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**GLOBALIZATION,
ORAL
PERFORMANCE,
AND AFRICAN
TRADITIONAL
POETRY**

Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah



Globalization, Oral Performance, and African Traditional Poetry

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*For my mother, Bilikisu Olohuntoyin Ahmad Na'Allah
Esuu!*

PREFACE

This book discusses globalization trends and influences on traditional African oral literary performance and the direction that Ilorin oral art is forced to take by the forces of the twenty-first century electronic age. Radically alarming differences exist between global lords or new bourgeois aesthetics and the downtrodden or peasant conception and appreciation of arts in twenty-first century African society. The examples presented here from Ilorin traditional oral performances in Nigeria show such differences. The African global lords or new bourgeoisie, who are largely products of new global capital and multinational corporations' socio-political and cultural influences, fashion their tastes after western cultures as portrayed by the electronic Super Highway of 24-hour satellite (and digital) television. They are perceived by many locals to have given their entire lives to American and Eurocentric cosmetics. Their perception of art is mainly celebrative and cosmetic. The danger, as I insist here, is the haste by the new global lords or bourgeoisie to force African indigenous cultural forms and essences to submit to American and European dictates. They take pride in working for or representing global corporations and are always eager to produce duplicates of western stereotypes in African communities. Yet, the African experience has perhaps shown that whatever amount of wealth is created by new globalization in Africa (if any), it has probably brought in newer risks and created problems that threatened the survival of important values and economic sustainability in the urban and grassroots Africa (Panic, 2011 correctly discusses the possibility of this reality).

This African new global lords or bourgeois's artistic taste is radically different from the downtrodden's and peasant's continued functional view of

art. The downtrodden, as contended by Dolgov (1980) and Amuta (1989), see themselves as custodians of culture and often strive at maintaining an art that champions the cause for traditional cultural identity, local values, social justice, equality, progress and balanced development in society.

My discussions here show that *Dadakuada*, a traditional oral art form in Ilorin, Nigeria, feels fully the impact of the assault of the global lords or new bourgeois aesthetics in Ilorin society. We discover that the different strata of Ilorin global lords or new bourgeoisie—western, Islamic and Hausa/Fulani—today have bold imprints on this oral poetry that originally took root from the *Egungun* cult, a traditional African ancestral performance. Instead of strictly retaining its traditional utilitarian status, the *Dadakuada* oral art is now dangerously largely a casino in the hands of the global lords and new bourgeoisie. Yet the existence of traditional African oral performance within the reality of a predominantly Muslim population of Ilorin is itself an important challenge to its performance and cultural values. This book thus provides opportunity for scholars, students, and teachers of culture to examine the impacts of globalization on traditional African performance art.

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I must acknowledge, with gratitude, my teachers at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria, who first introduced me to the concept of bourgeois aesthetics: Olu Obafemi, Bayo Ogunjimi, Gabriel Ajadi. It is clear to me that due to the ferociousness of the primary agencies of twenty-first century globalization, i.e., multinational companies and cyber technology, we must seek a new definition of bourgeois in terms of its global reach, imitation of foreign forms and collaboration with the owners of the primary agencies. The knowledge I received from my Ilorin teachers close to the end of the Cold War has been helpful to me in the ways I have presented my explanations of what I call the new bourgeoisie.

I thank all the *Dadakuada* performers that I have interacted with for decades, in Nigeria, Canada, the United States, and across the world, who have honored me with their insights and criticism, without which no genuine scholarly efforts would come to fruit.

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