

# *Little Magazines & the Development of Modern African Poetry*

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## INTRODUCTION

Only a few dedicated studies have been done on the roles played by little magazines in the development of modern African poetry. These studies often limit themselves to a particular phase or period. It is this lacuna in scholarship that this paper investigates by engaging with the roles played by little magazines in developing modern African poetry from its earliest inceptions until the contemporary period. The influences of these magazines are identified from their roles as propagandist mechanisms, as nursery beds for poets, as forums between poets and readers, as catalysts to poetic criticism and as manifestoes for literary traditions. Little magazines examined in this paper include *L'Etudiant Noir*, *Présence Africaine*, *Drum*, *Black Orpheus*, *Transition*, *Staffrider*, *Okike*, *Kwani?* and *New Contrast*. Findings show that little magazines are the nucleus with which African poetry gained consciousness and attained maturation. Modern African poets have developed their craft, expressed their ideologies and experimented with new forms on the pages of these little magazines. Some of these magazines also serve socio-political and propagandist functions. Recommendations are made for the continuance of the little magazine tradition in the invention of future African poetic traditions.

This paper engages the historical evolution of modern African poetry and the roles played by little magazines.

African literary historians, critics and scholars pay little attention to the roles of formative little magazines in the development of modern African poetry. This lacuna in scholarship has relegated the roles of little magazines in the creation of a literary canon and the development of poets. The historical evolution of modern African poetry is examined with the view to emphasizing the place and importance of little magazines. Questions that the paper attempts to answer include: what roles have little magazines played in the development of modern African poetry? How have little magazines influenced African poetic traditions? What are little magazines doing now to promote the development of modern African poetry? These questions are answered with deep historical readings of modern African poetic history. This paper focuses on the poets and the magazines rather than the individual poems, and it presents a diachronic overview of African poetic history and the influences of little magazines from the colonial, through the post-colonial to the contemporary period. Attempts are made to cover the various regions of Africa.

Various definitions of little magazines have been given by scholars over the years. These definitions usually examine one or more forms of the tabloid that falls under the concept of little magazines. Suzanne Churchill defines the little magazine as 'non-commercial enterprises founded by individuals or small groups intent upon publishing experimental works or radical opinions of untried, unpopular, or under-represented writers' (*The Little Magazine Others and the Renovation of Modern American Poetry*: 8). Churchill's emphasis is on the fact that little magazines are non-commercial. This foregrounds the idea that little magazines do not charge writers for publication since they are not concerned with making profit. Churchill further asserts that the word 'little' refers to the audience size, which is usually small, rather than the magazine's size, budget, lifespan or significance (9).

Louise Kane conceives of the little magazine as 'a small-scale sort of publication whose pre-occupation with presenting good materials puts it in opposition to the commercial presses and publishing houses which will not publish a writer until they have become established. They are places of experiment and high-minded ideals and aims' ('The Little Magazine as Interdisciplinary Space': 2). Kane's conception emphasizes experimentation as one of the features of the little magazine as ideal avenues where avant-garde writers test their craft. Little magazines are always 'on the edge of something, furthering a cause or a certain set of aims ... having some sort of social or political function' (3). Kane's view is supported by Adam Augustyn who believes that a little magazine usually publishes works that are 'unconventional or experimental in form; or ... violates one of several popular notions of moral, social, or aesthetic behaviour' (*American Literature from the 1850s to 1945*: 104).

On the content of little magazines, Rahad Abir asserts that little magazines publish 'reviews, essays, fiction or poetry or more usually some combination of them' ('A Tale of Little Magazines'). Abir's position holds water for most little magazines that are solely devoted to the publication of creative works, especially poetry and short stories.

It is important to note that not all little magazines are traditional 'magazines'. The concept of little magazines has come to cover a wide variety of publications such as journals, periodicals and newspapers. Any form of the tabloid that publishes creative works, reviews and essays can take the appellation 'little magazine' or 'literary magazine'. The latter is another phrase that means the same thing as the former. The reason why other non-magazine media take this name can be traced to the historical evolution of little magazines. In this vein, Sue Waterman asserts:

Literary journals evolved quite literally from the pages of newspapers in the 17th century, themselves a relatively

new genre, where advertisements for new publications were printed. From this initial role of announcers of new books, journals quickly took on that of providing excerpts for a growing reading public. Literary journals, which proliferated in the 18th century and became ubiquitous in the 19th, then began to review new works, giving their growing readership a means to judge and choose from an ever increasing availability of printed books. ('Literary Journals': 1)

Waterman's position is that little magazines, also called literary journals, owe their existence to newspapers which served as avenues for new works to be announced and for reviews. This early usage of newspapers must have warranted the inclusion of the newspaper medium in the broad concept of little magazines. Waterman lists some of these early newspapers, and they include *Les Journal des Scavans* (1665), *Spectator* (1711-14) and *Tatler* (1709-11). Other early little magazines include *Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres* (1684), *North American Review*, *The Granta* (1889), *The Sewanee Review* (1892), *Poetry* (1912), *The Dial*, *The Masses*, *The Little Review* (1967-1977) and *Blackwoods* (1817-1890).

From the preceding, it is obvious that little magazines have been around for quite some time. These early little magazines have influenced the literary traditions in their various nations and continents. Their growths have been phenomenal, and their successes are striking. Little magazines have evolved to cover traditional magazines, newspapers, journals, periodicals and other tabloid forms that publish new and experimental writers.

## MODERN AFRICAN POETRY

Modern African poetry is not an easy concept to define due to the peculiar nature of African literature. Various scholars have attempted to define and unveil the canons

of modern African poetry. One such attempt is taken by Oniyitan Johnson who avers:

Poetry is by no means a recent import into Africa from Europe. It is an important and living part of African culture, going back into the distant past in nearly all African societies there has been (and still in many places) a thriving oral tradition of poetry. Poetry and song are basic human ... expression to accompany the activities of daily life, to give utterance to their joy and sorrow, to comment on life or simply to entertain. ('Understanding African Poetry at a Glance')

Johnson's view is anchored on the idea that poetry is not new to Africa. He attempts to show that Africans have had a thriving oral tradition of poetry before the advent of colonialism and Western education. Examples of these oral poetic traditions in Africa abound: examples include the *Udje* song-poetry tradition of the Urhobo people which has been documented and studied by J.P. Clark, Gabriel Darah and Tanure Ojaide, and the *Ijala* hunters' song of the Yoruba people which has attracted ample scholarship, among numerous others.

Kenneth Goodwin attempts to mark the beginning of modern African poetry, as opposed to African oral poetry, when he asserts:

The first significant stage in the formation of contemporary African poetry in English was ... emancipation from nineteenth-century cultural imperialism and the voluntary adoption of a foreign, but international twentieth-century style. It was a style comparable in many ways with that of the African Francophone poets ... The adoption of the Anglophone African poets of an international style was due to their tertiary education. (*Understanding African Poetry*: ix)

Goodwin believes that modern African poetry owes its origins to the general twentieth-century literary conventions to which the earliest African poets were exposed in their tertiary education. This marked the beginning of a written tradition of poetry in Africa.

Romanus Egudu underscores African poetry as 'intimately concerned with the African people in the African society with their life in its various ramifications cultural, social, economic, intellectual and political' (*Modern African Poetry and the African Predicament*: 5). This postulation is an attempt to show the distinctively African nature of modern African poetry. In response to Egudu, Oyeniyi Okunoye posits that 'ironically, Egudu underscores the variety of experiences articulated in African poetry without drawing attention to its implication for the continued validity of an African poetic tradition. This unproblematic reading of African poetry betrays the weakness of pioneering scholarship' ('Captives of Empire: Early Ibadan Poets and Poetry': 771). Okunoye stands upon polemical grounds with Egudu's position. He attempts at defining African poetry thus:

Modern African poetry, very much like other postcolonial literary practices, is defined in relation to European literary traditions which provide the paradigms, conventions and critical principles that are either appropriated or negated in the process of defining the identity of the newer literatures. ('The Critical Reception of Modern African Poetry', para. 2)

Okunoye's view rests largely upon post-colonial discourse which interprets poetic tradition as an appendage to that of a colonial power, such as Britain. In this light, modern African poetry is an appendage of European literary tradition and must be judged using European standards. Tanure Ojaide differs from Okunoye's standpoint in his attempt to define modern African poetry:

Modern African poetic aesthetics are unique in possessing a repertory of authentic African features. This authenticity manifests itself in the use of concrete images derived from the fauna and flora, proverbs, indigenous rhythms, verbal tropes and concepts of space and time to establish a poetic form ... In fact, an authentic African world forms the backdrop of

modern African poetry. (*Poetic Imagination in Black Africa: Essays on African Poetry*: 104)

Ojaide's position is anchored on African aesthetics. That is, those peculiar stylistic and thematic features that mark off modern African poetry from European traditions. These aesthetics are mainly drawn from African oral lore.

On the periodization of modern African poetry, Sule Egya believes that modern African poetry can be divided into 'the pre-independence nationalist era', 'the roaring 1960s' and 'protest poetry' which he also dubs 'the Osundare generation' ('Power, Artistic Agency, and Poetic Discourse': 61-63). Charles Bodunde divides modern African poetry into 'the pioneer period' and 'the modern African period' ('Poetry in the Newspaper': 271-2). However, Egya and Bodunde's views have not addressed some salient issues in the canonization of modern African poetry. For example, their views have not been able to show the stylistic peculiarities of each phase. Friday Okon's attempt at the periodization of modern African poetry puts politics as the driving force. Okon divides modern African poetry into 'The Pioneers (Pre-Independence Echoes)' ('Politics and the Development of Modern African Poetry': 95), 'The Nationalist Struggle' (98), 'The Negritude Phase' (98) and 'The Post-Independence Period' (100) which he divides further into 'the older generation' (101) and 'the younger generation' (102). He also identifies the contemporary period as that of 'recent echoes' (107). Okon's categorization is peculiar because it covers a wide range of poetic traditions in Africa.

The preceding section has attempted a conceptualization of modern African poetry. The defining features of modern African poetry have been underscored, and the canons have also been outlined. In all, modern African poetry can simply be seen as a body of poetic works written by Africans, for the African audience and which handles the African experience using African aesthetics.

## LITTLE MAGAZINES &amp; THE DEVELOPMENT OF COLONIAL AFRICAN POETRY

African poetry, before the advent of colonialism, was essentially an oral form of art. It was not until the advent of tabloid poetry that African poetry got its modern manifestation, reception and widespread production. This was mainly due to the influence of little magazines. These magazines were published when the printing press was introduced into Africa. In the period before 1920, much poetry had not been written down, and little magazines were few. By the 1920s, modern African poetry had taken a new stand. The newspapers and new little magazines became a fertile ground for the publication of poetry. Southern African vernacular little magazines such as *Izwi*, *Labantu*, *Imvo Zabantsundu*, *The Xhosa Messenger* and *Isigdimi Sama-Xosa* became veritable mediums for poetic publication. These works thematized African culture and experience and were directed towards the African audience. Writers such as H.I.E. Dhlomo, R.R.R. Dhlomo, Josiah Mapumulo, Jordan Ngubane, Benedict Vilakazi and Emman H.A. Made, featured on the pages of these tabloids.

It was the proliferation of newspapers in the 1920s that led to a culture of literacy as well as literary awareness. With the construction of secondary/high schools and universities across the continent, a growing class of literates sprung up and the newspapers were used to instil nationalism in the people. Some of the newspapers include *The Anglo-African*, *The Lagos Observer*, *Lagos Standard* and *Lagos Weekly Record*. *The Nigerian Magazine*, asserts Gabriel Darah, was 'among the publishing institutions that nurtured and preserved Nigeria's creative literature, the greatest, perhaps' ('Literary Development in Nigeria': 1). This magazine was established in 1927, and it released 'Literary Supplement' which helped in the development of a truly Nigerian literary productivity in which poetry was much more favoured. Nationalist poets such as Dennis

Osadebey, R.E.G. Armattoe, Michael Dei-Anang and Casely Hayford used these early newspapers as vehicles for propagandist poetry.

Modern African poetry attained the peak of its genesis in the 1930s. This peak is reflected in the rebirth of black culture and ideals which is dubbed as Negritude. This term was coined by Aimé Césaire (Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungbesan *A Celebration of Black and African Writing*: xi). The birth of Negritude in modern African poetry was largely the work of Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire and Léon Damas. The concept of Negritude, its philosophy and ideals as well as its thematic thrusts, were all propagated through the medium of little magazines. The little magazine that influenced the birth of Negritude was *L'Étudiant Noir* (1935). According to Sunny Awhefeada, 'the magazine was influential in establishing the concept of Negritude which projected the dignity of the black man and his cultural values' ('Africa: Development of Modern African Poetry'). He further contends that the journal had a bias for political poetry and 'gave cultural and intellectual support to the independence movement of the fifties'. Although *L'Étudiant Noir* did not last for long, its influence cut across borders. The magazine's aim of propaganda was achieved, and it provided the foundation for Léopold Sédar Senghor, a poet whose name is almost synonymous with early Francophone African poetry. Speaking on the manifesto of *L'Étudiant Noir*, Lilyan Kesteloot, asserts that '*L'Étudiant Noir* is a little journal, without pretence, that propagated the problems which troubled them. It has permitted them to notice that these questions interest the entire black race' (*Anthologie Negro-Africaine*: 90).

The period between 1940 and 1960 is unique in modern African poetry. This period marks the rise of Anglophone African poetry as well as the maturation of Negritude in Francophone African countries. Many African literary historians date the beginning of modern African poetry to

the 1940s. The attention that this period gets is largely due to the ample little magazines that were in vogue at the time. African poets, imitating the little magazine tradition of Modernist and African-American poets, set up their little magazines. Many of them were organized by student clubs and societies while others were published by individuals, groups or publishing houses.

In 1947, Alioune Diop founded a new little magazine titled *Présence Africaine*. This magazine was an offshoot of *L'Étudiant Noir*, and it was one of the strongest media for the Negritude propaganda. Awhefeada comments on this magazine that 'apart from its pre-occupation with socio-cultural and political didactics, [it] also took literary productions, especially poetry, and its criticism into fold. A large amount of the early poetry that came out of Africa first appeared in various editions of *Présence Africaine*'. The poets behind the workings of this little magazine include Paul N'Goma and Guy Tsiroli of Guadeloupe, Bernard Dadié of Ivory Coast, Apithy and Behazin from Dahomey and Rabe Mananjera from Madagascar. The journal's manifesto, as captured in the first edition, was written by Alioune Diop thus:

The idea was born in 1942–1943. In Paris, we were a number of students from overseas who – in the midst of the suffrage in Europe that was questioning its essence and authenticity of values – assembled to study the situation and the characters with respect to what defined ourselves. ('Opening Address': i)

The likes of Birago Diop, David Diop, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Bernard Dadié and almost all the Negritude poets, used this little magazine as a melting pot of their thoughts. The usefulness of *Présence Africaine* in establishing African poetry is made obvious through its publication of poems that deal with the African and black identity and experience both at the homeland and in the Diaspora. This little magazine also influenced the rise of other such Anglophone magazines at the time.

In Senegal, the little magazine *Bingo* was launched in 1953, and it echoed the Negritude tendencies of the emergent poetic tradition. Poets like David Diop, Birago Diop and Bernard Dadié have appeared within its pages. Awhefeada posits that 'the appearance of local sources of publications helped to create a more direct sense of community between the poets and their readers'. This position gives credence to the function of little magazines in fostering the poet-reader relationship by bringing the poets to the readers and the readers to the poets.

In South Africa, *Drum*, a little magazine, was making waves. Its influence on South African poetry was so much that literary historians do not hesitate to call the poets of the 1950s as 'the *Drum* generation'. It was first published in 1951 and continued uninterruptedly for 12 years. David Rabkin submits that 'in that time it gathered about it a group of writers and journalists who were largely responsible for black literature in South Africa' ('Drum Magazine (1951-1961)': 1). This submission shows the immensity of its influence in establishing South African poetry. Lewis Nkosi avers that the little magazine, *Drum*, 'seemed to be the place to be in for any young man trying to write' ('Apartheid: A Daily Exercise in the Absurd': 6). Such articles are concerned with the influence of this little magazine in fashioning the poetic output at the time. The magazine was a place of foundation for the young poets who wanted to air their voice. *Drum* was a magazine of protest: protest against white superiority and apartheid. It was a child of propaganda and history. It was also a cultural production of black South Africa. *Drum* had such imitators as *Zonk!* and *Bona* (1956) but none had the widespread literary acceptance of *Drum*. Some of the poets produced by this little magazine include Can Themba, Casey Motsisi, Bloke Modisane, Lewis Nkosi, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, James Matthew, Peter Clarke and Richard Rive. The greatest of them all was Lewis Nkosi.

In West Africa, this period marked the rise of the first generation of Anglophone poets. Many of these poets were college students and some even started writing from high school. The most veritable means of airing their voice was through the medium of little magazines. Many of them wrote at the time, but only a few did much in creating a unique modern African poetic tradition. Some of the high school students' little magazines include *The Umuahian*, a publication of the Umuahia Government College where Chinua Achebe studied and wrote his early poetry; *The Mermaid*, a little magazine by Kings College in Lagos; *The Interpreter* which was published by Aggrey Memorial College in Arochukwu; and *The Pathfinder*. Many of these high school little magazines doubled as almanacks and yearbooks, and short, witty poems were usually published in them.

The first students were admitted to University College, Ibadan, Nigeria, in 1948, and the development of Anglophone African poetry can be traced to this institution. Many of the well-known West African poets of the first generation attained literary maturation in the little magazines published at Ibadan. Starting with *The University Herald*, other little magazines started to rise in what culminated as an Anglophone little magazine renaissance. The titles include *The Beacon*, *The Horn*, *Aro*, *Catholic Undergraduate*, *The Bug*, *The Eagle*, *The Criterion*, *The Rag*, *The Scorpion*, *The Wasp*, *Tear Gas*, *Leepsteck*, *Blow*, *The University Voice*, *Oke'Badan*, *The Abadina Unibadan*, *Horizon*, *The Sword* and *The Weekly*. The little magazine renaissance quickly spread to other schools such as the Nigerian College of Technology in Enugu where little magazines such as *Fresh Buds* produced a notable poet, Okogbule Nwanodi. This trend later spread to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and to a host of others.

The greatest little magazines that influenced this period and its poetic output were *Black Orpheus* and *The Horn*. These little magazines published not only Nigerian

poets but also the works of young poets from other African countries. *Black Orpheus* was first published in 1957 to a very professional standard and intended for a general readership. The title itself is based on an essay by Jean-Paul Sartre titled 'Orphée Noir'. *Black Orpheus* was created to cultivate Anglophone African poetry in the same way that *LEtudiant Noir* and *Présence Africaine* had for Francophone African poetry. Ulli Beier, the founding editor, lamented the fact that African students of poetry had no indigenous works to look to and so *Black Orpheus* was created to foster and promote creativity from young writers. In the pages of this little magazine, criticisms were also published. Beier, formulating a manifesto for this tradition, asserts that the purpose of this little magazine was 'to make people feel they were not alone, even if they were writing in a part of Africa where there were no writers of their own calibre' ('The Conflict of Cultures in West African Poetry': 17). Beier further comments that the purpose of the magazine 'was to sell African literature abroad'. Most of the first-generation Anglophone African poets had their poems published within the pages of this magazine. Janheinz Jahn and Ulli Beier published criticisms on Negritude poetry and the new emergent poetry. The poems of Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Christopher Okigbo, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Dennis Brutus, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Lenrie Peters, Vincent Kofi, Ibrahim Salahi and so many others, were featured in the pages of *Black Orpheus*. This little magazine can be regarded as a major catalyst for the development of early African poetry. The magazine bridged the gap between Francophone and Anglophone African poetry. Awhefeada argues that 'the various conferences on African arts ... and the introduction of African literature into the curriculum of African universities and schools, all owe much to *Black Orpheus*'. It did not just play the role of propaganda and experimentation but also of consolidation and formulation. It is the single most important phenomenon in

early modern African poetry. The experimentation with Euromodernist tendencies as African poets fashioned their unique identities was also facilitated by *Black Orpheus*.

If *Black Orpheus* developed early Anglophone African poetry, it was *The Horn* that developed early Nigerian poetry. *The Horn* was established through the influence of Martin Banham, and it had J.P. Clark as its founding editor. Banham's idea was born out of the desire to replicate what obtained at Leeds University where he graduated. In 1957, the first issue appeared when J.P. Clark set up a committee of three which included Higo Aigboje and John Ekwere. Some of its earliest editors include Abiola Irele, Dapo Adelugba, Omolara Ogundipe and Onyema Ihema. *The Horn* published poets who would later turn out to be some of Africa's most well-known poets. On the pages of *The Horn* can be found the experimental tendencies of Africa's first-generation writers; the Hopkinsian syntax of Christopher Okigbo in his 'Idoto', the grandiloquism of Wole Soyinka, the allusiveness of Gabriel Okara, the imagism of J.P. Clark, the linguistic experimentations of M.J.C. Echeruo, and a host of others. This little magazine proved itself to be a fertile ground for new and experimental poets as they fashioned a unique literary identity. Some of the other poets that were nurtured in *The Horn* include Mabel Segun, Okugbole Nwanodi, Frank Aig-Imoukhuede, Mac Akpoyoware, Pius Oleghe, Bridget Akwada, Nelson Olawaiye, Glory Nwanodi, Gordon Umukoro, Yetunde Esan, Ralph Opara and Minji Karibo.

Without *Black Orpheus* and *The Horn*, African poetry may not have attained the heights it has today. The founders of these little magazines saw their utility and actively used them. The European expatriates in various African universities took cues from Modernist and African-American little magazines and invented a modern African poetic tradition through these little magazines. It is its diverse functions that earned *Black Orpheus* the title

'the doyen of African literary magazines' (Wollaeger and Eatough *Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms*: 280).

Meanwhile, in southern Africa, other magazines soon sprang up from the universities and beyond. Some of them include *The Purple Renoster* (1956) and *Contrast* (1960). There was also the *African Affairs Journal* which was devoted to African studies and oral literature. It was within the pages of this journal that Solomon Babalola published translations of 'Ijala' (Yoruba hunters' verse). This little magazine was used to propagate African oral poetry and incite the emergent poets to make recourse to orature.

One of the culminating effects of the little magazine phenomenon in West Africa was the publication of an anthology of Anglophone African poets with the title *Nigerian Student Verse* (1960). This anthology was published by Martin Banham with cues drawn from Olumbe Bassir's *An Anthology of West African Verse* (1957). Some of the poets, first published with little magazines, went on to publish their anthologies and poetry collections, such as Okigbo's *Heavensgate* (1962), *Limits* (1964), and Clark's *Poems* (1961).

The preceding section has examined the roles of little magazines in developing modern African poetry in the colonial period. Some of these little magazines and their contributors have been documented, and it has been ascertained that pre-independence African poetry owes much to such magazines as *L'Étudiant Noir*, *Présence Africaine*, *Black Orpheus*, *Drum* and *The Horn*. The poets that pioneered African poetry all experimented and attained maturation with these little magazines.

#### LITTLE MAGAZINES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN POETRY

The year 1960 was when many African countries attained political independence. Because of this, some African

literary historians delineate the period after 1960 as the post-colonial or post-independence period. Post-colonial African poetry was informed by the historical consequences of independence and the creation of national identities. African poets had to distance themselves from Western tendencies and establish a unique voice. The poetry of this period was intimated by history; from the pessimism of the remaining years of the first decade after independence, to the bloody civil wars in some countries in Africa and then to the rise of Marxism, socialism and critical realism in the continent and finally to more ailing concerns such as corruption, environmental degradation, global affairs and other contemporary issues.

By 1960, several universities in Africa had already attained maturation, and indigenous poetry had been added to the curriculum. New universities such as the University of Nigeria at Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University at Zaria, University of Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University (then University of Ife) at Ile-Ife, were built and approved. Other universities were built in the 1970s and 1980s. These new universities adopted many of the student literary traditions from University College, Ibadan, Makerere University, Uganda and University of Witwatersrand in South Africa. The poets of this period took cues from the little magazines that proliferated in the last decade. At the University of Nigeria, *Pioneer* was first published in 1961 and was quickly followed by *The Muse* in 1963. *The Muse* was a publication of the English Students Association, and it acted as a catalyst for poetic production at Nsukka. It was on the pages of this tabloid that poets such as Pol Ndu, Okogbule Nwonodi, Bona Onyejeli, Uche Okeke, Sam Nwajioba and Romanus Egudu were produced. This magazine was a brainchild of Peter Thomas who took his cue from the Ibadan experiment by Banham and Beier. This little magazine was the foundation for a later class of writers who discovered and distanced themselves from Eurocentric

tendencies and started to fashion a new and distinctively African poetry.

At the University of Ibadan, *The Horn*, now defunct, was soon replaced by *Idoto* and it continued to serve its function as a cultivation plot for the new writers at the University of Ibadan. At the University of Nigeria, *Fresh Buds*, now defunct, was replaced by *Omabe*. At the then newly created University of Ife, some little magazines were published to nurture creative talents. Some of them include *Ijala*, *Sokoti* and *Ife Writing* and tried to replicate the success of *The Horn* and *Black Orpheus*.

In South Africa, the influence of its quintessential literary magazine, *Drum*, was to lead to the proliferation of little magazines at the universities as well as outside the university walls. By the 1960s, the voices of the *Drum* generation had started to create a culture and tradition of protest poetry known as 'apartheid poetry'. The racial divide and prejudice of the South African white supremacists was known as apartheid. Both black and white poets expressed their anger against this system, and the little magazines were used as veritable means of propaganda. These magazines, which had widespread acceptance and readership in major cities and universities, heralded the finest of protest poetry ever to come from Africa. In 1965, *Unisa English Studies* was published at the University of South Africa.

Another South African little magazine, *The Classic*, was published in 1963 with Nat Nakasa as its founding editor. This little magazine, modelled after *Drum*, was created with the intention of seeking 'African writing of merit' (Nakasa 'Writing in South Africa': 4). This magazine published the early poems of Can Themba, Lewis Nkosi, Richard Rive, Leslie Sehume, Julian Beinhart, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Andrew Motjuoadi, J.M. Brander and Casey Motsisi. As the little magazine evolved into a richer and more cultural production, the poems of Dugmore Boetie, Chris Macgregor, Finn Phetoe, Bill Ainslie, Wole Soyinka, David Rubadiri and Joseph Kariuki were published on its pages.

Most of these poems echo protest against apartheid while others were simply centred upon cultural consciousness. The earliest poems of Oswald Mtshali, Njabulo Ndebele, Mongane Serote and Mafika Gwala were published. This little magazine, thus, foreshadowed the new generation of poets in the South African literary space. Worthy of note also is the South African little magazine – *Contrast* – which was first published in 1960 by Jack Cope. This short-lived little magazine published both white and black South African poets. An anthology of South African poetry was published in 1967 with the title *South African Writing Today*, and the poems were drawn from little magazines.

In eastern Africa, the harsh and brutal colonial experience which was opposed by guerrilla forces paved the way for a protest tradition of poetry. At Makerere University, the little magazine, *Penpoint*, was already inventing a tradition. Poets such as Jonathan Kariara, John Nagenda, Pio Zirimu and David Rubadiri were incubated to poetic maturation in the 1960s as a result of the influence of this little magazine. *Makerere Beat* was another little magazine that was published in the Idi Amin era as a protest publication for students and new writers. At the University of Nairobi, there was *Mwangazawa Fasihi* and *Mzalendo* which published political and Marxist-oriented poems that attacked neo-colonialism. Jared Angira published his satirical poems in these little magazines. Other poets published in them include Peter Nazareth, Bahadur Tejani, Tilak Banerjee, Sadru Somji, Adolf Mascarenhas, Yusuf Kassam, Sadru Kassam and Mohamed Virjee.

The little magazine that influenced eastern African poetry of the 1960s most was *Transition*. This magazine was first published in Uganda in 1961 by Rajat Neogy. According to King and Ogungbesan, this magazine ‘was more politically and intellectually oriented than the Nigerian *Black Orpheus*’ (xviii). This assertion foregrounds the fact that this magazine was transcultural and pan-African. It was a formidable catalyst to African poetic

output in the 1960s. *Transition* started off by publishing the works of local writers based upon Rajat Neogy's original vision to search for and encourage writers within eastern Africa. In the later part of the first decade after independence, *Transition* started to publish the works of other African poets, including Okot P'Bitek, Taban Lo Liyong, Grace Ogot, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, Cameron Duodo, Ama Ata Aidoo, Dennis Brutus and David Rubadiri. This expansion of range took *Transition* from the eastern African poetic space to a pan-African poetic tradition. It was a magazine that actively sought, encouraged and published works that mirrored the African experience and culture. It was important in African writers' return to oral traditions as a means of creating a wholly African literary identity. Akin Adesokan posits that the little magazine, *Transition*, 'became the battlefield for such questions as African Socialism, Pan-Africanism, the status of ethnic and racial minorities, political partisanship as against free speech and literary "universalism"' (53). The influence of *Transition* in developing African poetry of the 1960s cannot be overstated. The coming-to-age of modern African poetry owes much to the influence of this little magazine. Other little magazines that played pivotal roles in developing eastern African poetry include *Nexus* (which was Mphahlele's creation), *Busara Kenya Twendapi?*, *Cheche Kenya*, *Coup Broadcast*, *Zuka*, *DarLite*, *Ghala*, *East African Journal* and *Juliso*. These little magazines were largely responsible for eastern African poetry in the 1960s.

By the 1970s, with new universities already established in Africa, the African poetry curriculum had been developed enough to include poets of the 1950s and 1960s. Most of these poets turned out to be the teachers of this new generation of poets. In West Africa, the Nigerian Civil War ended in 1970, and the end brought with it a new class of poetry that was different from the older generation. The poets of this period have been described as belonging to the 'Alter/Native tradition' (Aiyejina 'Recent Nigerian

Poetry in English': 112). Their poetry was marked by a return to orature as well as recourse to socialist and critical realism. Many little magazines proliferated at the time and these new poets vented their anger and pain on their pages. At the University of Nigeria, new little magazines such as *Nsukkascope*, the brainchild of Chinua Achebe, were founded in the 1970s. At the same time, *Okike* (1971) was also launched. On the influence of *Okike*, Lindfors asserts that it is 'Africa's finest extant literary journal' ('African Little Magazines': 87). This little magazine published poetry and its criticism and became a mouthpiece for several poets within and outside Nigeria. The influence of *Okike* can be seen by the sheer strength of poetic voices from eastern Nigeria – the likes of J.O.J. Nwachukwu Agbada, Catherine Acholonu, Obiora Udechukwu, Ossie Enekwe, Dubem Okafor and the others whom Aiyejina and Okunoye call 'the Nsukka poets'. As *Okike* expanded, its influences gradually spread to cover poetic output from other regions as well. The poetry of Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Remi Raji, Femi Fatoba, and a host of other writers of the 1970s and 1980s, were all published in *Okike*.

With the establishment of Universities in Nigerian cities such as Maiduguri, Benin, Port Harcourt, Calabar, Sokoto, Jos and Ilorin, and in other places across the African continent, new student little magazines were inaugurated in other countries to cater for the poetic expressions of the new poets. This period also marked the beginning of modern newspaper poetry. At the University of Benin, *Oyiya* was launched by the creative writers' workshop alongside *Akpata*. The influence of Benin little magazines can be seen in the calibre of poets it has produced. Among these poets are the likes of Esiri Dafiewhare, Sonnie Adagboyin, Ogaga Ifowodo, Godwin Uyi Ojo, Ezenwa Ohaeto and Maik Nwosu. In Ghana, the little magazine *Okyeame* was already making waves.

*Okyeame* was first published in 1961, but it took on a radical shift in tendencies in the early 1970s. This little

magazine was the nursery bed for poets like Kofi Awoonor, Kwesi Brew and Kofi Anyidoho. At the University of Sierra Leone, poetic output was encouraged by the publication of *African Literature Today* as a journal of criticism and review. Other journals that facilitated poetic output in Africa at the time include *Fourah Bay Studies in Language and Literature*, *Calabar Studies in Modern Languages*, *Lagos Review of English Studies*, *Cameroon Studies in English and French*, *NJALA*, *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, *Nigerian Journal of the Humanities*, *Ife Studies in African Literature and the Arts*, *Ife Monographs on Literature and Criticism*, *Opon Ifa*, *Nsukka Studies in African Literature*, *Working Papers in African Literature*, *Work in Progress*, *Saiwa*, *Afa*, *Nka*, *Kiabara*, *Ganga*, *Gwani*, *Hekima*, *Marang*, *Pula*, *Ngoma*, *Ngam*, *Mould*, *New Horizons*, *Nigerian Theatre Journal* and many others. The importance of these journals is that they signified the mainstay of critical and meta-critical engagements in modern African poetry. This, in turn, raised the demand for more poetic outputs.

The eastern African poetic scene of the 1970s was not very different from what obtained in the 1960s. New little magazines such as *Umma* (1970) and *Dhana* (1971) were published. Others such as *Mawazo*, *Taamuli*, *East African Journal*, *Drum*, *Trust*, *True Love*, *Flamingo*, *Baraza*, *Afrika ya Kesho*, *Africa Nyota*, *Lengo*, *Target*, *Ukulima wa Kisasa*, *Uhuru* and *Musizi* published more populist poetry. The influence of *Transition* became even more pronounced as it changed its name to *Chindaba*. With this change, it became even more cultural than ever and served its purpose of pan-Africanism. At one time, in the 1970s, Wole Soyinka was its Chief Editor.

In southern Africa, some of the older little magazines of the 1960s forged on in the 1970s. Some of them, like *Contrast* (1960), continued with their original philosophy and produced new poets. Other little magazines by students and non-students were launched. At the University of Malawi,

there was *The Muse* which was founded by Ken Lipenga and other undergraduate students. This little magazine produced some of the greatest Malawian poets such as Felix Mnthali, Jack Mapanje, Steve Chimombo, Frank Chipasula, Paul Zelaza and Ken Lipenga. Other Malawian little magazines that served similar functions include *Odi*, *Umodzi*, *Denga*, *Outlook* and *Kalulu* – which was devoted to translating oral poetry. In South Africa, *Snarl* and *Staffrider* were inaugurated in 1978 and both little magazines were largely responsible for English South African poetry as well revitalizing the spirit of racial co-operation. The works of both white and black poets were published, and focus was given to establishing literary conformity and a canon between white and black South African poets. *Staffrider* was a little magazine that was largely responsible for most of the contemporary South African poets. The first editorial had asserted that its primary objective was to provide a platform for the great surge of creative activity at the time. The same editorial goes forward to assert that the new writing of South Africa which it published has ‘altered the scope and function of literature in South Africa in ways we are still to discover’ (quoted in Oliphant and Vladislavić *Ten Years of Staffrider*: i). *Staffrider* provided a forum for the black and white South African audience to meet on equal grounds. Some of its poets include Michael Siluma, Joel Matlou, Bheki Maseko, J.M. Coetzee, Njabulo Ndebele, Peter Randall and a host of others. *Staffrider* marked the decline of protest poetry to a more liberal poetic content. One of the influences of the little magazines in South Africa in the 1970s is the relaxed tension between the whites and blacks. South African poetry started to gain a unification of traditions (white and black) as a result of these little magazines.

By the year 1980, modern African poetry had enlarged as a corpus with which scholars had already started to engage in the phases of African poetic evolution. The period between 1980 and 2000 marked the rise of new trends in African poetry. The poets became even more socially concerned

with the conditions of the time, and they did this through Marxist lenses, but as the years went by, Marxist ideals met a decline. Many African countries had military heads of state while others had civilian dictators. The agitations for democracy were commonplace. By the early 1990s, all African countries had gained independence and apartheid was abolished in South Africa. The poetic space in Africa witnessed the rise of more socially and politically oriented works. The Marxist doctrines of the 1970s were gradually paving the way for a calmer and less revolutionary type of poetry. The poets were much less concerned with proletarian revolution. Their poems advocated against corruption which was commonplace in Africa. New trends such as ecological poetry, feminist poetry, Niger-Delta poetry, the free Mandela campaign, among others, came into vogue. The little magazines continued to play their roles as catalysts for poetic outbursts. They played roles that bordered on avant-gardism and it was due to their influence that the heralding of a more vibrant and younger generation of poets arose.

In West Africa, new little magazines were published in the universities. The poets that now occupy the contemporary space of African poetry were mostly students at the time in some of these universities. The little magazines became a medium to cultivate their skills. At the University of Lagos, the little magazine, *Iju Omi*, was launched in 1984. Assessing the functions of this little magazine, Awhefeada asserts that on *Iju Omi*'s pages, 'aspiring poets have also tested their powers'. This little magazine produced Hope Eghagha, one of the most formidable poets in the contemporary scene who, in 1984, was studying for his M.A. at the University of Lagos. At the then Bendel State University (now Ambrose Alli University), there was *Ivive* which was first published in 1991 by the Poetry Club. This little magazine was a starting point for Charles Omoife, a poet who is getting more critical attention. At the University of Port Harcourt, there was *Ofrima*. At

Ahmadu Bello University, there was *Kuka*, *Saiwa* and *Work in Progress*. At Delta State University, Abraka, there was *Abraka Voices*, which published poets such as Ebi Yeibo. These little magazines were the catalysts of Nigeria's status as the hotspot of African poetry in the 1980s and '90s.

Apart from the proliferation of these magazines, the newspapers also played pivotal roles in developing the African poetry of this period. *The Guardian* in Nigeria, in particular, was quite sympathetic to poetry. *The Guardian* gave a column to Niyi Osundare, one of Africa's most prolific poets. This column was titled 'Songs of the Season'. Osundare used this column to publish some of his earliest poems. Through the pioneer editorship of Femi Osofisan, 'The Guardian Literary Series' was floated, and it catered to the needs of the new poets for a place to air their voices. Some of the poets who published within the pages of the newspapers include Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, Odia Ofeimun, George Asinaba, Ogaga Ifowodo, David Nwamadi, Afam Akeh, Tanure Ojaide, Esiaba Irobi, Balami Shaffa and Funso Aiyejina. In this vein, the *Daily Times* Newspaper also helped with its 'Poet's Corner'.

In Cameroon, the University of Yaoundé was creating its poets through such student little magazines as *Abbia*, *New Horizon*, *Ngam*, *Syllabus* and *Mould*. Some of the poets that these magazines produced were concerned more with the society than earlier Cameroonian poets. A new poetic tradition free from idealization was thus created.

In eastern and southern Africa, few new little magazines emerged. The older ones were still in vogue and were becoming stronger. The Ugandan *Transition* had an acclaimed international audience and was a continental symbol for African poetry. The South African *Contrast* was rebranded into a newer and more formidable *New Contrast* in 1989. *Staffrider* and *Snarl* played significant roles in the eventual end of the apartheid regime in South Africa in 1994. New little magazines such as *Stet* (1982), *Graffier* (1980) and *Taaldos* (1980) were published in

South Africa as liberal white and black magazines to usher in a more tolerant society. Some of the poets that were produced include Breyten Breytenbach, Daniel Hugo, Rosa Keet, Antjie Krog, Peter Snyders, Wilma Stockenstrom, Barend Toerien and Marlene Van Niekerk. In eastern Africa, *Wajibu* was formed in 1985. These little magazines produced poets that still dominate contemporary poetry.

The preceding section presents the development of modern African poetry in the post-colonial period. African nations were attempting to find their unique identities, free from colonial identities. In this search, their poets acted as guides and priests. The little magazines provided the poets with means to express themselves and aid the new African nations in their search for identity and selfhood. The little magazines have stayed on course in their duties through one of Africa's most trying times and, with their aid, African poets have been able to create a unique tradition of African poetry.

## LITTLE MAGAZINES & THE DEVELOPMENT OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POETRY

The beginning of the twenty-first century marked a radical shift in African affairs. Most African countries were already witnessing steady democracies. The Marxist ideals of the later part of the twentieth century had already been given up as a lost cause. More contemporary issues were raised. Issues of corruption, violence, electoral malpractice, societal neglect, fraud and so many others, became the themes of social discourse. The maturation of technological advancement in Africa signified the birth of an internet era. The whole world transformed to a 'global village'. This period also marked the genesis of the security problems faced by many African countries. In Nigeria, Boko Haram engaged the nation in a religious war. In Nairobi, the Al-Shabab, allied to Al-Qaeda, orchestrated a bombing in 2013 that

took the life of, among others, Kofi Awoonor. The genocide in Darfur, Sudan (2003-2009) also attracted international sympathy, and the culminating effect of these events is that the twenty-first century ushered in a new order of affairs in Africa. The problems that bothered new post-colonial states paved the way for issues that will determine the fortitude of these states. The poetic space of Africa in this period was as unique as the period itself. Most poets wrote in line with the conventions of African poetry in the twentieth century while others became more innovative and addressed new issues. These issues were so diversified that delineation becomes a tedious task. The little magazines also took new forms along with the winds of change. Publishers started to take advantage of the internet, and the result was that little magazines entered a digital stage where hard copies became rare and internet copies proliferated.

The little magazines, due to their sheer numbers, are not all known because the internet is a vast space where anything can be put by anyone. However, there are some prominent little magazines that have encouraged poetic output in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Most of these little magazines are a continuation of what obtained in the twentieth century, but changes have been made in the roles that they served. Among some of the little magazines that survived into the twenty-first century are South Africa's *New Contrast* and Uganda's *Transition*, which took its base to New York.

One of the most influential little magazines of the twenty-first century is *Kwani?* Launched in 2003 by Binyavanga Wainaina, it has been credited with starting an eastern African poetic renaissance. Many of the writers published by this little magazine have won awards both at the national and international level. Some of them include Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Parselelo Kantai, Andia Kisia, Uwem Akpan and Billy Kahora. *Kwani?* positions itself as the best of the new little magazines in eastern Africa because of its quality, milestones and avant-gardism. It

has launched new and experienced writers into the poetic landscape, and it has utilized the internet perfectly. Other little magazines from eastern Africa include *Jahazi* and *Sanaa*. These magazines have engaged themselves with the projection of eastern African contemporary poetry. The *Nairobi Journal of Literature* was launched in 2002 and with its critique of poetry, showed the need for young poets to write becoming even more pronounced.

In West Africa, some little magazines have been used by poets such as Jumoke Verissimo, Chuma Nwokolo, Tade Ipadeola, Chika Unigwe, Oha Obododimma, Sefi Atta, Peter Omoko, Stephen Kekeghe, Mathias Orhero, Rome Aboh and Sade Adeniran, among other contemporary poets. These magazines include *Africa-Writing*, *Saraba*, *Maple Tree Literary Supplement*, *Sentinel Poetry*, *The New Gong* and *Farafina*. The magazines are usually accessible online, and some are packaged in a portable document format (PDF). These changes are as a result of the rise and acceptability of information and communication technology (ICT).

The list of little magazines that have emerged in the twenty-first century is not exhaustive. Frequently, new online/digital little magazines are published, and the diversity of themes and lack of adequate editing have reduced the nobility of this form. That said, the little magazine has a very bright future in constructing new African poetry, but the proliferation of many of them will greatly affect a uniform delineation of the poetry of this period.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that little magazines have aided in the development of modern African poetry by giving voice to new and experimental poets. Since their earliest inceptions, African poets have used these little magazines to develop their craft and attain maturation. It has also been

seen that little magazines serve as ‘editors’ to poets whose poems first appear in magazines and are criticized before they are published in a poet’s personal collection. This is true of Clark, Okigbo and Osundare. Little magazines also play huge socio-political roles. In this vein, *Transition*, *Snarl* and *Staffrider*, among others, served as tools of pan-Africanism and anti-apartheid.

This paper ends on a note of optimism for the future of little magazines in Africa. The tradition, which has always lacked the needed financial support, should be given more attention and monetary donations. New little magazines should be encouraged because they play huge roles in the creation of new African poetic traditions. This paper also recommends that further scholarship should be undertaken on the influences of little magazines in modern African poetry, especially with regard to individual poems and poets. The new internet poems have attracted little attention. This paper recommends that studies should be done on internet poetry, especially those contained in e-books, e-magazines, blogs and other social media. If adequate support and scholarship on little magazines are achieved, the qualitative and quantitative future of these magazines can be guaranteed.

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