

Editorial

In this issue entitled "Expressive Culture in Africa", we bring you a collection of scholarly articles together with short fiction and poetry. We have chosen this title because of the expansive potential it holds beyond literary and oral cultural productions.¹ Take, for instance, the image of the *algaita* player on the cover. The photograph as a work of visual art is clear. Moreover, as the photo's subject is also an artist, the image concerns itself with cultural production. But what about the positionality of the photographer and any other audience that may have been present? What is the part played by these agents? Is their presence felt even though they are not seen? And what of the player's clothes, expression, and the circumstances of his creativity? Finally, do the circumstances of this snapshot represent a wider occasion than the photographer's visit, occur regularly, or unite people through a mutually intelligible significance? These are just a few of the questions that arise when examining humanistic expressions.

Expressions do not end with photos and writings. For example, consider collective actions. The successful conclusion of elections in Nigeria and South Africa recently are important landmarks for democratization processes in Africa and throughout the world. The people of these two great African nations have expressed their wishes through the ballot. In such group expression, the culture of performance, comprised of elements such as performance, audience, ambience etc., is important to develop a more complete analysis of the form and meaning of the people's collective actions. Leif Lorentzon shows this to be the case for the oral narrative situation. By comparing various techniques for interpreting oral narrative, and contextualizing African oral narrative among European traditions, Lorentzon tackles the task of breathing life and 3-dimensionality into a literary snapshot. Similarly, Idris O.O. Amali uses Alekwu poetry to recreate the life of the Idoma people, to engender an historical narrative. The author shows that such cultural expression may shed light on the distant past as well as on recent circumstances.

¹ For an informative discussion of expressive culture, see Carol M. Eastman, "Expressive Culture and Oral Tradition: Clues to African Influences on Swahili History," in *Paths Toward the Past* (Atlanta: African Studies Association Press, 1994): 27-38.

Although very much a modern phenomenon, the Kiswahili short story finds its beginning in older forms as well as in time-honored rites of life-stage transition. F.E.M.K. Senkoro and M.D.M. Matondo trace the development of the Kiswahili short story with regard to many dimensions—social function, historicity, relation to class dynamics, and as a mechanism for consciousness-raising. This last point raises the ever present problematic of the relationship of art and social responsibility.

Emblematic of modernity is literary effort as social and political commentary. Raymond Ntalindwa locates Nuruddin Farah among other African writers and within the many currents of African political thought. This piece raises the question as to whether or not we have a canon of African political literature, and, for better or worse, this canon implies the acceptance and mainstreaming of some of today's most subversive and original thinkers from Africa. With celebrated authors, do standards and expectations emerge? Ntalindwa examines whether Farah is a renegade or representative artist. Tunde Adeleke considers the very question of standards with "acceptable" speech and who determines suitability. Adeleke's examination of a controversial writer shows that when a work is contested, so too becomes the author. We also have here an addition to the important dialogue about diasporic identity and the image of Africa.

With an economy of language and varying literary stylistic elements, the short stories and poems included here evoke some of the questions and issues discussed above. Finally, our book review section begins with Guy Martin's consideration of a seminal work by Paul Zeleza, whose article appeared in our last issue (25.2). Leslie Devlin reviews a work of fiction by Opal Palmer Adisa, and Shobana Shankar discusses a collection of works by a nineteenth-century Hausa woman.

Shobana Shankar and Alhaji Maina Gimba