



Research Article

© 2019 Stephen Folaránmí and Eyitayo Tolulope Ijisakin.
This is an open access article licensed under the Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License
(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Re-Inventing African Literature through Visual Arts

Stephen Folaránmí

*Department of Fine and Applied Arts,
Obáfémi Awólówò University Ile-Ife, Nigeria*

Eyitayo Tolulope Ijisakin

*Department of Fine and Applied Arts,
Obáfémi Awólówò University Ile-Ife, Nigeria*

Doi: 10.2478/mjss-2019-0054

Abstract

Evidence abounds of the synergy that exists between literature and visual arts in Africa. Illustrations are known to have given more meaning to books, while the text plays the role of the storyteller, the illustration acts out the story or scene on the pages of the book. Illustrations also make readership very easy and appealing to children and the uneducated people in our local communities. In recent times however, studies have shown a sharp decline in the inclusion of very good, insightful and inspiring illustrations into African literary text. When included, it is often poor and limited to the cover page of the book. This paper examines the merits derivable from the inclusion of visual arts into African literature as well as the reason for its decline with a view to suggesting how it can be used to reinvent African literature. It is expected that by so doing, publishers and authors will see the need and importance of using more illustrations in their books. This will, in turn, generate more interest in the culture of reading among the youths of the 21st century as well as the development of literature directed towards children and the unread.

Keywords: Re-invention; illustration; Visual Arts; Literature; Publishing

1. Introduction

The idea for the paper was birthed as a response to the 50th-anniversary celebration of the classic work *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1924-2013), the illustrious Nigerian Africanist and literary icon. Part of the celebration took place at the Obafemi Awólówò University, Ile-Ife in 2008. This came simultaneously with a conference in honour of Achebe, as well as the Ife festival of the Arts. As part of the (2008) celebration, students from selected elementary and junior high schools in the ancient city of Ile-Ife were invited and requested to read *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe 2012) and express it in various forms of artistic rendition. The result was phenomenal; not that illustrations have not been made from this text before, but these children gave their own visual understanding of the novel in a fresh and inspiring way. Using various artistic media such as watercolour, gouache, pencils, pen and ink, they created on paper a wide range of visual perception of the scenes and expressions in *Things Fall Apart*.

2018 marks the 60th year the novel *Things Fall Apart* was published, while the author Chinua Achebe passed in 2013; however, drums are still being rolled out for the celebration of one of the most famous books ever written by an African author (Irele 2001). It became therefore necessary to revisit illustration in literary works on the African continent with particular focus on the works of art created by the school children for the 2008 jubilee celebration of this epic novel. Oral literature was

a major form of passing down information from one generation to the other in Africa before the widespread of the written language. Some of these were done through storytelling, tales, proverbs, folklore and all other such forms to ensure that the main fabric of the society is sustained. Aside from oral tradition, the art of the people in various media and forms, which served utilitarian, social or religious functions, also performed significant roles in the presentation, promotion, and preservation of the people's cultural history and education. Many of these works of arts removed from their original cultural locations are now found in many museums all over the world and have been used in one way or the other to understand the society and culture of the people who made them. Thus begins the long relationship between the art and history of the people, and by extension, the importance of the visual arts in the literature of Africa.

There is one inspirational elements behind this subject, the film *Amistad* directed by Stephen Spielberg. In the film, the ship conveying Africans as slaves to the New World in 1839 was named *Amistad*. It carried Africans who were captured from Sierra Leone, the slaves were restrained in shackles in the cargo, as the ship traverse the Atlantic Ocean. Sengbe Pieh¹ leads a mutiny and takes over the ship. After sailing for weeks, they reached the United States where they were imprisoned as runaway slaves. As Sengbe Pieh and other slaves could not speak English, it seemed they were to be executed for the mutiny committed against their captors. It was at this point that an anti-slave trade lawyer came to their aid, with the argument that rather than being slaves, they were free citizens of another sovereignty.

It was during a court session that one of these Africans started flipping through the pages of the Bible he had collected from proselytes (*Figure 1*). Even though he could not read the text, he seems to be enjoying and making a sense of the events that makes up the book. During the days that followed, he got engrossed with the book and actually tried to explain what he perceived to be his understanding to Sengbe in the privacy of their cell. When Sengbe accused him of pretending to understand the content of the book, he retorted "I'm not pretending, I'm beginning to understand it". This was possible because the Bible was a pictorial one. At that moment the impact of the illustrations in the Bible especially as a tool of evangelism for the early Christians, became very glaring. It is also a pointer to the belief and advocacy that for African history, literature, and, language to be interesting to the younger generation of Africans, visual representations should become a main stay in the texts (Foláránmí 2008).

Today there are still hundreds of editions of the Bible in different languages with thousands of illustrations, mostly directed towards the children to aid their understanding and get them interested in the word of God. Many of these children use several of these bible editions simultaneously while growing up; there is that constant desire to always want to return to the book at least to look at the pictures; even adults are fascinated by these beautiful illustrations. This however does not apply to the Bible alone or the account above; personal experiences in the past have shown that books with illustrations are usually very appealing and mostly interesting to look at. The Jehovah Witness organisation is particularly very diligent and consistent over many years for their striking and attractive illustrations in *Awake/Watchtower* magazines and books. There are also thousands of series of cartoons and comic books that have attracted the attention of both adults and children, simply because of the illustrations found in them. Many of these have made significant impact in the dissemination of information to the readers. On the other hand, the dearth of illustrations has contributed to the lack of interest in African literature and culture by the youth especially in the 21st century.

In 2008, the Department of English, Obáfémi Awólówò University Ile-Ife, Nigeria organised a series of events including a conference for the 50th anniversary celebration of the publication of *Things Fall Apart*, an epic novel by Prof Chinua Achebe (*Figure 2*). As part of the celebration, the Department of Fine and Applied Arts, Obáfémi Awólówò University, Ilé-Ife, Nigeria, in conjunction with Sunshine Foundation School, Ile-Ife, organised an art exhibition of drawings and paintings which focuses on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The exhibition was as a result of a two day

¹ Joseph Cinqué (1814-1879), also known as Sengbe Pieh, was a West African man of the Mende people who led a revolt of many Africans on the Spanish slave ship, *La Amistad*. The role was acted by Djimon Hounsou in the *Amistad* film in 1997.

art and quiz competition organised by the Sunshine School, Ile-Ife. With numerous illustrations in drawings and paintings in different media, the students expressed their understanding of the different characters and scenes in the book, as well as their desire to relate the words they have read with their visual illustrations.



Figure 1. Scene from the Amistad, directed by Steven Spielberg, 1997. (Screen Shot)

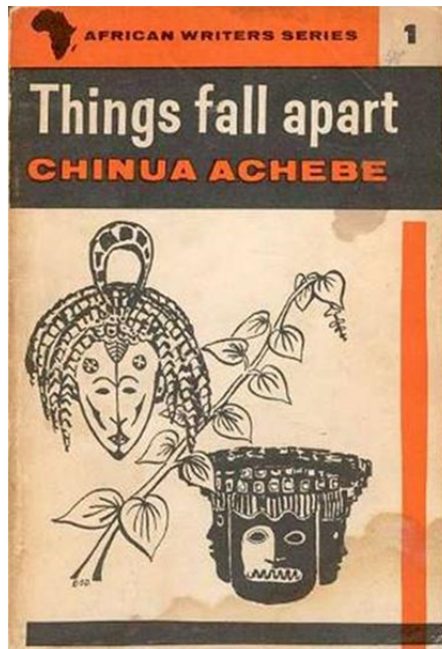
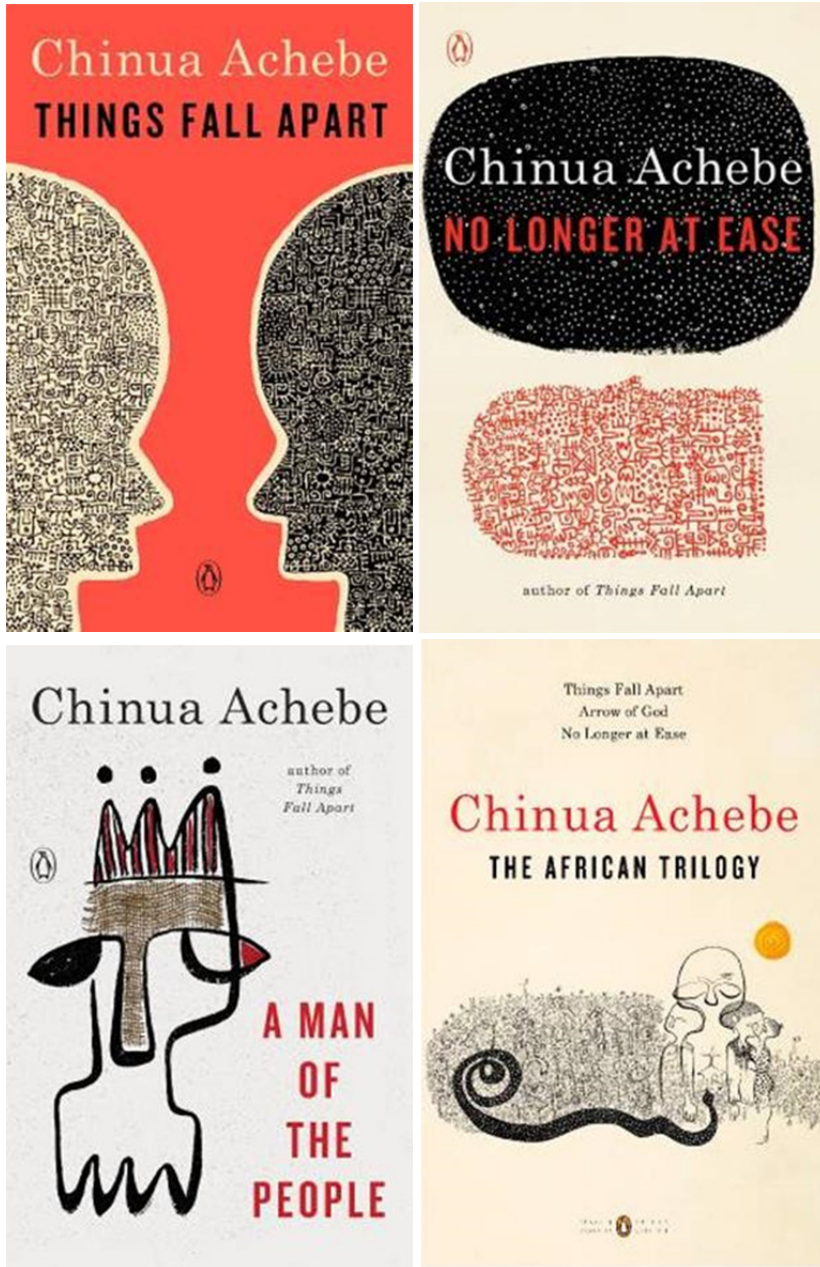


Figure 2. One of the earliest cover for Things Fall Apart illustrated by Uche Okeke. Several others have been made over the past 60 years. The most recent on figure 3-6 by Nigerian Artists Victor Ekpuk.



Figures 3-6: Commissioned covers for Chinua Achebe's works with beautiful illustrations by Nigerian Born Artists, Victor Ekpuk. Courtesy of the artist.

Until recently, the most familiar book cover of *Things Fall Apart* in Nigeria was that with illustrations by Uche Okeke² (see *Figure 2*). Recently however, there has also been resurgence in the use of

²Uche Okeke is a renowned Nigerian artist and Professor of art at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka

professionally created works of art, or, an adaptation of works of art by Victor Ekpuk (*Figures 3 and 4*) in many of the works of Chinua Achebe. With printmaking techniques, Onobrakpeya has also produced many literary illustrations for works of several authors including Chinua Achebe's (1960) *No Longer At Ease*, Heinemann, London. These illustrations have given a new lease of life to the text of the book, it also serve as an attraction to what the literary guru wrote many years ago. It shows therefore that art has a very scintillating role to play in every written text. The exhibition which held in the gallery of the Department of Fine and Applied Arts was therefore a collection of selected art works representing many students from ten different schools in Ilé-Ife. 50 drawings and paintings were selected for the art exhibition to commemorate the 50th anniversary of '*Things Fall Apart*'. The exhibition revealed the ingenuity of the pupils and their understanding of the novel, in addition to the use of different media they have employed. In separate interviews with several students³ they expressed that they are usually more interested in books that are well illustrated than those without illustration(s). For the purpose of this study 10 out of the 50 drawings and paintings were selected for analysis.

The images from the exhibition were selected based on different sections or scenes of the novel that the children illustrated. Some of the scenes were also illustrated by different pupils giving us more than a view and expressive imageries of the same portion of the novel. An analysis of the few images is here attempted to identify their usefulness and resourcefulness as means of aiding understanding of the text.

2. Analysis of Selected Illustrations

The illustrations by Fola Dada and Babátúndé Oládépò are quite interesting, both imagined and gave the title of their pieces '*Things fall apart and the centre refuse to hold*' (*Figure 7*), and, *Things fall apart* (*Figure 8*). To these pupils, the title of the book is very relevant and must be illustrated; while other pupils worked on scenes within the book, yet they were inspired by the title in the creation of their paintings. For Babátúndé Oládépò, his setting was Okonkwo's village, Okonkwo is the main character of the novel, and he is shown in the middle of the illustrations. Fola Dada in his own illustration captures the essence of a wall in which the cracks could no longer be mended hence the centre refuses to hold.

Figures 9-15 also show Okonkwo as the vigorous and hard-headed protagonist in the novel. He was a warrior, farmer, wrestler (*Figures 11 and 13*), and a brave individual who wishes to be respected and referred by all villagers. Several of Okonkwo's characteristics as an individual is thus portrayed by these pupils to show that they understood the story and could give a pictorial view that other can also relate to. Whereas training is often needed to achieve these understanding, these children have shown that they have the talent and grasp of what could make for an interesting read of a text. Okonkwo's portrait was painted by Jùmòkẹ Oke in pen and ink in Figure 9. In Figure 10, Timothy Fagbo portrays Okonkwo telling stories of his war exploits to children in the village and in Figure 11 as a wrestler who was able to defeat Amalinze "the Cat," a feat that won the heart of Ekwefi to Okonkwo. It was also the moment that Okonkwo first became famous among the local villages. The next illustration by Ibrahim Táíwò (*Figure 12*) was made with dexterous use of coloured pencils; it shows Okonkwo on the farm, heaping several ridges, that shows his strength and the importance of yam in the Igbo culture. Ogbuefi visits Okonkwo in Figure 14 also by Timothy Fagbo, this further shows Okonkwo's central role within the society, the scene was a remarkable one that brings sorrow to the heart as Ogbuefi's visit was at the instance of the oracle about Ikemefuna's death. Ogbuefi therefore came to warn Okonkwo not to have a hand in the death of the boy.

³ Most of the interviews were brief questions and responses from several students during the competition and final exhibition in Ile-Ife, April 2008.



Figure 7. Things fall apart and the centre refuse to hold. (2008). Gouache on paper. 42x28cm. Fola Dada. Photograph by Stephen Fọláránmí, 2008



Figure 8. Things Fall Apart (2008). Water colour on paper. 42x28cm Babátúndé Ọládépò, Henry Alex Duduyemi Secondary School, Ile-Ife. Photograph by Stephen Fọláránmí, 2008



Figure 9. Okonkwo, (2008).
Pen and ink on paper. Jumoke Oke.
Photograph by Stephen Fọlárànmí,
2008



Figure 10. Okonkwo telling children of his war exploit, (2008). Gouche on paper. 42x28cm
Timothy Fagbo Photograph by Stephen Fọlárànmí,
2008



Figure 11. Okwonkwo wrestles with Amalinze the cat. Coloured pencil on paper. 42x28cm.
Ibrahim Táíwò. OAU Staff School.
Photograph by Stephen Fọlárànmí, 2008



Figure 12. Okonkwo working on farm. Crayon on paper. 42x28cm.
Ibrahim Táíwò. OAU Staff School.
Photograph by Stephen Fọlárànmí, 2008

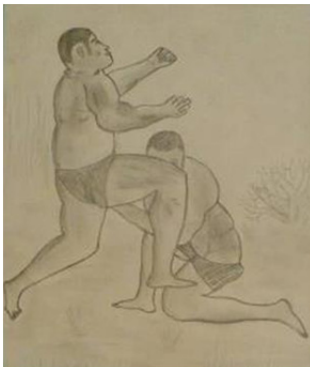


Figure 13. Okonkwo fights the cat. 2008.
Pencil on paper. 42x28cm .Daramola Olatoye,
Photograph by Stephen Fọlárànmí, 2008



Figure 14. Ogbuefi visits Okonkwo. (2008).
Gouche on paper. 42x28cm. Timothy Fagbo.
Photograph by Stephen Fọlárànmí, 2008

Further event in Okonkwo's life is illustrated by Benjamin Emmanuel where Okonkwo hacked down Ikemefuna (Figure 15). Ikemefuna⁴ was a fifteen-year-old boy from a neighbouring clan, Mbaino; he

⁴Shmoop Editorial Team, "Ikemefuna in Things Fall Apart," Shmoop University, Inc., Last modified November 11, 2008, <https://www.shmoop.com/things-fall-apart/ikemefuna.html>.

was given up to Umuofia as a sacrifice for killing one of the women of Umuofia. One commentary says "Ikemefuna is a prime example of how Okonkwo's fear of portraying a 'feminine' trait like his father, and being seen as weak and as a coward drove him to make a poor and regrettable decision. Despite Ogbuefi's counsel, he killed the young boy to prove that he was not a weakling. By this act, Okonkwo became haunted by his decision which also permanently affected his relationship with his eldest son, Nwoye.

Other scenes that have captured the attention of these young artists are Obiageli, daughter of Okonkwo's first wife who broke her pot whilst coming from the stream. Two paintings by two different artists represented these scenes with variations in their storyboard. While Figure 16 by Sodeke Fadeyi illustrates girls going to the stream to fetch water; Figure 17 by Alice Inya shows a fallen Obiageli and pieces of the broken pot. For these pupils other characters were as important, despite Okonkwo's intimidating presence in the novel. Obiageli was therefore one of those characters that caught their attention. The last three paintings also show different characters and scenes within the book. Notable is Timothy Oyejide's Figure 18 in which Unoka, Okonkwo's lazy father was pointing to a section of his wall where he recorded the details of his indebtedness. Unoka eventually died as a debtor, an act and characteristics Okonkwo despised with passion. Ibrahim Oladebo depicts the *Drummers* (Figure 19) to signify the beginning of the festivals and the wrestling. Sodeke Fadeyi portrays the presence of the 'Missionaries' (Figure 20) in the colonial era in Igboland. The missionary work changed the landscape of the villages as many began to convert to Christianity. By this time Okonkwo who was already in exile became so angry with the white man's religion which he considers weak and effeminate, a character his late father Unoka exhibited throughout his lifetime.



Figure 15. Killing Ikemefuna, 2008. Gouache on paper. 42x30cm. Benjamin Emmanuel, Adventist Secondary School, Ile-Ife. Photograph by Stephen Fọláránmí, 2008



Figure 16. Obiageli Broke Her Pot While Coming From Stream, 2008. Gouache on paper. 42x28cm. Sodeke Fadeyi. Photograph by Stephen Fọláránmí, 2008



Figure 17. Obiageli Broke Her Pot, 2008. 42x30cm. Alice Inya. Photograph by Stephen Fọláránmí, 2008



Figure 18. Unoka pointing at the far wall of his hut, 2008. Pen on Paper, 42x28cm. Timothy Oyejide. Photograph by Stephen Fọláránmí, 2008



Figure 19. Drummers, 2008. Coloured markers on paper. 42x28cm. Ibrahim Oladepo, Henry Alex Duduyemi Memorial College, Ile-Ife. Photograph by Stephen Folaranmi, 2008



Figure 20. Missionaries 2008. Pencil on paper. 42x30cm. Sodeke Fadeyi. Photograph by Stephen Folaranmi, 2008

The illustrations by these pupils show that much needs to be done in the production of text to attract readers particularly to African text. In many instances, books are not well packaged to draw the attention of readers; many have bad covers, sometimes poor binding and finishing with inappropriate illustrations or without any in most cases. It thus becomes exigent to examine what is responsible for this decline and suggest ways by which there could be a renaissance of sort in the inclusion of illustrations in African literature, especially for the young ones.

3. Illustrations and Book Publication

Illustrations are visuals such as a drawing, painting, photograph or other works of art that appeal to the eye so as to further stress the subject of the text. Illustration aims at clarifying or explaining, as well as beautifying text of written documents. Illustrations can appear in story books, textbooks, journals, magazines, and may include charts, graphs, maps, views of towns, technical diagrams of machine or tools accompanied by notes to end users, road maps, battle plans, and others such activities that has man's existence and the artists' imagination and skills. Through illustration the artists and illustrator is allowed to speak out more fully about his age and time. The relevance of illustration to publication can be better appreciated when seen as one of the functions of art. In compiling the functions of art, Adejumo (1998) asserts that art is a means of making ideas clearer in the mind with the aid of visual recapitulations of what has been learnt or read in written form. Adéjumo further explains that illustrations are very useful in accompanying texts in other subject areas like the sciences where illustrations are useful tools in explaining points. Adejumo's expression is corroborated by Adepegba⁵ who explains that illustrations add aesthetic value to text by helping it to achieve better communication; it also acts as aid to the brain in remembering the text, and makes reading interesting to children".

In an interview with the Operation Manager⁶ of the Bookshop of Oḡbáfémi Awólówò University, Ilé-Ifè, it was stressed that illustrations are necessary especially in children books, for clarity in teaching and for the books to be attractive to the students. He further states that good book illustrations could have positive effects on the sales of the books for children. Hence, children and parents are said to choose the best illustrated books, he is therefore of the opinion that illustrations are absolutely necessary for children's books, but may not be so important in adult books except in the technical and science related disciplines.

⁵ Personal communication with Kéhindé Adepegba in his office at Longman Publication, Lagos. September 30, 2009.

⁶ Personal Interview with Mr. Adewale Adegbami, Operation Manager, University Bookshop Limited, Oḡbáfémi Awólówò University, Ilé-Ifè, Nigeria. January, 2009.

The earliest forms of illustrations are ascribed to the prehistoric rock paintings and engravings found in various parts of the world including Africa.⁷ The golden age of illustration in Europe and America has been linked with the period between 1880s and World War I on the one hand, and the 1950-60s on the other. During this golden age period, all sorts of magazines including newspapers and illustrated books became popular media of information dissemination among the general public. The technological development brought advancements in the printing industry such that illustrators began to experiment with colour and new rendering techniques; a small group of illustrators during this period made fortunes and fame. Thomas Bewick for instance is renowned for his fine natural history illustrations. Norman Rockwell (1894-1978)⁸ was also one of the best illustrators still remembered today. The Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, is dedicated to the art of Norman Rockwell, the museum has a very large proportion of illustrations, letters, and other materials including enduring favourites from Rockwell's Saturday Evening Post covers. It is said that these works constitute historical account of American life that reveals her kind-heartedness, forbearance, struggle for liberation, and democratic governance as seen through the lens of the creative ingenuity of the artist⁹.

In Africa, writing was not widespread until the 19th century; the Art of Africa was thus the visual language by which the people communicated. One can therefore posit that illustration had been with them since it was the only form of communication apart from the spoken word in which the people carry out their day-to-day activities (religious, social or other cultural activities) (Willett 2002). Evidences abound in the Bushmen rock paintings/engravings in South Africa and the Sahara, the picture writing hieroglyphs of Egypt and the *uli, onà, nsibidi*¹⁰ of Nigeria and *adinkrah*¹¹ of Ghana. Going back therefore to the scene in Amistad, it was probably not so strange for Semgbe's compatriot to relate to the images and drawings in the book and therefore draw a conclusion on its meanings. Semgbe's imagination was very well developed considering the society in which they were coming from. He had been exposed to the signs, symbols, sculptures in various shapes and sizes, and materials, and sometimes a combination of more than one or two items in cases like *àròkò* among the Yorùbá people of southwest Nigeria (Sheba 2001).

It is therefore a contradiction that a people whose main form of communication was their art form, can today be on the verge of a total neglect of such forms. A few years ago, there are various reports of the gradual neglect and removal of art, history and literature as subjects in high schools in different parts of Nigeria. Many organisations and professional bodies had constantly called for a very serious advocacy and determination to see to the reversal of negative actions and inactions of the government policies and ineptitude. It was not until 2018 that the Federal Government took a step to address the issue.¹² It is however not certain how many schools have complied with the FG's directives, and if they have the manpower to teach the subject.

3.1 Illustration Today

Since the 1990s, illustration industry has witnessed tremendous development, moving from traditional ways of rendering to the use of high-end computer applications such as Corel draw, Adobe Illustrator, and Photoshop. Today illustrations have become a significant factor in video games, movies, animation, advertising, and publishing industries. A pressing question is what role

⁷<http://www.arthistoryarchive.com/arhistory/prehistoricart/>

⁸<http://www.nrm.org/page33>

⁹<http://www.nrm.org/page33>

¹⁰*Nsibidi is a sign writing form with linear characters among the peoples of Cross Rivers State in Nigeria while Uli Art as a stylistic expression is popularised by graduates of the Nsukka School using its linear and spiral motifs in terms of forms and using themes that have socio-cultural content and advantage. Ona on the other hand is Yoruba in context; it is also a movement and philosophy of the incorporation of Yorùbá signs and motifs as well as culture into contemporary art production of the graduates of the Ifè Art School, Qbáfèmi Awólòwò University, Ilé-Ife, Nigeria.*

¹¹*Adinkra are symbols that represent concepts or aphorisms. Adinkra are used extensively in fabrics and pottery among the Ashantis of Ashanti Kingdom, and the Baoules who historically migrated from Ghana.*

¹² See <https://allafrica.com/stories/201803290327.html>

is expected of Africa along these lines? Should Africa continue to depend on America and Europe to supply what the children and the entire society is to read or listen to? Today, there are books in some Nigerian schools with text and illustrations describing things that the students have never seen, and may never experience; using examples that are totally alien to the student's imagination and environment. Such books tell stories of other places at the detriment of their own historical and social background.

In Europe and America, more is being done to encourage more illustrations in book publication. It is pertinent to identify two classes of authors in this discourse. The first author being the owner of an intellectual property or creative writing of poems, literary works, research or article intended to be published (Chadsey and Wentworth 1978). Whereas the author/illustrators are usually artists with a flair for writing in which his drawings or illustrations becomes the central focus of storytelling or expressing an idea. There are great and many authors in Africa, but author/illustrators just like children books with African flair are very rare, one can almost count them on the tips of the finger. Some of the very few good examples of authors/illustrators in Africa are Meshack Asare, a Ghanaian who won the Noma Award in 1982 for his picture book "The Brassman's Secret". Uche Okekes "Tales from the Land of the Dead" was published in 1971 by Doubleday (New York). He also illustrated one of the editions of Things Fall Apart as mentioned earlier. There is also Bruce Onobrakpeya¹³ and Charles Ohu¹⁴, each of whom has won a gold plaque at the "Biennale of Illustrations Bratislava" (BIB 1983 and 1985 respectively). Other good children's book illustrators include Segun Byron, Anne Nwokoye, and Wole Vaughan. In South Africa, there is Nicolas Daly also known as Niki, who laments the nearly non-existence of book illustration heritage that could serve as exemplary model for the illustrators of children books in South Africa. Daly further argues that there is so much regulation to censor the contents of children books.¹⁵ This perhaps affects the illustrators of children books to be at their best.

Perhaps Daly's expression best represents our present view about the state of book publication in Africa and for Africa. The problem is not that of no stories to tell, ideas to propagate, or how best the authors can do it, but that of doing it in such a way that would continue to encourage the people to read. Reading educates the mind, broadens ideas and horizons and can wrestle people not just from the poverty of the "purse" but that of the mind; hence, the popular maxim "Readers are Leaders". Daly further expresses sadness over lack of adequate motivation in terms of prizes and awards that could serve as a driving force for illustrators of children books in South Africa; this is coupled with lack of enthusiasm from the general public towards children's literature. On the award and incentives for illustrators, there exists a few in which African authors/illustrators are encouraged to participate. One of such is the biennial *Noma Concours* for picture book illustrations that has been organized since 1978 by the Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU).

Noma Concours aims at encouraging budding and seasoned illustrators, as well as graphic designers from different parts of the world to showcase their works and also provide incentives for their creative endeavours.¹⁶ Only a few Africans have participated and won prizes from this award.

In Nigeria the dearth of good picture books as opined by Mabel Segun is due partly to economics of publishing, and by extension very few authors/illustrators are found in Nigeria and in most parts of Africa unlike in developed countries (Segun 1987). The present situation of picture book production has made many publishers hesitant about publishing picture books. Printing in full colours could be very expensive in Nigeria particularly, and in other parts of Africa where everything required for the printing industry such as machinery, ink, paper and colour-separation equipment has to be imported. Even when all these become available, the problem of electric power is another

¹³ Onobrakpeya illustrated books published by African Universities Press, notably "Sugar Girl", "An African Night's Entertainment" and "Koku Baboni" and other books. Onobrakpeya's approach is apropos for illustrating folkloric themes.

¹⁴ Ohu's illustrations gracefully adorn the pages of many books on indigenous Nigerian languages published by the Longman Nigeria Plc.; these include the award-winning "Isé Awon Iya àti Baba Nlá Wa" (traditional occupations of our fore fathers).

¹⁵ <http://www.childlit.org.za/ndaly.html>

¹⁶ http://www.accu.or.jp/noma/english/works/2006/e_index2.html

puzzle that constitutes an endless circle of frustration.

Many publishers compromise by printing in one bright colour on the premise that one colour is better than no colour at all; the results are books that are not comparable to imported books. There are also good printing houses and publishers, but by the time the entire cost of publication is laid at the doorstep of the author, the book becomes out of reach for the general populace thus creating another serious debacle. Because of these obstacles, many authors of African descent are forced to publish their books overseas, where the facilities are readily available. There are also problems in this respect as expressed by Sylvester Ogbechie¹⁷ particularly about the transportation of his published book from the United States of America to Nigeria; he claims that the luggage allowance by the airlines were very hostile. Ogbechie's outburst reveals that once the books are published abroad, the task of circulating such books across the African continent is arduous. The effect of this is that many authors become publishers of their own texts, leaving no space for relevance in the use of illustration because pages have to be drastically reduced to save cost. The result is often pathetic, and as such creates a huge gap in knowledge making in Africa compared to the rest of the world.

Good and attractive illustrations have positive and significant effects on readership and sales, especially of primary and secondary school books as earlier mentioned. Finance is however a challenge which makes African publishers and authors to "economize knowledge" by not employing good and skilful illustrators to make their works richer. Some publishers and authors rely too much on clip art and other ready-made computer generated pictures, which are not always suitable in driving home the points being expressed in the text.

4. Re-inventing Literature

The question now is what really needs re-invention? Is it the illustrations or the literature? The conclusion here is both; however, the issue of lack of interest in books without illustration was paramount because of the need to also make art very responsible in that field. The art of Africa was a powerful force that shaped the lives of the people for centuries; it has been used in every aspect of their existence. Today, it is still very potent and can be used to serve other dynamic issues emanating due to civilisation, globalisation and the shifting traditional values of the people.

The idea of re-inventing anything according to Gbádégesin¹⁸ presupposes a prior act of invention of that same thing, meaning that the idea must first have been invented and probably only needs turning around or re-examination. It is a re-assessment to find solution to identified loopholes or unnecessary digression towards a dismal development. Reinvention is also to make as if for the first time something already invented, to remake or redo something completely. For the purpose of this study re-invention is to bring into use again something that has been neglected. The inclusion of the visual art in African literature is something that must be looked into. If it is agreed that it was and still remain an important aspect of the people's culture and general life and wellbeing, it becomes important that those responsible for the dissemination of information through the production of books should act accordingly.

Táiwò Ati Kéhindé by Fagunwa and Lewis (1972) is a book that illustrates day to day activities in a typical African society, it also teaches children sound morals that could help mould characters and make them to become useful and responsible citizens. It is often expressed that in writing of children books, the ideals and morals of the society should be expressed with the use of language, imagery and the development of their imagination. Elizabeth Vaughan is a skilful illustrator whose illustrations in this book has a lasting impact on the memory, and helps the child's learning acquisition.

We must therefore go back into our traditional literature and bring them to the fore by retelling these stories with the inclusion of the visual arts especially directed towards the children. If we must

¹⁷ See <http://aachronym.blogspot.com/2007/10/borders-and-access-or-lack-of-access-to.html>

¹⁸ Gbádégesin delivered the lecture titled "Re-inventing The Yoruba Post-Obasanjo Presidency" was delivered as a commemorative 77th birthday lecture in memory of Chief Ajibola Ige, the late Attorney General of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on September 13, 2007 at the Premier Hotel, Ibadan, Nigeria.

get the children interested in their own culture, it must be early in life before they are allured to the foreign ones. In today's world, homes are constantly bombarded with various technological innovations found in video and games gadgets, iPod and many others. There is a need to examine the publication of books especially in Africa, or for Africa to check the drift away from positive aspects of the people's culture.

There is no gainsaying that the multimedia world is very important, it has made things easier as well as faster; societal evidences have shown some of these gains. Despite this, books are still very much part of the global culture that can never go away. If we therefore must continue to make them very relevant, publishing books in creative and innovative manners should be the way to go. All hope seems not lost at least for some parts of the world, efforts are being made by a few organisations to examine the situation and proffer solutions. Having recognised that mankind owes to the child the best it has to give, UNESCO identified and proclaimed ten principles; of which Principle 7 is very relevant to this present study. Principle 7 declares free and compulsory education as non-negotiable and fundamental right of the child, especially at the early stages of development. This will help the child to become a responsible citizen; the parents, the society and the state organs shall ensure the child fully enjoys this right.¹⁹

In the words of Hans Conzett²⁰ these requirements can hardly be fulfilled without books. He expressed that it was gratifying that GRAPHICS should devote a special issue to the children's book in 1979. Conzett argues that books usually leave a deep mark on the children who read them, the child's power of expression, and the ability to make contact and to communicate is improved while his imagination is stimulated by pictures. The highlighted parts of the Principle 7 above especially the word "culture" is to point to the importance of laying emphasis on cultural values in the teaching of the young ones in order to be properly grounded and educated as such (Herdeg 1979).

In another effort at examining Africa's contribution to the literary world, Professor Ali Mazrui was instrumental to the Zimbabwe International Book Fair that collated "Africa's 100 Best Books" to commemorate the beginning of 21st Century. The project which aimed at celebrating the efforts of the African scholars²¹ over the past century was held in conjunction with the African Publishers Network, the African Writers' Association, and the Pan African Booksellers Association among others. Regrettably, only four (4) out of the 100 books that made the list emanated from the literature for children category. It is possible that some of the books in the other categories could have been read by the young ones, but the fact is that they were not particularly directed at them. In effect many of such books will also be devoid of illustrations that could stimulate children interest.

In a related development, the Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO²² (ACCU) held a conference to brainstorm on issues that bother on the development of picture books for children. Ideas from diverse cultures were amalgamated as the conference tagged "Artists of Children's Books in Asia, Africa, and Latin America" which was held in Akihabara, Tokyo in March 2009 drew participants from Costa Rica, Japan, the Philippines and Sudan.

The conference encouraged teachers, librarians, and other stakeholders to promote the culture of book reading throughout the world.²³ Summarily, few efforts are being made, there is still a lot more to be done. Perhaps that was one of the reasons the Sunshine School Proprietor in Ile-Ife devoted time to this aspect during the 50th anniversary of the *Things Fall Apart*.

4.1 The Way Out

*Ti omodé bá şubú á wo iwájú,
Ti àgbàbá şubú á wo èyin wò*

¹⁹ Office of the High Commissioner for human rights, <http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/25.htm>.

²⁰ Han Conzett was the Chairman of the Swiss Commission for the International Year of the Child. See Walter Herdeg (1979:468)

²¹ <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/africa/cuvl/Afbks.html>

²² ACCU is a non-profit organisation for Asia and the Pacific regional activities in line with the principles of UNESCO

²³ http://www.accu.or.jp/en/newinfo.shtml#090318_1

*when a child falls he looks ahead,
but when the adult or elder falls he looks backward.*

The above Yorùbá proverb subtly addresses the expression of reinvention being proposed here. The importance is simply for the knowledgeable in the literature of Africa, its history, tales, dramas and other relevant documents to be re-invented. Stories have to be told and retold in many ways and formats with very interesting illustrations that would favourably compare with the foreign comic books and cartoons. Tales of the tortoise and other beautiful short stories expressed them in languages and formats that the young ones will find very amusing, interesting and at the same time not compromising the messages that is being passed across.

In a study on the books by Akinwumi Isola by Folárànmí (2008:142), it was discovered that even though all the books have back cover illustration, only the earlier publications (*Ólekú, Efúnsetán Aníwùrà and Kòséégbé*) included illustrations within the text which points to the decline in publishing in Nigeria. *Abé Ààbò* and *Olú Qmọ: Íyálóde Ègbá* are very rich materials and of historical relevance that can be republished with good illustrations. *Olú Qmọ* can be retold in a language for the enjoyment of the children, so that from an early age they are accustomed to their own history. The foreign rhymes and poems now very prevalent in schools can then be replaced or used along with more familiar and relevant texts.

5. Conclusion

Nigeria and indeed African children cannot continue to totally depend on imported foreign picture books often with foreign orientation both of theme and of illustration. Whereas this may be okay to give them a global view of issues and conditions of existence in other places, it would be unacceptable to neglect their own literature and history. Series of interviews²⁴ conducted with students, parents and teachers in schools points to the general need for a return to what used to be. It was stressed that illustrations aid better understanding of the story; it allows the reader to see the picture on the mind of the writer; it makes the book attractive and captivating; it entices them to read through to the end of the book and it gives additional information added to the text. Stakeholders must therefore ensure that there is a redress. If therefore we must catch them young with a habit of reading before the lure of computer games, digital equipment, and drugs take over, the author(s) the publisher, and the entire society must look into the publishing of books that is well illustrated and directed towards the nascent tender heart of the children.

References

- Achebe, Chinua. 2012. *Things Fall Apart*. 2012th ed. New York: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.
- Adejumo, Ademola. 1998. "Plato and the Functions of Art." *JEDM Journal of Environmental Design and Management* 1 (1 & 2):1–16.
- Chadsey, Charles P, and Harold Wentworth. 1978. *The Grosset Webster Dictionary*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap.
- Fagunwa, D O, and L J Lewis. 1972. *Taiwo ati Kehinde : Iwe kiini*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Folárànmí, Stephen. 2008. "A Critique of Artistic Illustrations in the Works of Akinwumi Isola." In *Emerging Perspectives on Akinwumilsola*, edited by Akintunde Akinyémi and Toyin Falola, 115–45. Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, Inc.
- Herdeg, Walter. 1979. *4th International Survey of Children's Book Illustration = 4. Internationale Übersicht Über Die Kinderbuch-Illustration = 4e Aperçu International Des Illustrations de Livres d'enfants*. Zurich: Graphis Press.
- Irele, F Abiola. 2001. "The Crisis of Cultural Memory in Chinua Achebe 's Things Fall Apart." *African Studies Quarterly*.
- Segun, Mabel D. 1987. *Children's Book Production in Nigeria: An Assessment*, in *Tapping Nigeria's Limitless Cultural Treasures*. Edited by Frank Aig-Imoukhuede. Lagos: National Council for Arts and Culture.
- Sheba, Ebenezer Aiku. 2001. "The Symbolism of Àròkò and Ààlè in Yoruba Tradition." *Nigerian Field*. 66:137–43.
- Willett, Frank. 2002. *African Art*. London: Thames & Hudson.

²⁴ Series of interviews were conducted with selected students and staff of Sunshine Nursery and Primary School, Ile-Ife and Ambassadors College Ilé-Ife, Nigeria between June 2007 and March 2008.