanisms – the African and the European. In line with this interest, Mphahlele progressively draws attention to the distinction between African humanism and other forms that also include Christian and scientific humanisms. Rafapa clarifies these distinctions with lucid illustrations and support drawn from a number of post-colonialist theorising. He suggests, following Mphahlele's: "Unlike Christian humanism, African humanism (. . .) does not include the view that man will be saved, as it does not point to alternatives such as some promised land or the prospect of hell (. . .). In African humanism it is man's present moral and spiritual life that deserves our attention and care, not the imaginary rewards and punishments of the future or some authority outside humanity that tries to censor and control our thoughts" (30). Rafapa engages these differences in the theorising of Mphahlele by carefully locating the points of divergence between African humanism and the Western, Christian, and Scientific humanisms. Given the spiritual dimension of African humanism, morality is sustained within communities as "the primary criterion to assess the ethics of conduct" (30-31). Mphahlele is celebrated here in what he calls Africa's "pastoral sensibility", a persuasion recently explored by Harry Garuba in his 'Explorations in Animist Materialism'.

African humanism, for Mphahlele, neither stifles the individual's freedom, nor does it valorise individualism over the collective identity of the people. In other words: "I am because you are,

you are because we are” (42) sums up his conception of the Africanist ideals, especially when locating the place of the ‘person’ in the collective sensibility of the ‘people’. Rafapa highlights this significant aspect of Mphahlele’s theorising, and goes further to elaborate on the nuances that typify the precepts of African humanism as articulated in the narratives of Es’kia Mphahlele: “The African humanist individual (as illustrated in the way Mphahlele idealises the decolonised citizen) is one who identifies unashamedly with the ethnic society he/she belongs to (sic) and thus forges a sense of history or anteriority while at the same time sacrifices the excesses of individualism to the collective needs of the group” (42-3).

There is the possibility that cynics of the Africanist ideals might want to vitiate the humanity of Africans to a primitive embrace of what the West often ridicules as heathenism or ancestral worship. Mphahlele’s essays on African culture, religion/spirituality, social work, inheritance structures, education and leadership, as well as on nationalism, negritude, Pan Africanism, Black Consciousness, and many others all point to the principles of African humanism to be implicit in “a simple faith free of the tyranny of theology and intellectual argument” (58). It is for this reason that Mphahlele corrects the Western perception of Africans as ancestral worshippers: “We do not worship the ancestors. They are our mediators, intercessors with the Supreme Being” (46). Rafapa observes that unlike the essays of his early years, Mphahlele’s lectures and speeches of the late 20th century were pleasantly mellowed down. But even at this, Mphahlele insists that African humanism “could never be a godless way of life”, just as “we cannot separate African humanism from African thought and belief, including religion” (52).

Mphahlele’s ‘African humanism’ is expressive of the communal ethos that defines the black peoples of the continent. This, Rafapa observes, is built on a “complex pattern of social relationships” especially with its implicit recourse to a

“cosmological view towards emphasis on unity rather than diversity”, and of “synthesis rather than analysis” (52-3). What emerges here, then, is that unlike Christianity and Islam, African humanism “has never sought to colonise anybody” (53). Moreover, where Black Consciousness is attuned to “the psychological state of Africanness”, African humanism is given to “tackle matters of praxis” (69). The link between African humanism and Pan Africanism is eased by the experiences of history of the African peoples. Rafapa clarifies: “Because history as a source of nativist memory” is relevant to negritude, “African humanism and negritude commonly conform to nativism, but to differing extents and for differing reasons” (70). But ‘Pan Africanism’ and ‘Black Consciousness’ do not mean the same thing as ‘Afrocentrism’ (71).

It is important to note, however, that Mphahlele’s pursuit of the philosophy of African humanism was not inspired by an essentialist quest to position African humanist consciousness as superior to other forms of humanisms. He was compelled by the dictates of history to respond to the proclamations of Western hegemonic discourses of race. As a postcolonial theorist and thinker, it was simply necessary for him to educate his people and the rest of the global humanity that Africans never were, and never will be, inferior to any racial category. His theorising cannot in any way, therefore, be considered racist. While contemporary globalism could be useful in some ways, Mphahlele’s vision must not be mistaken: African humanism is in practice a very accommodative consciousness. But globalism should be embraced with caution. Rafapa explains that, for Mphahlele, “internationalism/global solidarity should not come before the consolidation of national consciousness” (77). Drawing upon thinkers as varying as Fanon, Achebe, Said, Spivak, Mbembe, and Conversci, Rafapa highlights the flexibility of Mphahlele’s African humanism particularly on the subject of essentialism. It is such readiness to shift that enables

him to conceptualise a humanism that [reorganises] “itself from time to time and from one complex of circumstances to another” (93). As a response to the jaundiced image of Africa in the Western imagination, Mphahlele’s humanism, Rafapa argues, reclaims “a self-affirming and self-constituting position” in the discourse of the post-colony (95). This interest in the politics of globalisation later re-appears in Rafapa’s explication of Mphahlele’s imaginative writings and expository essays, as we are to meet, shortly, in the course of the present essay.

But Mphahlele’s notion of African humanism is not confined to his expository and polemical writings. In his creative work, instances of Africanity enjoy immense resonance. His tropes vary. Rafapa notes that the notion of ‘perspective’ is central to his aesthetic, with the implication that in his narratives of, and about Africa, character delineations should be seen in terms of distinctive cultural symbols. “The competent writer”, therefore, is most likely to be the one “who artistically represents African humanism in his or her work”. This affirms what Rafapa identifies as the “multidimensional entanglement of the writer and his community” (100-101), an affirmation of Mphahlele’s sustained interrogation of the experience of post-colonial Africa through his embrace of the nexus between the aesthetic and social ideals. At this point of convergence between the aesthetic and the social, the recourse to religion as an escapist route to understanding African humanism must be eschewed for patterns that articulate “the empirical conditions of human actions” (106). In his actual exegesis of Mphahlele’s narratives, then, Rafapa draws upon “a few of Mphahlele’s poems” as well as “the entire body of his short stories, novels and autobiographies” in an exhaustive analysis that takes the reader through the long decades of Mphahlele’s sojourn in his quest for self-apprehension, and personal engagement with the mission of decoding the African humanist ethos (110).

Of relevance in Rafapa’s investigation of Mphahlele’s narratives, too, is the novelist’s attitude to the colonialist’s language, in this case the English language. Mphahlele’s oeuvre as a writer demonstrates a resentment of what is often seen as ‘standard’, ‘correct’, or normative use of the English language. What he does, Rafapa reasons, is to “add novel features to the English language” (159), in a manner very much reminiscent of the work of most African writers of the postcolonialist persuasion. The segment entitled ‘A More Marked Appropriation of English’ (158-169) does not immediately address this issue, however. While the segment starts with a concrete illustration of linguistic interference, especially in an L2 situation where the transliteration of indigenous expressions often present conflicting semantic imports in the standard English variant, the overall segment dwells more on speculations of African humanist consciousness than it does the analytical projections of African humanism through the appropriated language.

One strong unit of Rafapa’s investigation of the African humanist ideals is beautifully explicated in Mphahlele’s figuration of women (188-193). Where Western conceptions of feminism tend to present women as fundamentally marginalised in the socio-political and economic life of most societies, Mphahlele’s women, Rafapa brilliantly illustrates, are not the perennially complaining lot whose mentality of victimhood beclouds the immense veneration that women enjoy in traditional African societies as mothers, sisters, daughters and wives. What emerges in Mphahlele’s figuration of women is the essential truism that women are necessarily “stronger than men” in a number of short stories that include narratives of the novelist’s exile days in Nigeria such as ‘The Ballad of Oyo’ and ‘The Barber of Bariga’. This might sound rather patronising to some highbrow feminist scholars of African descent, yet Rafapa carefully illustrates how Mphahlele’s notion of African humanism “reverses women” since women are “essential to cultural

self-preservation" (192; See also pp. 233-237).

But religion remains very germane in discussions of the African humanist consciousness. In his narratives, as it is in his aesthetic, Mphahlele demonstrates his strong persuasion in that sense of Africanity that frowns very seriously against the abominable. In African humanism, sacrilegious actions (such as 'murder') remain abominations since anyone who "kills a human being made in the image of God can never wash off the blood" (224). Rafapa's *African Humanism* illustrates Mphahlele's persistent attempts at finding a manageable space in his narratives where Western Christianity and African traditionalism co-exist as mutually beneficial spiritual modes whose missions do not consist in *deleting* the Other. We thus enter the universe of Es'kia Mphahlele as writer, scholar, autobiographer, and as custodian of culture in his "preoccupation with the need for cultural connection of the present to the past and the future", with the result that in a number of his writings, we continue to encounter his "uniqueness in wielding metaphors, symbols and dialogue" (250-1) to provide hope for the disillusioned.

There is a persistence of such narrative idioms as resonance, myth-making, tyrannies of place and time, as well as Mphahlele's "impeachment of white liberalism" with its bias toward 'gradualism'. Given the turbulent historical epoch that inspired a number of radical transforming engagements, African humanism becomes evident in its spiritual commitment to compassion for others. For Mphahlele, then, African humanism is "a state of mind, a way of life and a meaning-making approach to life" (260). In attaining these idyllic structures in narratives of the self and the nation, Rafapa locates the figuration of various tyrannies of space, time, and their resonance in Mphahlele's fictional evocations of "dialogue with setting" (262). Rafapa is persuaded that in his fiction as in most of his other writings Mphahlele evinces a character so distinct and inspiring that they authorise attention with respect

to his delineation of African humanist consciousness. In his novels, Rafapa suggests, Mphahlele "resists compromising circumspection and racial inclusiveness while articulating the predominantly black cultural-experiential identity he calls African humanism" (268). A preoccupation with the tyrannies of place and time is Rafapa's focus in his analysis of Mphahlele's *Chirundu* and *The Wanderers*.

Within the tenets of contemporary globalism, Rafapa's further observes Mphahlele's consistency in highlighting the dynamism of culture. This explains his attitude to the postcolonial dictates of cultural hybridity, defined as "the way and extent to which one's African humanist social behaviour absorbs change brought about by historical transitions such as colonisation and independence" (298). In simple idiom, Mphahlele's position here, Rafapa clarifies, is that "African humanism should continually redefine itself to absorb world civilisation" (300). The African humanist is, by this paradigm, urged to project visions that will "teach Africans to initiate constructive nation-building activities rather than focusing on idealisation or demonisation of the enemy of their focus" (322).

Rafapa's *African Humanism* draws attention to a thematic bloc often ignored in narratives by black South Africans: the exploration of rural sensibilities. Contrary to general perception, he notes, Mphahlele devoted at least one of his novels to the excavation of bucolic existence. He does this in a manner distinctly evocative of the experiences of a homogenous racial group pleasantly insulated from the ubiquitous anger and pains inspired by racial separatism in most black South African narratives of urbanities. In the fifth chapter of his *African Humanism*, Rafapa examines African humanist consciousness in Mphahlele's *Father Come Home* through the novel's narrative form and subject-matter. It is in this respect, he notes, that "for the first time in Mphahlele's works, Western Christianity is depicted not as a competing social force but as a crushed

consciousness replaced by the more exuberantly vigorous traditional tapestry of religious practices”, just as “for the first time in Mphahlele’s narrative writings, the poetic voice takes the foreground, in keeping with the cultural homogeneity unfolding at the centre of the novel” (352). In other words, a sense of aesthetic sublimity is achieved here as a result of the novelist’s resonant deployment of African aesthetic forms of orature, to such a level that even the use of colloquial utterances finally “reveal epic, decisive moments in the development of (...) action, or resolution of the national dilemma of destruction by apartheid’s urbanisation policies” (353).

Rafapa’s *African Humanism* is at once a statement on the essential traits of “Africa’s distinctive paradigm of human existence” (354) as it is a meticulous exploration of Mphahlele’s creative and philosophical output of over half-a-century of resourceful engagement with the African humanist ideals. Where such resonant paradigms as Negritude, Pan Africanism, Black Consciousness, Afrocentrism, racism, and essentialism have consistently engaged with the explicit demands of an African identity defined by certain autochthonous mores and sensibilities of the black African peoples, it is to the eternal credit of Mphahlele that his long sojourn into the soul of the continent emerges finally as religious and moral principles in which the African humanist ideal is defined as a “state of mind producing moral action” (356). It is a further credit to Rafapa, however, that his investigation of Mphahlele’s long years of critical rumination addresses serious consideration not only to the topical dimensions of Mphahlele’s writings within a chronological framework, but also for his placing such African humanist projections within the confines of post-apartheid’s multicultural global challenges.

To conclude this essay, it could help to reiterate some significant thrusts of Rafapa’s *African Humanism*. It is in fact salutary that contrary to the proclamations of some contem-

porary African feminists whose sheepish embrace of Western feminism tends to portray African women as culturally redundant subalterns, Rafapa’s *African Humanism* demonstrates, through his careful reading of Mphahlele’s narratives, that women are pivotal to societal stability across Africa’s historical epochs. In fact, the literary representation of women in African humanism shows women as “central and not peripheral in the life of her husband, of the family and of the nation” (360).

African humanism also emerges as non-racist in Mphahlele’s narratives. While following his calling as a postcolonial thinker, Mphahlele’s African humanist ideals recognise the commonality of a humankind inundated with similar existential problems, even if at varying degrees. The danger of racism so blatantly projected in Eurocentric notions of the Other should, therefore, be counteracted with African humanism which, as Rafapa shows, “is dependent for its survival upon a judicious appropriation of some aspects of European mores which results ultimately in neither a purely African nor a purely European sensibility characterising the behaviour of the postcolonial African humanist citizen” (365). In other words, African humanism as developed by Mphahlele is very dynamic, accommodating, flexible, but consistently moral and compassionate. In the construction of these ideals in his narratives, Mphahlele’s tropes of resonance, myth-making, rhythm, refrain, dialogue, time, and space are all consistently evoked to the level that they often attain ritualistic, religious heights.

But Rafapa’s *African Humanism* seems to have ‘erred’ a little when the author suggests that readers of Mphahlele’s narratives, which are essentially of English expression, should embark on a further mission of learning the novelist’s indigenous sePedi/seSotho languages (375-6). To insist that readers of Mphahlele’s writings in English should study these languages is obviously an over-kill: it implies that only such an attempt

can lead to our understanding of African narratives of English expression. This position renders redundant the supposed roles of translators and interpreters; it further assumes that most readers of African novels of English expression such as Chinua Achebe's trilogy cannot lay claim to having properly understood such narratives since they probably have not studied the Igbo language. This raises a fundamental question. For instance, what difference is there between Mphahlele's deployment of a "domesticated English language" and similar such usages in the novels of writers as vast as Achebe, John Munonye, Ngugi, or Elechi Amadi? It needs be added here that literary scholars of African descent did not necessarily write some of the finest statements on Achebe's novels. To insist, therefore, that researchers on African writings in English must study African indigenous languages to be able to explicate such narratives is an unhealthy recourse to academic territorialism so reminiscent of African literary scholarship at its inception from the second half of the 20th century through the 1970s.

Rafapa's *African Humanism*, which is a product of a 2006 doctoral research submitted to South Africa's Stellenbosch University, certainly would have benefited immensely from a proper conversion into a bookform. This means that the author and his publishers should have undertaken the task of a more rigorous editing and

proofreading before its publication. Like most dissertations, the study's dense structure does not enhance reader-friendliness, a weakness unhelped by the book's equally reader-unfriendly typeface. There are occasions, too, when Rafapa's erudition blurs his intentions – an issue not very uncommon with doctoral researches across the globe. Explications of relevant theoretical paradigms get tortured in linguistic or syntactical lack of clarity. A few instances of some of the weaknesses are also found in a number of eclectic phraseologies, slips, syntactical transpositions, as well as some typographical errors. The title page, for instance, could do without the conventional statements on the requirements for submission of dissertations to Universities.

Be these as they may, Rafapa's *African Humanism* is convincingly a brilliant contribution to our understanding of African humanist consciousness. It is not only a significant source material for researchers on the subject of Africanity in African literary scholarship, but also a major statement on the cultural personality of the autochthonous Africans. More significantly, researchers and adventurers into the imaginative and philosophical universe of Es'kia Mphahlele would find Rafapa's *African Humanism* a collector's item. Academic gamblers and name-droppers might do well, however, to maintain a dignified distance.

Title: *City of 201 Gods: Ile-Ife in Time, Space, and the Imagination*

Author: Jacob Olupona

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ISBN: 10: 0520265564

Number: 356 pages

Price: \$34.44

Reviewer: Fortune Afatakpa, University of Ibadan

City of 201 Gods: Ile-Ife in Time, Space and the Imagination is an exposition of the sacred reality of the ancient city of Ile-Ife. It is also an in-depth study of the traditional religions of the Yoruba race; traditional religious institutions and cults within the religions; the modus operandi of the priesthood structure and system. The book further mirrors the ideological, theological, philosophical and cosmological concepts encoded in the practice of African Indigenous Religion in the Yoruba worldview. It opens and engages the minds of both the “initiated” and “uninitiated” into the sublime principles that influence the religious thoughts and perceptions of the “traditional Yoruba man”. By comparing Ile-Ife in present and past contexts, J.K. Olupona surgically applies a multi-disciplinary approach to establish and advance the thesis that the ancient city, in Yoruba cosmology, is not only an abstract concept but a reality.

City of 201 Gods is divided into three parts showcasing the fusion of sacred religious and political authority. It engages the use of patriarchal myth of origin as a platform for social mobilisation, upholding of sacred spaces and places as a tool for establishing hegemony for religious, professional and an entrenchment of the sacred kingship system. Additionally, this in-depth scholarly effort provides informed insights into some fields yet to be explored by scholars of religion. Apart from providing new avenues for scholarship in the field of religion, this study also

throws up a challenge to African scholars and Africanists, to embark on an in-depth ethnographic study of various sacred places and spaces across Africa, but to also redefine the distorted perception of Africa’s cultural heritage.

The first part of this intellectually stimulating discussion consists of three chapters. Olupona applies findings distilled from archival documents, archeological discoveries, iconographic evidence and mythic narratives to introduce the foundation on which the identity of Ile-Ife is constructed. This way, Ife is first the cradle of the Yoruba race; secondly, the epicentre of Yoruba traditional religion and thirdly, a sacred city equal in status to ancient sacred cities such as Jerusalem, Mecca, Medina and Rome. The evidence depicts, to a large extent, that Ile-Ife is not inferior to other ancient civilisations in terms of sophistication; it also confirms its significance in the construction and preservation of the priestly and the sacred kingship hegemony. In this section, Olupona projects sacrifice in the Yoruba worldview as a communion between humans and the sacred deities conceived to be in charge of the various spaces. Using textual historical narratives, phenomenological insights and hermeneutical approach, the book ascertains that all the mythic rituals in Ile-Ife ranging from the Olojo festival, Obatala festival, Edi Festival, Ifa Festival and the Oduduwa festival, among others, are meant to sacralise the primordial lineages, preserve lineage identities and renew the sacred cosmic order. Furthermore, the festivals are

used to invoke cultural memories, reminding devotees of their mythic origin as well as refresh their collective consciousness. In addition, the rituals are used principally as instruments to promote social order, peace and harmony in both the public and private spaces.

Very importantly, Olupona catalogues the various rituals as having different modes of implementation, in connection to the identity and personality of the venerated *orisa*. Apart from the veneration of the various *orisa*, the various festivals are also used as instruments to project the relevance of the priestly class in the public space especially in the religious and political affairs of Ile-Ife. The festivals are conceived to be integrative, imbued with both intrinsic and extrinsic values. Concluding this section, it is revealed that the ritual festivals establish the *Ooni*, the king of Ile-Ife, as the ultimate power and authority especially when he wears the *sacred crown*.

The third and final part of the book focuses on the deconstruction of the identity of Ile-Ife as a sacred centre in Yoruba cosmology and as the epicentre of Yoruba indigenous religion. It invests the city with a new identity as a result of the centrifugal forces of Christianity and Islam. The two chapters concluding the book deal with the contested public space which was the exclusive preserve of the *orisa* and her priests, before the advent of Islam and Christianity and the dwindling fortunes of traditional Yoruba religion. It also examines the ascendancy of evangelical Christianity from the private space to open contest in the public space. It raises issues of gender equity and the symmetry of religious power in the contest for the public space, especially in the palace of the *Ooni*. The paradigm shifts from traditional belief

systems methodically set the template for inter-religious conflict and religious intolerance between the imported faith traditions of Islam and Christianity and the traditional religious institutions.

The skilful use of metaphors, proverbs and idioms by the author subscribes to the fact that they are sacrosanct in the study of indigenous African religion. The theoretical frameworks of instrumentalism, constructivism and functionalism are proficiently applied.

No doubt, *City of 201 God isa* is a robust research effort by the erudite scholar. It has however glossed over certain critical concerns that should have given the work a greater level of perceptiveness. As touching the weakening structure of the traditional African religions as a result of the clash with other religious traditions – Pentecostal, Charismatic and Islamic faiths – the writer fails to address the shortcomings of the *Orisa* religion which has made it less appealing to the indigenes of Ile-Ife. At this junction, the *Olaju* philosophy as postulated by J.D.Y. Peel ought to have come into play. Furthermore one would have expected the writer as a scholar of comparative religion to identify and enumerate the salient factors encoded in the Christian evangelistic faith tradition that have made it a power block in contest for the public religious space in Ife city.

This book is relevant for those who want to gain an in-depth understanding of the historical myth of the Yoruba race, of Ile-Ife as the primordial home of the Yoruba race as well as those who intend to be grounded in the studies of African Indigenous Religion.

Title: *Theorising Practice and Practicing Theory: A Phenomenology of Music in Nigeria*

Author: Anthony V. E. Mereni

Publisher: University of Lagos Press

Publication Year: 2014

Reviewer: Olusegun Stephen Titus, PhD

The book is a provocative and insightful text on the practice and theory of music. From introduction to conclusion, it is segmented into sub-themes. The writer passionately analyses the stages of music; he then chronicles each stage with a focus on the fourth stage – classical/school music as evolving from the third stage – folk/traditional music.

Starting with the premise of theory as the reflection of a thinking mind on practice, the author notes that theory and practice were initially inseparable entities. The book elucidates on phenomenology as a body of philosophical studies that opens up, analyses facts and allows individuals to deduce solutions.

Also, the book gives a definitive explanation on music theory as the agglomeration of all the thoughts *on* and *in* music. He postulates that the theory of harmony, counterpoint, and other rudiments of music be collectively termed composition theory. While the other body consisting of philosophical and literary matters be referred to as philosophical theory of music. These two form the concepts of thoughts *on* music, while the thoughts *in* music involve performance, even where it is not written down or notated. He argues that African music theory as thoughts *on* and *in* music are recognised through concretisations of thoughts and in performance (5-7).

Mereni further classifies the origin of music and classical music into four stages which include: (i) music in nature, (ii) music in human activity, (iii) music in human consciousness and practice and (iv) music in human reasoning. The author

postulates that stage i and ii have abundant evidences of musical activities in human nature ranging from the earliest developmental days of the foetus to pre-elementary school years. In the third stage, which started earlier than 6000 BC, music became a conscious practice of man; he learnt the art of playing musical instruments and singing through imitation. Sometimes, man gets intoxicated during performance which is generally common among the pop stars and traditional musicians. While in the fourth stage, which began around 3200 BC, at this time man began to rationalise music, with a focus on the intellectualisation of the art. The classical/school music was characterised by discipline, silence, reasoned action, which begrudge vulgarity. It is controlled and of proportional transcendence. The fourth stage does not belong to any race as falsely believed in some quarters as the music of the Europeans.

Again the book elucidates that the practice of music theory in Nigeria is generally misunderstood with xenophobia and separatist tendencies to western culture. The book further traces the history of classical music to Africa in Egypt and went through the Greek philosophies, then to the West and now brought back to Africa/Nigeria. He attributes the lackadaisical attitudes of some music teachers in both lower and higher institutions of learning to; ignorance, lack of sound knowledge, lack of instructional materials, policy advocacy on the need to indigenously mono-musicalise school children till they mature. Other reasons include execution of the syllabus-

teaching theory, problems of provision of musical instruments, and lack of music scores for illustrations.

The author buttresses on the musicology versus ethnomusicology dichotomy. He emphasises that the creation of the term “ethnomusicology” is a derogatory term and with the mindset of racial humiliation. Instead, the ethnomusicology in Africa should be termed African Musicology. In theorising practice, the author categorises two types of artistes as those groomed and produced from the classical/school music and those produced from folk music. He categorically asserts that ethnomusicology does not have a root in musicology but in socio-cultural anthropology.

He lists reflections on classical/school music as: (i) reality and nature of value, (ii) an intellectual value, (iii) part of history of ideas, (iv) part of world patrimony of artistic creation, (v) education, (vi) training to self-will, (vii) a training to discipline and, (viii) means to preserving nation culture.

He suggests the following as ways of

improving musicology: (i) a more sincere commitment towards the study of musicology; (ii) a stricter screening for prospective teachers and lecturers of music; (iii) a good standard in practical musicality; (iv) the Nigeria State should see to the study of our national cultural music and practices by establishing conservatories; (v) more music academies and institutes should be encouraged; (vi) promotional activities should be encouraged; (vii) and more use of indigenous composers' works.

While the book has a good hold on the explanation and historical potentials of the classical music, however, the book over-emphasises classical music above the traditional music which is the bedrock of our cultural blessings. Furthermore, the book generally demonises the scholars in ethnomusicology. This shows that the author has little respect for other fields of musicology as he categorises folk/traditional music and its scholars as second class or low rated scholars.

Title: *What the Forest Told Me: Yoruba Hunter, Culture and Narrative Performance*

Author: Dr. Ayo Adeduntan

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Reviewer: Racheal Olufunke Akinduro, University of Ibadan.

Through a preface, five well articulated chapters and a conclusion, the book provides valuable insight into the Yoruba hunter's worldview. Since a hunter's activities usually revolve around the forest, its title *What the Forest Told Me* reflects the Yoruba worldview as conceptualised through hunters' narratives and performances, inspired by the forest. The research techniques employed by the author include participants' observation, Focus Group Discussion, in-depth interview and key informant narratives. The author engages in a detailed analysis of the narratives and performances gotten from his key informants – hunters between the ages of twenty and ninety. Through these, he provides an understanding of their worldview. He introduces the book with the argument that:

Studies of Yoruba culture and performances have failed to focus predominantly on standardised performance forms such as *ijálá*, *èsòà*, *iyeròò* and *àlò,ò* ignoring the more prevalent performance culture that has convolved with everyday human routine. The drama, poetry and narrative embedded in such practices as hawking, preaching and conversation have not received enough consideration. A related problem is the question of taxonomy. Existing studies have too frequently ignored the elastic nature of many African cultural sites (x).

The above extract points to the main research problem which he brilliantly provides an answer to. He does this by analysing relevant hunters' narratives to argue and find a space for such narratives/oral performances as a unique form of art that should not be studied via hasty generalisation which depicts identifiable western theoretical frames.

He does a comparative analysis of traditional and modern hunters to find common roles played by them, such as securing and defending the society and serving as healers. He also adumbrates on how the traditional narratives find new media of creativity through modern methods. He started his argument by using elements of the hunter's narrative – acknowledgement and appeal (*Iba*), proverbs, epigrams (*owe*), praise names (*oriki*), incantation (*ofò*) – to interrogate the different generalisations that were peculiar in describing/classifying African cultural forms.

Also, with copious examples of Western and African scholars who had tried to conceptualise and classify the culture and worldview of Africa employing Western paradigms, Adeduntan argues that the dualist mode of interpretation could do no fair appraisal of the African culture. His contribution to scholarship on oral performance is centred on the theme of the inappropriateness of the dualist interpretation of informal African

art forms, shaped by Western thoughts. This interpretation simply boxes the African culture into a duo class – reality or fiction, good or bad, among others. In the author's view, this is misleading and will do no fair evaluation of an African orientation. His argument is not premised on the fact that identifiable norms are utterly defective; rather, he argues that imposing Western norms of classification on African informal art will downplay African performer's creativity. It will further lead to an inappropriate portrayal, via a blanket and shallow description, of the uniqueness of individuality of African oral forms. His argument, therefore, shows that an understanding of the local narratives, performances and practices of the hunters will provide an illuminating appreciation of the uniqueness of the African culture and perspectives, which necessarily do not need the western shaped dualist construction to thrive.

Further, he focuses on the Yoruba hunter's ideology of the order of the world and how credibility is being achieved during recitations. Here, he explains how the Yoruba hunters' narratives are different in ideology to the western religious ideology of superiority. He also gives more examples of narratives that show how hunters use the strategies of negotiation/magical power possession, flight and offering of sacrifice to re-organise the order of creation, thus, depicting equality, superiority and inferiority respectively.

Lastly, he gives a clearer picture of the influence of modern broadcast on the hunters' narratives and performances. He shows how the cultural and professional ethics in modern broadcasting have somewhat whittled the

pervading impact of the hunters' performances which symbolise the oral forms of African art and culture. He also notes how this has led to the commoditisation of the performances to a large public audience who are largely precluded from participating.

The language translation of the narratives from various interviews conducted with the hunters deserves a comment. Besides the masterful portrayal in English Language, the translation is unique for its autographic style. The Yoruba language originally spoken by the informants is transcribed in a way that preserves the qualities which distinguish the spoken form from the written form. Reading through the translations of the hunters's speeches, the Yoruba readers cannot but savour the pleasure of being present at the live interviews. It literally creates a performer-audience relationship between the readers and the work. This further buttresses the author's scholarly appreciation of African oral performance.

In sum, the book is a thorough examination of the main issue of classification in oral performance. With clarity of argument, achieved through engagement of previous writings on African oral performances and analysis of the narratives gotten from his key informants, Adeduntan gives new insight into the worldview of African art via the Yoruba hunters. A quality which makes the book a valuable contribution to the scholarship on African oral performance is Adeduntan's ability to argue with detailed examples that the hunter's narrative is a distinct form of art that needs to be appreciated globally for its uniqueness. It must not be utterly subjected to western canons of perception.