

quiet lives like this, without show. Each day here is as the next. There is nothing to distinguish it from another. I am warmed by that simplicity." (174).

Jennings' descriptions of the various (living and dead) people inhabiting places, and especially her sketches of Cape Town, are comparable with Ivan Vladislavić's exploration of Johannesburg in *Portrait with Keys* (2006). Vladislavić's work (and urban spaces in general) have been described as palimpsests (for example by Graham 52–3 and Ngara 34)—a manuscript written on partially deleted previous texts. Freud (9–10) uses the example of the ruins in modern Rome. The value of this metaphor is clear. Previous versions of cities are everywhere still visible and the past of places are inescapable. It is the limitations of the metaphor of the palimpsest that struck me, however, when reading *Travels with My Father* (and this also applies to *Portrait with Keys*). The narrator doesn't just "read" and search for historical traces in the places she visits. Rather she is also influenced by these places and histories and even something as personal as the depression and suicidal ideation she experienced while living with relatives in Tasmania is recorded in the same sober tone and with the same intellectual curiosity as everything else (170). She refers to a note her father left of the places he would have wanted to visit, "listing them as facts rather than regrets" (175). This is also the tone of Jennings' novel. Implicitly she is also representing her own life and eventual death impersonally as constitutive parts of the world—a philosophical position that could be frightening but here

provides as much comfort as the lives of the patrons of the Plumstead bar, warming in its simplicity.

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Indigeneity, Globalization, and African Literature: Personally Speaking

Tanure Ojaide.

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Ambitious and bold, Tanure Ojaide's *Indigeneity, Globalization, and African Literature* offers readers an analysis of predominantly Nigerian poetry and fiction over a period of more than five decades. In particular, Ojaide is interested in how the relationship between Africa

and the West, as distinct geopolitical and cultural spaces, plays out in different literary texts. The book consists of several different genres of writing that include literary analysis, tributes to two deceased writers, autobiographical narratives, Ojaide's own perspectives as a writer, and a treatise on the politics of publishing.

While Ojaide's book has some interesting observations, it is unfortunately driven by an essentialist impulse in which a collective African culture is always at risk of contamination from a seemingly monolithic West. The book would have benefited from a more rigorous engagement with discourses of transnationalism in order to disrupt the binary logic of indigeneity and globalization, especially as these terms are defined by the author in rather narrow and unproductive ways.

Ojaide's argument also becomes far more prescriptive than descriptive, as he sets out to define what characterizes "good" African literature. He appears to centre this analysis on two loose criteria. Firstly, he argues that fiction and poetry that locates itself within indigenous myths and folklore are not only better and somehow more "authentic" but also more likely to form part of the canon of World Literature. He goes so far as to insist that "[o]ne who denies African culture should not be seen as an African writer!" (17). Ojaide appears to evaluate the quality of African creative writing in terms of the amount of African culture and folklore that it references.

Secondly, the didacticism of his binary classificatory judgements is similarly

evident when he privileges political commitment to social issues over artistic freedom and authorial agency. He claims, for instance, that African literature should "promote literacy and solutions to African problems" (49) and function as "the vanguard of human development" (51). He writes further that "[f]or a literary artist to set works in a society, culture, or environment and to not help raise the consciousness of the people about their problems is unconscionable" (43). While social justice concerns are important themes in the history of African literature, Ojaide's didacticism also risks producing art that is utilitarian and hollowed out of all the complexities of cultural life.

A troubling conservatism also underscores much of the book's analysis. Ojaide writes, for instance, that African authors should "promote virtues in individuals that will make the society grow stronger" (48). This claim is explained when the author criticizes the "graphic representation of physical sex" in African literature, in part because such depictions supposedly reject essentialist constructions of African values in an attempt to access "a large foreign audience" (48). Ojaide similarly evidences an essentialist and Manichean logic when he writes, "the liberal societies of the West have encouraged some African writers to delve into thematic explorations as of sexuality that they would not have dealt with in their African homelands" (22). This idea is repeated again when he says that the representation of sex, sexuality, and politics is "to the acclaim of Westerners affirming their distorted ideas of Africa" (200).

Despite the book's largely essentialist and didactic impulses, three chapters stand out as important discussions of Nigerian literature. In a chapter titled "Defining Niger Delta Literature", Ojaide offers a speculative mapping of a localized Nigerian literature. The author incorporates bioregionalism and ecocriticism into his analysis of selected texts from local writers, probing the relationship between activism, capitalism, the environment, and postcolonial statehood. This could have been theorized in greater detail and might have been a powerful way to rethink the binaries on which much of the book's analysis depends.

The book's exploration of the poetry of Tijan M. Sallah and Odiya Ofeimun also marks a significant contribution to literary scholarship. Ojaide expertly contextualizes the work of Sallah, a Gambian poet, and seems to gesture to a more dynamic system of transnational cultural production. The analysis of selected works of Ofeimun, a Nigerian activist poet, tracks the aesthetic and ideological genealogy of poetry, as well as a history of protest poetry in Nigeria. Significantly, and unlike many of the discussions in the book which tend to offer long lists of literary texts with only basic summaries and few analyses, the chapters on Sallah and Ofeimun offer probing engagements with the literary texts themselves.

Finally, Ojaide's book appears to lack a polished sophistication, which undermines the flow and cohesion of its arguments. There is a strong sense that the book is a collection of essays that were

not conceived or written together. In one instance, the author introduces Chinua Achebe despite already having devoted a chapter to discussing one of his novels. Similarly, one of the final chapters in the book is derived from a speech that had previously been delivered. This is not signposted effectively, however, and readers are left uncertain by declarations that "[m]any of my generation are here [...] and I welcome them as colleagues and kindred spirits. My good friend Niyi Osundare has not been able to make it here today" (217).

Furthermore, at times, the author appears to lack critical distance and regularly refers (in the third person) to his own creative output as being constitutive of the "good" African literature that he imagines. His own work is discussed alongside the works of literary giants such as Achebe, and with more than 30 references to his own novel and poems (excluding the autobiographical section at the end of the book), the analysis takes on a rather self-indulgent tone.

Ultimately, while Ojaide's book might have been well placed to contribute to current debates about decolonizing the curriculum in South Africa and elsewhere, its binary logic misrepresents the mobility of literary forms and the transnational networks in which texts move.

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