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Saying 'No' to Yielding to a Compromised Culture and Identity: The Works of Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe and Fikre Marcos Desta

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Abstract

I cannot easily digest the idea of dividing our world into ordinal numbers and so, my introduction will be a little explanation of this terminology with the help of some available maps showing such divisions on the world wide web sites and briefly show how even intellectual people in the world are prone to accept such inordinate divisions blindly and swallow such false ideas to be real.

After reaching a sort of idea about the so-called 'fourth world literature' which must mostly belong to the Native American Literature and the literature produced in the major central part of Africa, I would like to start my paper with special references to "Can the Subaltern speak?" by Gayatri Spivak and "Until the lions produce their own historians, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter" by Chinua Achebe (*Home and Exile*). I cannot easily agree with the answer given by Gayatri Spivak herself in the above mentioned popular rhetorical question mode article, as it looks somewhat compromised with the reality. Vividly feeling the punch in her staunch criticism poised against "white men are saving brown women from brown men", and reading the line of thought set in that article, a serious reader like me would have expected the answer to the rhetorical question Gayatri raised must be "Yes, the subaltern can and must speak". Neither can I admit Gayatri to be a real spokesperson for the real 'subaltern' as we understand the term today. It is true, that Gayatri herself has met with terrible criticism from Terry Eagleton and all and she has tried to justify her implication that the subalterns cannot speak and even if they spoke, it would not be listened to, in later interviews and conferences, but all of it was very late and after she could amass wealth and popularity in large measures.

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When we think about the so-called fourth world literature, I would rather concentrate on authors Amos Tutuola and Chinua Achebe, both of them from Nigeria, and on Fikere Markos Desta from Ethiopia, who in my opinion showed the audacity and courage to hold on to their originality, traditional values, ethnographic and cultural identity in multifarious ways, never yielding themselves to come down to a compromised approach just for the sake of getting into the vogue and popularity and financial gains. Amos Tutuola having the formal education of only 6 years, mesmerized the western world with his broken English novels *The Palm Wine Drinkard* and *My life in the Bush of Ghosts,* but promoting the rich folklore of his country among the westerners.

Chinua Achebe's lecture *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"* in 1975 featured a famous criticism of Joseph Conrad as "a thoroughgoing racist"; and his novels too brought out the clash of cultures in the best way possible. *The Land of the Yellow Bull* presents the adamant insistence of Goity, a Hamar Tribe girl, on sticking on to her cultural values even when she comes out of the Hamar tribe and visits Addis Ababa and then England. Such boldness and curious behaviour will not be easily digested by so called 'civilized world' where everybody is ready to shred the traditional values and heritage and swallow up everything in the name of conformity.

Keywords: Indigenous culture and language, Yoruba, Igbo, Hamar Tribe, Identity, Tradition, Oral Literature, Folklore

Introduction

While presenting this paper as a Theme Talk in the International Conference on Fourth World Literature under the aegis of Scott Christian College, Nagercoil, I had to be very cautiously using this phrase 'Fourth World Literature'. I could not easily reconcile with or swallow the idea of dividing the world into 'first','second', 'third' and 'fourth' categorizing the world in ordinal serial numbers. This has been a thought which used to haunt and harass me since the 1980s especially after my first trip to European countries in 1983, and hence I began my theme talk with a little bit of research output regarding the "worlding" accredited to Ms. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who brought this idea into postcolonial vogue. "If these 'facts' were remembered, not only in the study of British literature but in the study of the literatures of the European colonizing cultures of the great age of imperialism, we would produce a narrative, in literary history, of the "worlding" of what is now called 'the Third World' (Spivak 1985: 243)." Spivak continued: "To consider the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact literary heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation fosters the emergence of "the Third World" as a signifier that allows us to forget that "worlding," even as it expands the empire of the literary discipline" (Spivak 1985: 243). Acknowledging her inspiration for 'coining' this phrase 'worlding', Gayatri has explained in her note

to the above quotation: "My notion of the "worlding of a world" upon what must be assumed to be uninscribed earth is a vulgarization of Martin Heidegger's idea; see "The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter" (Spivak 1985: 260). As observed by Marko Juvan (2019) in his Conference paper "The Concept of Worlding in Comparative Literature": "Aware of her conceptual 'vulgarization' (Spivak 1985: 260), she adopted the term to criticize Western narratives constructing the colonized as dependent on the imperial cultural mission. The Third World as 'worlded' by the First World thus figures as the subjugated other whose otherness is to be discovered and appropriated by the colonial language" (2).

Any sensible and educated person will be wondering, how come there is the blind acceptance of the 'hegemonial' or 'hegemonistic' terms like 'First World', 'Second World', 'Third World' (by the by, we Indians are no better than the third world category) and Fourth World, even by the intellectuals and research-minded people like us in the world at large. One wonders, whether there is a specific body like QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World Universities Ranking agency, or THE (Times Higher Education) World University Rankings or even NAAC which grants A+, B+ etc. to different educational institutions in India, who is responsible to decide which all countries belong to the first world, second world, third world and the fourth world for that matter. Everybody knows the answer to be negative to this question, but simply swallows it and takes it for granted. I start with this dissenting note, because I don't want to demean myself to belong to the so called third world, where India belongs to. Or, does the adjective 'fourth' apply to mean only the fourth in order with regard to world literature? I am afraid, it is not, and the 'fourth' applies primarily to 'world' and not to 'literature'.

As affirmed in the Template of www.nationsonline.org: "The terms First, Second and Third World is a rough, and it's safe to say, outdated model of the geopolitical world from the time of the cold war". As remarked by the same Template, "first there was the three worlds model" which is now out of date. The same template records further:" The origin of the terminology is unclear. In 1952 Alfred Sauvy, a French demographer, wrote an article in the French magazine *L'Observateur* which ended by comparing the Third World with the Third Estate: "*ce Tiers Monde ignoré, exploité, méprisécomme le Tiers État*" (this ignored Third World, exploited, scorned like the Third Estate). Other sources claimed that Charles de Gaulle coined the term Third World, or, maybe, Charles de Gaulle only has quoted Sauvy" (https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/third_world_countries.htm).

The Fourth World

Explaining the etymology of this phrase, Wikipedia.org gives the following note:

> *Fourth World* follows the First World, Second World, and Third World classification of nation-state status; however, unlike the former categories, *Fourth World* is not spatially bounded, and is usually used to refer

> to size and shape which does not map onto citizenship in a specific nation-state. It can denote nations without a sovereign state, emphasizing the perceived non-recognition and exclusion of ethnically- . . . . Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells of the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication has made extensive use of the term *fourth world* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourth_World).

As explained by Hall (2003): "The term was coined by Mbuto Milando, first secretary of the Tanzanian High Commission, in conversation with George Manuel, Chief of the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations). Milando stated that 'When Native peoples come into their own, on the basis of their own cultures and traditions, that will be the Fourth World'" (Hall 2003: 238).

Since the publication of Manuel's *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (1974), the term *Fourth World* is synonymous with stateless, poor, and marginal nations. Since 1979, think tanks such as the Center for World Indigenous Studies have used the term in defining the relationships between ancient, tribal, and non-industrial nations and modern industrialised nation-states. With the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, communications and organizing amongst Fourth World peoples have accelerated in the form of international treaties between aboriginal nations for the purposes of trade, travel, and security.

One World Nations Online (OWNO)'s Explanation of the "Four Worlds"

Here below I quote extensively from this website regarding the Four Worlds: "After the Second World War, the world split into two major geopolitical blocs and spheres of influence with conflicting political views about government and the right society.

First World

The bloc of democratic-industrialized countries within the American sphere of influence, the "First World," also known as The West.

Second World

The Eastern bloc of the communist-socialist states, where the political and economic power should come from the up to now oppressed peasants and workers.

Third World

The remaining three-quarters of the world population, countries that did not belong to either bloc, were considered "Third World."

Fourth World

The term "Fourth World" was coined in the early 1970s by Shuswap Chief George Manuel, it refers to widely unknown nations (cultural entities) of indigenous peoples, "First Nations" living within or across national state boundaries" (https://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/ third_world_countries.htm on 7 August 2020).

It was Gordon Brotherston who argued that American continent was identified as the "Fourth World" in his famous work, *Book of the Fourth World: Reading the Native Americas through their Literature* published in 1992. As established in this book, at the time of its "discovery", the American continent was identified as the Fourth World of our planet. In the course of just a few centuries, its original inhabitants, though settled there for millennia and countable in many millions, have come to be perceived as a marginal if not entirely dispensable factor in the continent's destiny. Today the term has been taken up again by its native peoples, to describe their own world: both its threatened present condition and its political history, which stretches back thousands of years before Columbus.

In the lucid words of R. Reshmy (2018), "The Fourth world refers to the most underdeveloped regions in the world. The fourth world is used to describe the most poverty stricken and economically troubled parts of countries in the third world. Unlike the first, second and third worlds, the fourth world does not have any political ties and is often based on a hunter gatherer lifestyle. The fourth world covers all ethnic, racial, caste, linguistic, gender even socio-political and economic marginal"(16).

Three Authors Challenging the Concept of 'worlding'

After reaching a sort of idea about the so-called 'fourth world literature' which must mostly belong to the Native American Literature and the literature produced in the major central part of Africa, and many of the indigenous tribal cultures of India and other countries, I started my paper, with special references to "Can the Subaltern speak?" by Gayatri Spivak and "Until the lions produce their own historians, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter" by Chinua Achebe (*Home and Exile*). I could not easily agree with the answer given by Gayatri Spivak herself in the above mentioned popular rhetorical question mode article, as it looks some what compromised with the reality. Vividly feeling the punch in her staunch criticism poised against "white men are saving brown women from brown men", and reading the line of thought set in that article, a serious reader like me would have expected the answer to the rhetorical question Gayatri raised must have been "Yes, the subaltern can and must speak". Neither could I admit Gayatri to be a real spokesperson for the real 'subaltern' as we understand the term today. It is true, that Gayatri herself had met with terrible criticism from Terry Eagleton and all and she has tried to justify her implication in pronouncing "that the subalterns cannot speak" to be because, even if they spoke it would not be listened to, in her later interviews and conferences. But all of it was very late and after she could a mass wealth and popularity in large measures as result of her article. At the same time, her thought provokingly challenging of the "worlding" could be seen as a radical step of questioning the literary conventions imposed by the westerners on the rest of the world.

Amos Tutuola

When we think about the so-called fourth world literature, I would rather concentrate on authors Amos Tutuola, and Chinua Achebe both of them from Nigeria and Fikere Markos Desta from Ethiopia, who in my opinion showed the audacity and courage to hold on to their originality, traditional values, ethnographic and cultural identity in multifarious ways, never yielding themselves to come down to a compromised approach just for the sake of getting into the vogue and popularity and financial gains.

Amos Tutuola (1920–1997) was recognized globally for his perpetuation of Yoruba folklore tradition via novels and short stories written in unconventional English. His works, especially *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), were translated into numerous European languages. Amos Tutuola having the formal education of only 6 years, mesmerized the western world with his broken English novels *The Palm Wine Drinkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. He could achieve great significance and promote the rich Nigerian folklore among the westerners, although he was not welcomed enthusiastically by his own countrymen, alleging that it would give a bad impression of the country among the westerners due to incorrect usages of English. Amos Tutuola deemed his incorrectness of English usage should not be judged by the Europeans, and wished to communicate in English as he conceived it and comprehended in his own ways. He considered this quality of "freedom of expression" to be his trump card and in an insisting way, this 'uneducated' man from Nigeria succeeded in publishing his book outside his own country and continent, and denied the publishing editor any freedom to correct his 'broken English' and insisted on getting it published as he has scripted it.

The Plot

The Palm-Wine Drinkard, told in the first person, is about an unnamed man who is addicted to palm wine, which is made from the fermented sap of the palm tree and used in ceremonies all over West Africa. The son of a rich man, the narrator can afford his own tapster (a man who taps the palm tree for sap and then prepares the wine). When the tapster dies, cutting off his supply, the desperate narrator sets off for Dead's Town to try to bring the tapster back. He travels through a world of magic and supernatural beings, surviving various tests and finally gains a magic egg with never-ending supply of palm wine.

Although the novel was not applauded by his countrymen, way back in 1975 Taban Lo Liyong, the Acting Vice Chancellor of Juba University in South Sudan gave supreme praise to Amos Tutuola in his article, "Tutuola, Son of Zinjanthropus" published in *Critical Perspectives on Amos Tutuola* edited by Bernth Lindfors,Three Continents Press, 1975. Both in a web article entitled "Errr . . . But James Joyce is More Ungrammatical Than Tutola" (2013) and in an interview with

Yinka Tutuola, (Amos Tutuola's son) by Jeff Vander Meer (2013) a very lengthy laudatory quotation is included from Liyong's article "Tutuola, Son of Zinjanthropus":

> Now, in all that he has done, Amos Tutuola is not *sui generis*. Is he ungrammatical? Yes. But James Joyce is more ungrammatical than Tutuola. Ezekiel Mphahlele has often said and written that African writers are doing violence to English Language. Violence? Has Joyce not done more violence to the English? Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is written in seven dialects, he tells us. It is acknowledged a classic. We accept it, forget that it has no "grammar", and go ahead to learn his "grammar" and what he has to tell us. Let Tutuola write "no grammar" and the hyenas and jackals whine and growl. Let Gabriel Okara write a "no grammar" Okolo. They are mum. Why? Education drives out of the mind superstition, daydreaming, building of castles in the air, cultivation of yarns, and replaces them with a rational practical mind, almost devoid of imagination. Some of these minds having failed to write imaginative stories, turn to that aristocratic type of criticism which magnifies trivialities beyond their real size. They fail to touch other virtues in a work because they do not have the imagination to perceive these mysteries. Art is arbitrary. Anybody can begin his own style. Having begun it arbitrarily, if he persists to produce in that particular mode, he can enlarge and elevate it to something permanent, to something other artists will come to learn and copy, to something the critics will catch up with and appreciate" (As quoted in the web article of Brittle.com, retrieved from: https://brittlepaper.com/2013/11/joyce-ungrammatical-tutuola/on 20 August 2020 and the interview report made by Meer, Jeff Vanders (2013) retrieved from: https://weirdfictionreview.com/2013/01/amos-tutuola-an-interview-with-yinka-tutuola-by-jeff-vandermeer/ on 28 August 2020).

It should be noted that as reported by Jeff Vander Meer (2013) in his article "Amos Tutuola: An Interview with Yinka Tutuola", Yinka Tutuola the son of Amos includes the same lengthy quotation as a means of concluding the answer given by him to the question "What are your thoughts about the claim that some of the positive early Western reactions to Tutuola's work were, in a way, racist?" raised by the interviewer Weirdfictionreview.com to him.

Similarly, Timothy Temilola Ajani (2001) in his PhD dissertation described that "Tutuola decided to change his name from Olatubosen (his given name, meaning 'wealth or honour is still increasing') to Amos (most probably his baptismal name), a name reminiscent of the biblical fiery prophet of righteousness in the Jewish Old Testament" (95). Ajani (2001) further explained Tutuola's changing his name Odegbami (his family name, bearing loyalty to the deity Ogun) to Tutuola, his father's given name (meaning 'fresh wealth') and thus eschewing affinity to the deity in one's name (95) and further established: "In this name lies the history of Tutuola's transformation as well as an important key to understanding his works, works that mix Yoruba beliefs and cosmology with Christian beliefs and western technology

and transfer underlying Yoruba linguistic structures into English to produce writings that appeal to both Yoruba and English speakers alike" (95). Ajani affirmed again: "Achebe is known to have referred to Tutuola as 'the most moralistic of African writers' while Soyinka has popularized his works among the masses through theatrical performances" (99).

Ajani in his PhD dissertation tried to explore, in part, "this thorny issue of Tutuola's language – why he wrote the way he did, and the linguistic principles that underlie his experimentation with the English language (EL)", and in the conclusion of his unpublished dissertation, Ajani (2001) avers:

> What Tutuola was doing in essence was to think in Yoruba, then translate his thoughts into English before putting them into writing. The end result of this linguistic alchemy was an English language touched by, then molded and shaped by Yoruba worldview and thought processes, a new type of English that Afolayan, another Yoruba and a distinguished Professor of English, would later on refer to as 'Yoruba English', and an internet reviewer would describe as having the 'cyclical nature of extended drumming', a good reminder of the Yoruba language itself, a tonal language that uses the 'talking drum' as one of its means of communication through an artful combination and manipulation of three tonal system of the language (134).

The Palm-Wine Drinkard is, in fact, a classic quest tale in which the hero, a lazy boy who likes to spend his days drinking palm wine, gains wisdom, confronts death, and overcomes many perils in the course of his journey. The book has been translated into 11 languages. Tutuola followed up his first book with *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), which reiterates the quest motif through the experiences of a boy who, in trying to escape from slave traders, finds himself in the Bush of Ghosts. Another quest is found in *Simbi and the Satyr of the Dark Jungle* (1955), a more compact tale focusing upon a beautiful and rich young girl who leaves her home and experiences poverty and starvation. In this and the books that followed—*The Brave African Huntress* (1958), *The Feather Woman of the Jungle* (1962), *Ajaiyi and His Inherited Poverty* (1967), and *The Witch-Herbalist of the Remote Town* (1981)—Tutuola's rich vision imposes unity upon a series of relatively random events. His later works include *Yoruba Folktales (1986), Pauper, Brawler, and Slanderer* (1987), and *The Village Witch Doctor and Other Stories* (1990).

As the Biographies section of www.britannica.com avers: "Tutuola's vivid presentation of the world of Yoruba mythology and religion and his grasp of literary form made him a success among a wide British, African, and American audience. The theatrical and operatic versions of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* made by others have also proven popular" (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Amos-Tutuola on 31 January 2018).

As revealed by Timothy Temilola Ajani (2012): "Using three of Tutuola's works – *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954), and *The Brave African Huntress* (1958) – as corpus for this linguistic analysis, [Ajani's] dissertation tried to show how the Yoruba language (YL), among others, has exerted a profound influence on EL as used in present day Nigeria" (2). Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2015) categorically remarked: "His stories are contributions to his mission of keeping alive and relevant African ways of knowing and knowledge production, and fending off the one-dimensionalism of resilient colonialism and the ambitions of completeness which it claims and inspires" (3).

Chinua Achebe

As observed by Paul Bisceglio in his article "Beyond Chinua Achebe: Five Great African Authors You Should Read Right Now": In a 1994 interview with the *Paris Review*, Chinua Achebe, the world's most widely-read modern African author, said that recording a people's history is not a one-man job. The Nigerian-born writer explained he wanted to paint a more accurate picture of African culture than the one portrayed by the white authors he read as a boy, growing up:

> I was introduced to the danger of not having your own stories. There is that great proverb - that until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter. . . . Once I realized that, I had to be a writer. I had to be that historian. It's not one man's job. It's not one person's job. But it is something we have to do, so that the story of the hunt will also reflect the agony, the travail—the bravery, even, of the lions'. (https://www.smithsonianmag.com)

Achebe, who was born on November 16, 1930 and died at age 82 in 2013, leaves behind a legacy of success in telling the other side of the story. His robust oeuvre includes critically acclaimed novels, poems and essays. His first and best-known novel, *Things Fall Apart*, required reading in schools across America, was translated into more than 45 languages, and sold more than 10 million copies worldwide.

Jonathan Kandell reported in *The New York Times* on March 22, 2013 in his article "Chinua Achebe, African Literary Titan, Dies at 82" and described Achebe to be a "towering man of letters":

> *Things Fall Apart* gave expression to Mr. Achebe's first stirrings of anti-colonialism and a desire to use literature as a weapon against Western biases. As if to sharpen it with irony, he borrowed from the Western canon itself in using as its title a line from Yeats's apocalyptic poem "The Second Coming."
>
> "In the end, I began to understand," Mr. Achebe later wrote, "there is such a thing as absolute power over narrative. Those who secure this privilege

> for themselves can arrange stories about others pretty much where, and as, they like" (Kandell).

Chinua Achebe's lecture *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"* in 1975, featured a famous criticism of Joseph Conrad as "a thorough going racist"; and his novels too brought out the clash of cultures in the best way possible. Chinua Achebe (1930-2013), in fact, had published his first novel *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. Achebe wrote it in response to European novels that depicted Africans as savages who needed to be enlightened by the Europeans. Achebe presents to the reader his people's history with both strengths and imperfections by describing for example, Igbo festivals, the worship of their gods and the practices in their ritual ceremonies, their rich culture and other social practices, the colonial era that was both stopping Igbo culture and also brought in some benefits to their culture. *Things Fall Apart,* therefore, directly battles with the misleading of European novels that depict Africans as savages into a whole new light with its portrayal of Igbo society, and examines the effects of European colonialism on Igbo society from an African perspective. Achebe's primary purpose of writing the novel was that he wanted to educate his readers about the value of his culture as an African. *Things Fall Apart* provides readers with an insight of Igbo society right before the white missionaries' invasion on their land. The invasion of the colonizing force threatened to change almost every aspect of Igbo society; from religion, traditional gender roles and relations, family structure to trade.

Consequently, Achebe blamed the white missionaries' colonial rule and/or invasion for the post-colonial oppressed Igbo culture; this oppression can be seen in terms of the oppressed social coherence between the individual and their society. Furthermore, Achebe tried to educate readers extensively about Igbo society's myths and proverbs. Achebe (2012) has shared this detail:

> James Welch [Achebe's Professor of Religion] said to me, 'We may not be able to teach you what you need or what you want. We can only teach you what we know.' I thought that was wonderful. Welch helped me understand that they were not sent there to translate their knowledge to me in a way that would help me channel my creative energies to tell my story of Africa, my story of Nigeria, the story of myself. I learned, if I may put it simply, that my story had to come from within me (41).

Before Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart*, all the novels that had been written about Africa and Africans were written by Europeans. Mostly, the European writings described Africans as uncivilized and uneducated persons. The Europeans, seeing that they thought of themselves as more advanced than Africans, were determined to help Africans shift from the old era into the modern era of civilization and education.

As Sickels (2012) observes: "*Heart of Darkness*, for instance, by Joseph Conrad was one of the most read novels around the time of its publication in 1899. Conrad

described Africa as a "wild, 'dark', and uncivilized continent". Following Conrad's novel in 1952 was *Mister Johnson*, a novel by Joyce Cary. Like *Heart of Darkness*, *Mister Johnson* was also quite a popular read; its reviews suggest it was a more popular read than *Heart of Darkness*. According to Sickels (2012), *Mister Johnson*, describes the novel's protagonist Mr. Johnson generally as a "childish, semi-educated African who reinforces colonialist stereotypes about Africa". Based on the descriptions of Africa and its people by both Conrad and Cary, it comes as no surprise that Achebe and other African writers began to emerge and tell their story of Africa and its people. Not only were Conrad and Cary's novels a misrepresentation of Africa, they were also humiliating to its people. It is through the insights of *Things Fall Apart* that the world became more appreciative of Africa and its people and at the same time the truth surrounding the stereotypical ideas that once existed about Africa began to appear in a much clearer light.

He gained worldwide attention for his novel *Things Fall Apart* in the late 1950s; his later novels include *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). Achebe wrote his novels in English and defended the use of English, a "language of colonizers", in African literature. A titled Igbo chieftain himself, Achebe's novels focus on the traditions of Igbo society, the effect of Christian influences, and the clash of Western and traditional African values during and after the colonial era. His style relies heavily on the Igbo oral tradition, and combines straightforward narration with representations of folk stories, proverbs, and oratory. He also published a number of short stories, children's books, and essay collections. Upon his return to the United States in 1990, he began an eighteen-year tenure at Bard College as the Charles P. Stevenson Professor of Languages and Literature. From 2009 until his death, he served as David and Marianna Fisher University Professor and Professor of Africana Studies at Brown University. Speaking about the role of the writer in Africa, Achebe (2012) avowedly acknowledged: "What I can say is that it was clear to many of us that an indigenous African literary renaissance was overdue. A major objective was to challenge stereotypes, myths, and the image of ourselves and our continent, and to recast them through stories—prose, poetry, essays, and books for our children. That was my overall goal" (59).

Fikere Markos Desta

The Land of the Yellow Bull presents the adamant insistence of Goity, a Hamar Tribal girl on sticking on to her cultural values even when she comes out of the Hamar tribe and visits Addis Ababa and then England. Such boldness and curious behaviour will not be easily digested by the so called 'civilized world' where everybody is ready to shred the traditional values and heritage and swallow up everything in the name of conformity. The famous



Fig. 1

travel writer Giulia Raciti in her article "Omar Valley – The Hamar Tribe, Bull Jumping and the Evangadi" and tattoo anthropologist Lars Krutak in her article "Ethiopia's Last Frontier: The Bloody World of the Hamar Tribe" share their personal encounters and experiences in this tribe and give some of the pictures to better understand what is described in the novel *The Land of the Yellow Bull*. Figure 1, a photograph by Giulia Raciti depicts the dress pattern of the Hamar girl as described with regard to Goity Anteneh who did not conform herself to the western way of dressing in Addis Ababa or in England (See Fig.1).

The famous tattoo anthropologist Lars Krutak has described the Omo valley in the South western Ethiopia as the "Poisoned Paradise":

> The Omo Valley has been described as Ethiopia's 'poisoned paradise' because although its landscape is at times extremely beautiful, especially after the rainy season when the verdant valley is filled with plant life, the rest of the year it sizzles in extreme heat much like the Arizona desert. . . . Largely undisturbed and little visited until the recent influx of tourism development, it is in this harsh environment that exotic tribes with animistic religions and ancient customs have remained relatively intact (http://www.larskrutak.com/ethiopias-last-frontier-the-bloody-world-of-the-hamar-tribe/).

Two very important events enshrining fundamental moments in the life of every man for the social life of its inhabitants are poignantly described in *The Land of the Yellow Bull*. These two events, which take place one after the other, are illustrative of a culture rooted in the traditions and tell a lot of the tribal way of thinking. These are the Bull Jumping (the jumping of the bull) and the Evangadi (night dancing) which are described in the novel with the point of view of the British Anthropological Researcher Charlotte Alfred.

The famous travel writer Giulia Raciti describes her first hand experiences among the people of Hamar and their traditional values with the help of some pictures (http://www.viaggiare-low-cost.it/en/omo-valley-the-hamar-tribe-the-bull-jumping-and-the-evangadi/). The most important moment in a man's life, or rather for the male member of the tribe, coincides with the passage from youth to adulthood, passage that requires a very picturesque celebration, evocative and even controversial, and a physical test that literally, lays bare the alertness, the strength and the virility of the young boy. This step takes place during the jumping of the bull (bull jumping), the celebration that is distinguished in two stages: the whip-lashes by the "new men", i.e. those who have jumped the bull recently, to the women of the family of the boy who will have to jump the bulls who, to show their love for him, will let themselves be whipped until they bleed (See Fig. 2).



Fig. 2

And the second part, i.e. the jumping of the bulls. The boy, completely naked, will have to jump and run on the back of 8 bulls and only when this is done three times, without falling (See Fig. 3), he can retire in the bushes with his friends, following the di (night dance), until the family will announce who will be the future wife (the first wife is chosen by the family).



Fig. 3

Addis Ababa and Bull Jumping

This aspect of the bull jumping is strongly opposed by Ethiopia that would like to abolish this moment but to only maintain the successive part, or rather the jumping of the bulls. In fact, the Hamar tribe to Addis that the day they stop venerating their GODS giving up the celebrations and so to their own cultural traditions then they might think it over. An answer that means NO, we do not want to abolish this part of the tradition because it would mean for us to give up an important part of our society, traditions that from the outside are not easy to understand.

It's true, it is not nice for us to see women being flogged, but it is also true that it is the women who, shouting and showing the body pushing towards the men, grasping their arms vigorously and persistently, even when he, tired of all this refuses, finds himself forced to do so. The more scars you have (remember that the scar has a value in tribal communities), the more you have shown to love the future jumper (remember that they are all women of the family, except the mother who, in the meantime prepares food for the celebration). It is, therefore essential to approach this event knowing that there will be blood and do not judge these gestures in which are concerned symbols and deep-rooted traditions important to the community. I asked my Hamar friends first if really the women are happy to be hurt and the answer is univocal: YES. This is their way of living family and community relationships, the case to say a kind of "blood pact".

In the meantime that the family women allowed themselves to be flogged, the mother of the jumper organized instead the feast which that night would happen in the village, with the participation by all those by standers who do not want to miss the incredible, tireless and sensual dance of the night: the Evangadi.

The group of men in a semicircle sings striking up music where there are no instruments, but only voices (See Fig. 4). The women in the group are in front, next

to the largest of the village tree under which the celebrations start. The first moment is all male, they sing, jump, dance, as the women slowly arrive to form the group, the sensual and some what promiscuous dance of the night begins.



Fig. 4

A chase between him and her, in which she escapes from his invitation and ends with a great final jump of the man protruding his pelvis towards the woman. The meat in the meantime is left to roast, the technique reminds me of that in Argentina. A slow cooking due to the fact that the animal is not put on the fire but at the sides. The old drink and chat in the shade of the open hut that serves as a gazebo. Giulia Raciti affirms: "I danced with them, I jumped and I was not fast enough to run away from his jump at the final part".

As reported by Lars Krutak:

> Before a Hamar male can prove himself as a warrior on the field of battle, he must first prove to his peers and relatives that he can become a man. And as long as there have been cattle in the Hamar universe, there has been the bull-jumping ceremony called the *bullah*.
>
> Failure to jump and then run across the backs of a dozen or more dung-laden bulls is one thing, but when there is a crowd of several hundred family members cheering you on (and who will whip the living *HELL* out of you if you don't succeed!) that is another. Most Hamar men prefer death over failing at the bull jump, and if you succeed your name will be mentioned in folk songs and soon enough you'll have a new wife. Even young men who are crippled or blind can participate, and in such cases they are either lifted over the backs of the cattle or are allowed to run under their necks. (http://www.larskrutak.com/ethiopias-last-frontier-the-bloody-world-of-the-hamar-tribe/).

As Lars Krutak observed: "Depending on the number of enemies he has slain, the Hamar warrior is also allowed to have his chest scarified with vertical rows of *pala* or "hero scars" (Krutak) (See Fig. 5).


Fig. 5

She reproduces also the pictures of 'scarified Hamar women at Turmi market (Krutak). Hamar women also wear intricately beautiful scars like their male counterparts. In some villages I was told that if a man has no more room on his body to tally his "kills" through scarification, then one of his wives

(the Hamar are polygamous) can signal this information on her skin (See Fig. 6); each line of scars is said to represent one enemy killed.



Fig. 6

Lars Krutak describes these scars on woman's body skin to be the "Beauty marks of the Hamar". She further observes: "One Hamar woman named Gule stated, 'When you bleed, you lose weight and become weak'. But the women still get scars, not because we are forced to, but because we want to".

Conclusion

It is true that we have seen authors like A. K. Ramanujan, Arundathi Roy and Salman Rushdie who joined hands with the provoking challenge launched by Chinua Achebe's "*until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter*" as well as the radical questioning of the 'worlding' brought to vogue by Gayatri Spivak and were bent on holding on to their culture and identity in their works. Yet, I wish to conclude this study with the attitude of Goity Anteneh the Hamar girl, when she was requested by her husband Kello Gorra and their mutual friend Charlotte Alfred to change her Hamar way of dressing only with a goat skin skirt, in order to comply her with the sophisticated dressing pattern of the more 'civilized' Addis Ababa society: "How dare you humiliate me by asking me to put off my forefather's dress? Why should I pretend? Why should I change my traditional dressing for the sake of likeness?" Goity fumed with anger.… "Why have you gone to educate our self if there is nothing courageous that tightens our relationship with the past" Goity asked rhetorically (Desta, *The Land of the Yellow Bull*, 353-354). Later on Kello admitted: "Goity you taught us that freedom is the right to choose, acknowledge and respect the right to exist as we are. . . . We are wrong Goity. We asked you to throw away your confidence and hope" (Desta, *The Land* . . ., 355).

Mackenzie Finley in a web article quoted from Di Maio, *Tutuola at the University* (148), and witnessed that during his lecture series at University of Palermo, Italy Tutuola explained: "As much as I could [in my novels], I tried my best to bring out for the people to see the secrets of my tribe—I mean, the Yoruba people—and of Nigerian people, and African people as a whole. I'm trying my best to bring out our traditional things for the people to know a little about us, about our beliefs, our character, and so on" (https://news.clas. ufl.edu/constructing-identities-amos-tutuola-and-the-ibadan-literary-elite-in-the-wake-of-nigerian-independence/). I would wind up this study giving this clarion call to feel free with experimenting with the English language without moving away from one's own individual country's native identity and never aspiring at achieving only the 'Queen's English' as our

bench marks and trying to eschew blindly following whatever the Westerners approved. Transferring our native culture and identity to the world at large must be the paramount thrust of our usage of English language.

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