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The development of exilic poetry in Anglophone West Africa

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The nineteenth century was a period of migration that was perpetuated by the socio-political and economic instability in the continent; this caused the decline in the quality of life which had forced many people to go on exile. This study provides insights into the development of exilic poetry in Anglophone West Africa to show that exilic literature is not an accidental product; it grows out of the sordid social, political and economic realities in the sub-region. The contemporary development in exilic literary discourse in Anglophone West Africa indicates a radical shift in vision which is informed by the need to use this literature as a writing-back strategy. We have also discovered in this study that exilic literature in Anglophone West Africa has grown from the simple narration of personal feelings to become a radical ideology for re-ordering of human relations. Moreover, this study shows that there is a wide range of forms emerging from exilic literary experience in Anglophone West Africa in the explication of personal feelings, nostalgia, alienation, political and socio-cultural disruptions. **Keywords:** alienation, Anglophone West Africa, exile, exilic poetry, migration.

A pervading motif in recent Anglophone West African poetry is the narration of the pains and gains of exile; this marks a shift in the thematic focus from the poetry of dehumanization at home to the poetry of humiliation abroad, and by extension, the subtle stigmatization of African leaders for their irresponsible governance. Exile involves the physical displacement of a people from their homeland, either forced or voluntary. It is also concerned with the cultural and psychological disorientation of an individual as a result of estrangement and alienation. Arnold Itwaru (quoted in King 203) underscores the complex nature of exile when he stresses that "to be in exile is considerably more than being in another country, it is to live with myself knowing my estrangement. It is to know that I do not belong here". This estrangement, more than anything is felt at the domain of language when a migrant becomes inaudible as a result of language differences. Exile also has the capacity of providing security for people who are no longer safe in their homeland; this has influenced artistic creativity as writers in exile find it propitious to express their condemnation of the activities of the rulers in the homeland without fear of censorship or incarceration. Syl Cheney-Coker has explained that writers go to exile under compulsion in order to help in the reconstruction of their society. He posits that:

no writer voluntarily goes into exile [...] the writer would probably be the last person to leave his country. For the writer in Africa has never been outside his country's social-political development and in going into exile he is merely extending his concern, his need to be able to write, to breathe and help in the process of reconstruction after the chaos. (Cheney-Coker, "Exile, the Writer and the Critic" 4)

Exile and migration as literary motifs have a long history. The biblical account of the exit of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden is tantamount to a movement away from home to exile with all it connotes. This was the beginning of man's wandering on the surface of the earth. The loss of Eden becomes a leitmotif for the understanding of the situation inherent in exile as the Man (Adam) became an outcast, a wanderer and a drifter. Ali Shari'ah provides a philosophical explanation to man's wandering on the surface of the earth when he reasons that:

[m]an, this dialectical phenomenon, is compelled to be always in motion [...] Man then can never attain resting place and take up residence in God [...] Man is a "choice", a struggle, a constant becoming. He is an infinite migration, a migration within himself, from clay to god, he is a migrant within his own soul. (Quoted in Said 334)

Literary production in Anglophone West Africa is informed by diverse experiences that result from the socio-cultural, political and economic realities of the sub-continent. Emanating from these phenomenal concerns is the diagnosis of the challenges that the continent has had to contend with in asserting its place and importance in the world. Modern Anglophone West African poetry simply refers to the recent literary poetic production written in the language of the former colonial master, specifically, Britain, in West Africa. Several factors could be attributed to the growth of this poetic tradition: the frequent political skirmishes in Africa have the tendency of producing equivalent thematic response through the medium of poetry. Another outstanding factor is the postcolonial inclinations of these writers who are able to see the problems engendered by colonialism in the domains of politics and cultural relations. In terms of movements, Anglophone West African poetry responds to the panoply of activities within the sub-region. Therefore, the poetry which began as a cultural material had developed in recent years to create a passion for the expression of societal foibles, and perhaps the outflow of personal emotions. Tayo Olafioye in *Politics in African Literature* (1984) locates the sensibilities of these poets within their ability to use traditional symbols and invention of new dictions that confer cultural authority on this poetry (23).

Within Anglophone West Africa, a great deal of poetic creativity was witnessed starting from the mid-twentieth century. These poets have had to develop personal themes through their private experience and as a result, there emerged new ways of

expression that came with the use of personal and complex images and symbols which some critics have described as obscure as it reflects the cultural, social economic, intellectual and political life of the African people. Through the narration of private experiences, these poets are able to examine the social and political dislocations in their societies. For instance, Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark and Christopher Okigbo bear eloquent testimonies to the disruptive effects of the memorable Nigerian civil war in their poetry. In Ghana, Kofi Awoonor, Atukwei Okai and Kofi Anyidoho also use the resources of poetry to inform the world of the existence of a vibrant oral culture in Ghana especially through poetry performance. The same tendency of using poetry to project the communal values in the society is a general preoccupation of poets from other Anglophone West African countries such as Gambia, Sierra Leone and Liberia during this period. Anglophone West African poetry, in terms of its characteristic temperament and commitment, has been summed up by Thomas Knipp (108) in the following words:

much of the imagery of the modern Anglophone poets is derived from the historical myth. Africa is depicted in pastoral images of nature and nurture, symbolized often as a woman in tropes that are both maternal and erotic. The traditional past, figured by dance, drums, masks, and other artifacts, is both sustaining and creative. The Europeans who violate it are presented as birds of prey or other predators. The psychological myth often determines the character of the persona and its relation to historic Africa.

Independence in all African countries came with social dislocations and disillusionment; this political disjunction necessitated a change in poetic tradition, attention is thus shifted to the perennial socio-political and economic problems emanating from self-rule. The postcolonial era in Africa is indeed a time of economic recess as African leaders continue to plunder the resources of their respective countries to the chagrin of the masses. This has exacerbated the existential problems confronting the average person. A means of subverting this horrendous dysfunction has resulted in migration which eventually translates into exile. Through logic of understanding, modern Anglophone West African poets have been able to enlarge the terrain of their thematic focus by expressing the radically transformed socio-cultural and political conditions such as the unique African experience of exile. These poets have developed into a personality that is sensitive to the enigmatic relations and the predicament of a postcolonial subject by espousing the nightmarish condition of a people hounded into exiles when faced with economic and political problems in their countries of origin.

Anglophone exilic poets represent a movement in poetic creativity that captures the new exigencies of African experience that is associated with postcolonial tendencies. The originality in this poetry can be attested to by the fact that it opens a

new chapter in the interrogation of the pervading effect of the social and political crises that make people to take the exile option when faced with existential problems at home. Before now, Anglophone West African poets have experimented with series of ideas and motifs about the living conditions of people at home but these exilic poets have gone further to examine these challenges beyond the shores of Africa and thus have expanded the provenance of modern African poetry. The Anglophone West African poetry of exile is thus an emotional response to human challenges and conflicts in its exploration of the range of possibilities open to the dislocated Africans around the world. In broad general terms, this poetry conveys the social, cultural and political attitudes in the subcontinent to underscore the physical and psychological conditions of the people.

The understanding or awareness that the colonial contact provides creates the possibility of interrogating the relationship between the colonial world and the colonized in order to show how the colonized African nations have been affected by this contact. Postcolonial discourse investigates the effects of this remarkable contact with the West to underscore the overarching existential problems of the African continent; its provenance also includes the consequences or aftermath of colonial contact. And in our own time, exilic discourse has become an important aspect of these postcolonial investigations since exile is one important social crisis that has affected and altered human affairs in drastic manners in Anglophone West Africa.

The literature of exile in the African continent has its fount in the experience of slavery; therefore, the beginning of exile in Africa could be traced to the twin evil of slavery and slave trade. During this period, many Africans were herded away to the West and these slaves went away with some residues of their culture and in their new abode, this becomes a foundation for the enactment of the home cultures. J. E. Inikori (2) confirms the place of the slave trade in the making of the African Diaspora when he says that "the slave trade has remained by far the most important factor which dispersed African peoples and their cultures all over the globe. Quantitatively therefore, the trade can be treated as the origin of the Diaspora". There is a touch of the tradition of exploration which is a common motif in the nineteenth and late-twentieth centuries in West African Anglophone exilic literature. Thus, exilic literature maps out not only new landscapes and new spaces within the contemporary world but also portrays travel writings beyond its earlier perception, by giving it a new popularity and a new critical orientation through the discovery of new possibilities in the apprehension of different cultural spaces. What this new writing did was to popularize exilic writing and give it a political and social impact it had never possessed before.

Estrangement from Africa has provoked innate reactions to the pains of exile among African writers. As scholars in exile, the awareness of their estranged condition is brought to light by racial discrimination in the host society; social integration into the West society is impossible, hence they live on the fringes or periphery of the

society as social outcasts. This necessitates a literature that projects the extent of their agony and the loss of identity they have suffered. In the works of Christopher Okigbo, J. P. Clark, Wole Soyinka, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Okot p’bitek, Ayi Kwei Armah, Bessie Head, Alex La Guma and Dennis Brutus, the motif of exile is prominent. Alienation expresses the condition of man in the world; it causes the disruption of psycho-social equilibrium as the exiles are tendentially lost in the new environment. Abiola Irele (56) expresses similar position more clearly in the following words “alienation signifies the sensitive tension between the immediate closeness of the self and the reflected distance of the other in its creative potential”. Alienation is a compulsion that African exiles must contend with as a direct tragedy of colonialism and neo-imperialism; at the macro-cultural level, alienation prefigures the conflict between the West and Africa. In the works of African-Caribbean and African-American writers, alienation is a dominant motif. Right from the narratives of Olaudah Equiano (Gustavus Vassa), Frederick Douglass, Phillis Wheatley, Marcus Garvey and W. E. B Du Bois to the works of Edward (Kamau) Braithwaite, Derek Walcott and Samuel Selvon, this motif has been expressed poignantly as a form of mental infirmity. Their works are pre-occupied with the sordid condition of migration and the grim realities of exile experience. Samuel Asein (125) expresses the situation thus:

the theme of alienation and exile is one of the most persistent themes in the literature of the black world. It features prominently in the works of many black writers who at one time or the other have had to yield to the socio-political circumstances prevailing in their countries; or choose to undertake an epic journey in search of their ancestral roots.

Okigbo and Clark perceive themselves as exiles from a primal tradition. This informs their ambivalent posture to both African and western traditions. They could only find a place on the fringes of existence in their cultural exile and this unwholesome experience, translates into the urge to creatively articulate their exilic condition even as they are primarily committed to a search for identity. While Okigbo’s and Clark’s exilic imagination could be located within the ambit of cultural and psychological dislocation in “Heavensgate” and “Agbor Dancer”, Soyinka’s encounter with exilic motif in “Telephone Conversation” is imaginatively real. The poem demonstrates the conflictual relationship between the black and the white in a predominantly white environment. The dialogue in this poem is a manifestation of the crippling socio-cultural relations between Africa and the West. The problem of cultural and communal disorientation in *Songs of Lawino and Songs of Ocol* (1966) is conceived from the spatio-temporal disorder in an emerging African state. Okot p’Bitek laments the after-effect of colonial contact on the unsuspecting Africans who in embracing Western civilization have lost touch with their cultures. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (146) believes that colonialism has a debilitating or harmful effect on African culture, hence his

condemnation of western values especially the English language which he describes as a colonizing instrument.

In Anglophone West Africa, the factors that initiate and perpetuate exile are mainly economic and political. But literary exiles are also propelled by personal and psychic compulsions that are at variance with the conditions of their home countries, so exile becomes a form of freedom where the mind is free to roam the world and express multitudes of ideas without constraints. Nuruddin Farah (1984) explains, in "In Praise of Exile" the freedom that exile offers when he says that "one of the pleasures of living away from home is that you become the master of your destiny, you avoid the constraints and limitations of your past and, if need be, create an alternative life for yourself. That way everybody else becomes the *other*, and you the centre of the universe. You are a community when you are away from home". Literary artists are able to discern the sharp contrast between the way of living in their home countries and the world metropolis and may decide to move away to such world centres in order to experience the condition of living in such places. But while there, they experience alienation from home in the form of loss of identity and they try to reclaim it through artistic creativity by resorting to exilic imagination, through which they create new themes and fresh inspirations.

Through travel writing a lot is being discovered about cultural histories and ideologies. Travel writing as a way of re-imagining the world, widens our understanding of the binary opposition between home and abroad, and recreates the connectivities between the home and foreign cultures. There is also the complex attitude of people that is revealed when cultures interact, as travel writing provides enough ground for the analysis of the textual logic inherent in different cultures. Within this logic, the political and cultural complexities in the relations between the imperialists and the colonies are explored. Thus, travel writing produces, through inscription and appropriation, a discursive formation that aims at echoing the colonial presence. Furthermore, travel writing brings to limelight contemporary issues in the world. This is corroborated by James Duncan and Derek Gregory (1) when they observe that "[travel writing] raises questions about the politics of representation and spaces of transculturation, about continuities between a colonial past and a supposedly post-colonial present, about the ecological, economic and cultural implication of globalizing projects of modernity". This movement is driven by the economic, political, social and cultural events and conditions in the originating nations and societies; this also creates new experiences or evolves new identities in terms of cultural artefacts, new clothing, and the development of alternative food culture, new political lineages and a new direction in literary production (White 1).

The discourse of migration could be underpinned through the concept of voluntary and forced migrations. Migration is voluntary when the people who relocate to other countries do so of their own volition without any push or pull factors. As a

matter of fact, this category of migrant may not exist because behind every act of movement, there must be a purpose which is embedded within either a pull or push factor. Grouped among voluntary migrants are those seeking for better ways of improving their socio-economic conditions in other countries when the dwindling economic fortunes of their home country have affected their rising economic potentialities or capabilities. On the other hand, forced migrants relocate to other places because of adverse conditions within their country of origin. In most cases, they are victims of unfavourable conditions. This group of migrants includes war victims, victims of disasters—flood, fire, earthquake—and political refugees. Nigeria, Liberia and Sierra Leone to mention a few have produced a large number of migrants in this classification as a result of fratricidal wars in these countries at one time or the other. These victims are generally referred to as refugees as they fall within the United Nations (UN) convention of 1967 and the 1969 Organisation of African Unity (OAU) definition of refugees that incorporates: “every person who, owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his place of habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place outside his country of origin or nationality” (quoted in Kanagayakam 207).

The development of exilic motif in African literature coincided with a period when migration of people across the globe appears to have reached a high point. The frequency of exilic themes during this period does not only reflect a significant reality of human existence, it is also inherently attractive to writers as an avenue of projecting different literary canons and traditions. Again, there has been a noticeable movement of highly qualified people from Africa—most of them from the academic world—to the developed countries in recent time. This exodus of scholars has both physical and psychological consequences for the migrants, and the immediate literary effect of this is the harvest of exilic literatures across the African continent. An understanding of the political and economic issues in Africa will be necessary to enable us grasp the intricacies of migration in the continent during the last century. A major cause of the departure of scholars from Africa is the need for survival; a problematic issue in view of the realities of the economic downturn the countries are going through. Economically, most African nations are operating under the stranglehold of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and these bodies are always imposing conditions that affect the economic live-wire of the nations. The austerity measures that are imposed on these nations often propose the downsizing of government expenditures. This translates to a reduction in the work force and funding and this creates some levels of uncertainty within the labour force; specifically, it leads to an increase in the rate of unemployment. Apart from this threat, there is the uncontrollable inflationary trend that overtakes the economy of these nations and the governments’ inability to arrest the situation triggers the exodus of people to the outside world in

search of better alternatives. Perhaps the most affected group is the academic community. Ibrahim Jumare in his analysis of the effect of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Nigeria reveals that the programme affects the universities more than any other sector of the Nigerian economy, as its main focus is the restructuring of the educational/university system. In his words "... recruitment of academic staff was frozen, lecturers were retired and retrenched, some universities were recommended for closure and merger (Jumare 113). The bandwagon effect of this is that these intellectuals, faced with survival problems at home, fled to the developed countries to trade their expertise. These, coupled with the political rumblings orchestrated by the adventurers in politics in the sub-continent have necessitated the movement of people out of their countries when they are confronted with political and socio-economic crises.

Political victimization has caused a great exodus of writers from the African continent as they could not withstand the overarching political situation in their countries. In truth, writers are traditionally anti-establishment. Historical antecedents abound of the antagonism between writers and the state. From Socrates to Ovid, and from Dante to Moliere and from Pa Chin of China to Camus and Brecht, "writing has been under intense censorship and writers have been made to choose between life and death which implies a choice between writing and silence" (Brink 190). Writers tend to be more creative in the face of persecution as exile provides the writers with infinite resources for making them to be heard. From the panoply of dangers that threaten their existence, come the inspirations for enduring compositions. Prymoedya Ananta Toer, an Indonesian writer, confesses that his fourteen years of detention have enabled him to concentrate to write better works (Brink 190). Paul Zeleza (473) has pinpointed the creative effect of politics on Anglophone writers when he asserts that: "tyranny [a fallout of political intrigues] had created us, imprisoned and exiled many of us, enraged our consciences, and nourished our imaginations. It had given us the moral inspiration to write, the themes to write about, and often determined the languages, forms and styles of our writing as well as our audiences and production outlets".

An earlier wave of African migration to the West was during the Second World War when blacks were conscripted to fight in the war. This period also coincided with the anti-colonial and nationalist struggle in Africa. This was a time when dissenting voices were not accommodated by the colonial powers, as they perceived the struggle as a move to undermine colonial authority. This trend continued after the attainment of political independence. Africans were hounded into exile by their rulers; the most affected were writers who used the medium of literature to criticize the mode of governance in their respective countries. Kofi Anyidoho (108) with palpable disquiet has observed that "Africans are not necessarily the world's most travelled people but it is hard to find any other people so ruthlessly flung across a hostile

world, clearly against their will and choice". This reveals a confounding characteristic of the postcolonial era that has produced more migrants than ever before in history as a result of postcolonial and neo-imperialist conflicts around the world.

In majority of African countries, neo-colonialism has replaced colonialism, with Africans at the helm of affairs unleashing the worst forms of dictatorship and autocracy on their subjects. For many postcolonial writers, these leaders are plunderers that brought misery and misfortune to the continent. The emerging literatures are those of disillusionment and protest; they are critical of the leadership in their respective societies as they denounce the political and economic rape of their countries and complain against its corruption and incompetence. Consequently, the writers were seen as saboteurs and anarchists, many of them were sent to prison while others fled into exile. In this way, an epoch of exile writing began in the African continent. Adebayo Williams (335) corroborates this fact in "Literature in the Time of Tyranny: African Writers and the Crisis of Governance" when he states "the 1970s marked the advent of African literary refugees wandering from country to country [. . .] The writer suddenly became the most endangered species, the work of art became synonymous with subversive documents and no matter the complexion or coloration of the dictatorship, the literary artist was public enemy number one".

As a result of open victimization and the physical threat to their lives, these writers began to migrate to other countries where they felt secure. For instance, Wole Soyinka, the first African Nobel Laureate left Nigeria and stayed in Ghana, Okot p'Bitek left Uganda and settled in Nigeria, Ayi Kwei Armah left Ghana for Senegal, Camara Laye left Guinea to settle in Mali, Nuruddin Farah abandoned his home in Somalia and settled in Nigeria (Okunoye153). Olu Oguibe recounts similar experience when he says "on the surface of it, I had travelled to England to study, but the bitter truth was that my journey was no less than a painful, deeply conflicted and reluctant flight from persecution at home" ("Exile and the Creative Imagination" 4). This trend has continued today in Africa as writers are forced to leave their countries either through voluntary or involuntary exile.

Exile has seriously impacted on the writer's imagination and consciousness because it has created a new form of literature that exposes the vagaries of exilic life. At the same time, it reflects the struggle of the people against social, political and economic conditions in Africa postcolonial states. Adebayo Williams (356) explains the contributions of exilic experience to the development of African literature when he asserts "exile, rather than leading to disengagement, apathy and paralysis of will, invariably led to a literature of nostalgia, reengagement and renegotiation [...] It was at exile that Soyinka finally came to wrestle with the baleful impact of colonialism on his indigenous community and culture".

Mojúbàolú Okome identifies pull and push factors as the basic causes of African migrations. According to her, the push factors are embedded in economic, social and

political conditions in the form of unemployment, pseudo-employment, exposure to endemic violence, persecution and oppression, while the pull factors are noticeable in the possibility of earning a higher income, securing full employment and hope of freedom from the adverse conditions of home Okome (9). Okome also notes that the globalization phenomenon is one of the most effectual avenues for the understanding of migration possibilities in recent times. Globalization is the emergence of a complex interaction within the world space that interpolates on people's life. In reality, globalization is a concept that is difficult to define and possibly underpin. Arjun Appadurai (5) perceives it as objects in motion; these include ideas and ideologies, people and goods, images and messages, technologies and techniques. Kwasi Konadu (33) also describes the globalization phenomenon as "the current face of an old monster that feverishly reinvents itself". This is a pointer to the colonial imperative of globalization—a syndrome that pushes western ideas and terminologies to other parts of the world with the intent of making these 'goods' available for consumption. The effect of global transformation is noticeable in the total acceptance of foreign values brought about by technological innovations. Through advancement in international communication, there has been great advancement in awareness, as information flows uninhibited through the media and the information superhighway. Thus, it becomes possible for people to crave for economic and social opportunities available elsewhere in the world which ultimately results in migration.

Moreover, the Declaration of Human Rights which was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation on December 10, 1948—to the effect that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and that everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country" (quoted in Kanneh 144)—opens the world space for willing migrants. Again, the fact that there exists a 'pseudo' common language that enables communication has also reduced the pains of exile; hence the fear that comes with the inability to communicate while outside one's home is now a thing of the past. In the same vein, the media, especially the electronic media also makes it possible for an exile to be conversant with events at home. In addition to this, the internet also makes information and cultural materials available for consumption to everyone in different places. To a greater extent, modern means of communication has reduced the problems of exile and it facilitates easier movement across the world space.

Exile has become part and parcel of the modern society. Aijaz Ahmad underscores this position when he claims that exile literature is an offshoot of the suffocating and claustrophobic effects of political and economic difficulties that provoke migration as he paints the picture of exiles:

who had experienced the same kind of 'suffocation' in their own spaces of this globe, and were subsequently to leave behind immense resources of genre and vocabulary for delineating that predominant image of the modern artist who lives

as a *literal* stranger in a foreign and impersonal city and who, on the one hand, uses the condition of exile as the basic metaphor for modernity and even for the human condition itself ... (Ahmad 134)

Aijaz Ahmad perceives exiles as people who are prevented, against their own commitment and desire, from living in the country of their birth, by the authority of state or by fear of personal annihilation. To him, exile is authority-driven as state terror is directed on the intellectuals most of the times, and this forces them to migrate from their country of origins. He is quick to note that no firm generalization can account for the complex nature of exilic typologies as there are different propelling factors such as need, ambition, persecution and those who no longer have a home to return.

A general assumption for the drive towards migration is that the country of emigration is a land of unlimited possibilities, where one can become rich without much sweat. With this at the back of their minds, emigrants are convinced of turning their lots around in that country. On the contrary, the migrants discover that the figuration of their country of emigration as Eldorado is a myth when they are confronted with the stark realities of the situation. Psychologically, many immigrants discover themselves in an emotional abyss and regret the decision to emigrate. They feel uprooted from their base and suffer pangs of homesickness; literature of exile, to a large extent expresses this tragedy of being in two worlds, and not having a sense of belonging in either.

It is this condition of homelessness and alienation that attracts the attention of poets who have in one way or the other experienced exile. Some of these writers were attracted to exilic poetry in passing not as a dominant focus of their work. Among this group we have Wole Soyinka who in "The Immigrant" and "And the Other Immigrant" has dwelt on exilic experience of Blacks in Britain at a particular time. The same exilic motif features in Olu Oguibe's *A Gathering Fear* (1992) and Patricia Wesley *Before the Palm could Bloom* (1998). It should be on record that these poets are not the first voice to be heard in Anglophone West African exilic poetry since many of the slave narratives that came earlier on were poetic recollections of home and exilic experience as noted by Lewis Nkosi (108) when he observed that "slavery was a great initiator of a new consciousness among African exiles".

However, there are some poets whose main project is the presentation of a wide range of perceptions about the postcolonial condition in Anglophone West African countries through their exilic experience. In this category is Cheney-Coker whose *Concerto for an Exile* (1980) presents his experience of colonialism as an exile, especially the devastation propelled by the twin evil of slavery and the slave trade and their connections with the founding of Sierra-Leone. Abena Busia who in *Testimonies for an Exile* (1990) invokes the past to the extent that her collection displays an obsessive

preoccupation with memory as she laments the physical, mental, psychological and emotional violation of her homeland. Her narrative practice, as an expression of nostalgia shows the disorientation that results from exile and this becomes a means of imaginative negotiation of the trauma caused by exile. We also have Odia Ofeimun (*London Letters and Other Poems*, 2000) and Tanure Ojaide (*When It No Longer Matters Where You Live*, 1998) who through travelling subjectivities, offer a wide range of narrations that oscillate between longing and belonging, as they try to occupy two locations as colonial subjects in their metropolitan discourses. There is also Femi Ojo-Ade whose exposition of exilic consciousness in *Exile at Home* (1992) is conveyed in the delineation of a people's suffering, death and total denial of essence of living with the resultant effect of hunger and want. The politics of oil and environmental war in the Niger Delta, the socio-political imbalance in the country, the development of ethnic militia and ethnic cultures occupy a discursive space in *Exile at Home* to explain the factors at play in the Nigerian crises and to establish a claim for the possibility of exile at home. His idea of being an exile from within is premised upon the ways in which the Nigerian masses have been marginalized and alienated by subsequent governments in the country. Kofi Anyidoho's *Earthchild* (1985) is a narration of the perplexity of exilic wilderness in Ghana and thus a response to the condition of exile in the face of military autocracy. Weaving Ewe cosmology into a collective consciousness where the 'moonchildren' are the locusts that devastated the land, Anyidoho shows how exile becomes a quest through which the despair, trauma and deprivation that befell the sub-continent as a postcolonial state could be mitigated. The civil war in Liberia has also produced a corresponding poetry of pain, loss and exile. The poets construct war as a devastating phenomenon that has a demeaning impact on human life and purpose. Patricia Wesley, the exiled Liberian poet in her collection of poetry *Before the Palm could Bloom* (1998) shows how the war has affected the psyche of the people as many of them have had to take the exile option in some countries where they live as refugees.

These poets have shown that exilic experience in Anglophone West Africa has found expression in a multitude of written representations that range from horrors of war to the experience of postcolonial migration that is exacerbated by the need to negotiate social, political and economic conditions. Apart from this, personal and psychic compulsions that are at variance with the conditions of home also propelled other migrations. Therefore, exilic literature in Anglophone West Africa is not an accidental product; it grows out of socio-cultural, political and economic realities in the subcontinent.

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