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Under the Sun: Creative Writing, Broadcast Media and Debates for Social Change in Africa

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Abstract: Radio is the fastest growing broadcast medium in Africa. This paper will draw upon my experience of designing and implementing the British Council 'Radiophonics' programme in Uganda and Nigeria, 2006-2009. The programme promotes writing skills for radio and led to the launch of the broadcast series 'Under the Sun' on commercial FM. The paper will examine the antecedents of the project, the social context, the pedagogic process, broadcast media and audience response, and the way that African writers position themselves in relation to economic, social and political change in Uganda and Nigeria. It will also explore aspects of Creative Writing as a practice-led research discipline, the development of new writing for radio broadcast, and the promotion of debates that address issues of social and political concern to African societies. In doing so it will draw upon the direct testimony of African writers themselves who participated in the project.

Keywords: African Writing, Creative Writing, Research through Creative Writing, Commercial FM Radio in Africa, Social Inclusion and Democratic Change, Social and Political Debate, Pedagogic Process

> 'In a continent which was still predominately non-literate and one in which literacy campaigns had been so much hostage to the myopia of native rulers – Europe's political stepchildren – to talk of the Death of the Author was like killing off those who were ready to script their people into history.'[1]
>
> **Odia Ofeimun**
>
> 'The story is our escort; without it, we are blind.'[2]
>
> **Chinua Achebe**

Introduction

UNDER THE SUN is the series title of radio productions in English created within the *Radiophonics* literature development programme. They were funded by the British Council[3] - the United Kingdom's international organisation for educational opportunities and cultural relations - and broadcast in Uganda and Nigeria in 2007 and 2009. At the time of writing (January 2010) the broadcasts have concluded in Nigeria

[1] Ofeimun, Odia ,"The Impossible Death of the African Author", *African Quarterly on the Arts,* Vol 2/No 3, 1998.
[2] Achebe, Chinua, *Anthills of the Savannah*, Heinemann, 1987; Penguin Classics, 2001.
[3] http://www.britishcouncil.org/new/

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(in Lagos, Abuja and Kano) and their reach will be extended through podcasting on British Council and Lancaster University websites. This project grew from earlier British Council/Lancaster University collaborations and raises questions about the catalytic role of creative writing as a research methodology within the UK academy as well as focusing issues of literature development, the use of broadcast media in social debates, transcultural exchange, and the position of writers within post-colonial African societies.

These projects offered opportunities to explore the research potential of Creative Writing within the academy. By 2006 I had collaborated with other creative writers, literary critics, cultural critics and post-colonial scholars to set up a new research centre - the Centre for Transcultural Writing and Research[4] - at Lancaster. The UK academy is fostering Creative Writing courses at an unprecedented rate, often as a companion subject to English. But the relationship of Creative Writing to English studies and to wider notions of research in the Humanities remains problematical and paradoxical. Literary output in the form of poems, stories and plays provides a 'textual artefact' that can become the subject of critical and theoretical discourse by academics in English or Cultural Studies, yet that artefact itself is not recognised as a form of research without some accompanying exegesis – as exemplified by the requirements for submission to the 2007 Research Assessment Exercise in UK Higher Education. Research into the text has increasingly moved away from close critical readings that consider authorial intention towards much wider inflections or 'readings' and a view of the text as an intertextual artefact – a function of language and textuality itself that can be endlessly theorised.

Just as African writers accused post-colonial scholars of appropriating their work by continuing to read it as an ongoing affect of empire, so creative writers seem subject to a parallel post-colonising process. Creative Writing has gained a semi-independent presence in many Universities only to be shackled to critical theory and the ramifications of canonical deconstruction. Writers themselves are often the subject of anthropological study in ways that are uncannily reminiscent of ways in which one culture – as Edward Said has pointed out so trenchantly[5] - constructs another and controls it through a combination of wish-fulfilment and inequity of power. The quotation from Odia Ofeumun that heads up this essay captures the essence of this irony for the African writer.

That is not to deny the insights of post-colonial or literary theory in any way, but to show how under-theorised and unequal in academic (but not intellectual) terms Creative Writing seems as a discipline within university faculties dominated by the Social Sciences with their more formal methodologies and formidably theorised research practice. Creative Writing, as an academic discipline, suffers from other structural weaknesses, as perceived by the dominant cultures of academia, not least of which is the lack of peer reviewed journals that validate its outputs as academic discourse, rather than one dispersed into the wider reading culture of society.

[4] Mission Statement: CTWR links extensive research activity in creative writing to a transnational postgraduate community. A diverse range of research projects fosters an interdisciplinary environment, promoting the generation and study of creative writing across cultures. CTWR encompasses research-as-practice, action-research projects, the study of historical and contemporary creative practice, the relationship between writing and social change and the extension of learning and research networks through information technology. It promotes critical, pedagogical and theoretical accounts of praxis with special emphasis on cultural exchange between practitioners and with social and political institutions: http://www.transculturalwriting.com

[5] Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978.

The *Radiophonics* project offers some interesting perspectives on the role of creative writing in research. These encompass the development of the literature development projects, critical reflection upon them, the process of creative writing itself, online mentoring methodology, and the role of creative writing as a catalyst in the exploration of social and political issues through the domain of public broadcasting. A form of educational praxis that could be seen as 'action-research' was thus followed by a form of academic reflection that brought the projects to the attention of a different audience than their immediate constituents and explored them as forms of transferable knowledge

Such 'modalities' of research within the overarching discipline of Creative Writing seemed to offer an enriched version of creative praxis within various wider research contexts[6], suggesting ways of understanding it that link formal research strategies to creativity and its acts of invention as a means of exploring, defining and understanding human experience. The methodology of Creative Writing might differ radically from those of the Social Sciences but the effect/affect of its outputs can be seen of as having parallel significance as an original contribution to knowledge – Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart* [7] still seems as essential to the understanding of colonialism as the writings of Frantz Fanon or Edward Said.

Background and Antecedents

Radiophonics developed from a the British Council/Lancaster University literature development project *Crossing Borders* [8] which began as a small-scale pilot scheme in Uganda and developed into a major initiative across nine sub-Saharan African countries[9]. The methodology of the project[10] involved email correspondence and the exchange of attached electronic drafts, allowing mentors to intervene in the development of the writing in a very practical way. Each assignment was accompanied by a piece of reflective writing, so that close textual attention was accompanied by discussion of wider literary and cultural issues.

A major literature festival, *Beyond Borders* [11] was staged in Kampala in 2005, drawing delegates from 17 sub-Saharan African countries. As well as celebrating achievements and promoting debates, this event functioned as a diagnostic tool to define the future priorities of British Council work in literature in Africa. The views of African writers at the conference were diverse, but expressed the need for better standards of publication and editing, the promotion of indigenous literatures in schools and University curricula, and the development of libraries and bookshops in order to foster wider readerships for their work.

The priorities that emerged for the British Council from this conference had to be achievable, affordable, and in line with its current practice and institutional ethos. By 2006, a major re-organisation of British Council structures and services was in hand. Administrative change was accompanied by fiscal change, so that budgets that had previously been held and directed largely in London were devolved to regional offices around the world. This act

[6] See: *Narrating the North, Crossing Borders, Radiophonics, Regarding War,* and the AHRC-funded research project *Moving Manchester: Mediating Marginalities* at www.transculturalwriting.com
[7] Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart*, Heinemann, 1958.
[8] http://www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/index.html
[9] Uganda, Kenya, Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, Cameroon, Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa.
[10] See: The Reflexive Muse, *International Journal of the Arts in Society*, Mort, G, Vol. 1, 2006. http://www.arts-journal.com
[11] See: "Crossing Borders and Beyond", *Moving Worlds*, Mort, G, Vol. 6 (1), June 2006: 96-109.

of devolution was accompanied by a more rigorous definition of the Council's mission. To summarise crudely, the Council did not exist to fund arts activity *per se*, but only as part of its broader mission. Furthermore, small-scale arts projects would be replaced by much bigger, themed projects whose priorities might be achieved partially through arts work, but would not in principle promote it. Any new projects would have to reach audiences that could be counted in millions and not hundreds or thousands.

The project team at Lancaster and the Literature team at the British Council in London were charged with winding down *Crossing Borders* at the very point where it had achieved goals that had been hard to imagine four years previously. We had established on online literary magazine, launched a major literature festival with delegates from 17 African countries, and mentored over 300 African writers. A number of these had begun to achieve publication and win literary prizes, including the prestigious Macmillan Prize for African Fiction, the Commonwealth Short Story Prize and the Caine Prize[12]. But by 2005/6 the British Council had toughened its stance and re-directed its priorities. The only hope of the Lancaster University team continuing to work with African writers was to change our own priorities or lose the partnership we were trying to develop with them.

The Pilot Scheme: Uganda

Uganda had always been the leading edge of the *Crossing Borders* project. Our activities began there and it continued to be the focus for innovation and experiment. Accordingly, it was decided to run a new pilot scheme there to train writers to write short stories[13] for radio – the fastest growing broadcast medium in Africa. Literature could become the basis for developing new work that could reach a mass audience at the flick of a switch, raising the profile of writers and literature in society. Furthermore, if the stories themselves focused on issues of social importance, then we might develop a direct conversation with our audiences to debate those issues. In the widest sense, this was an educative mission that anticipated change within the Council but that would also test the credentials of creative writing as a catalyst for promoting democratising social and political debates. Literature, which is a slow-burn activity, could itself by catalysed by the broadcast media to work faster and in more immediate ways. The notion of a broadcast series with an emphasis on voice and story also recalled crucial aspects of the oral tradition. Furthermore, the broadcast outputs from the project might gain longevity and impact from podcasting and from their incorporation into educational materials that could be used in schools with suitably trained teachers. The oldest forms of orature could be recast through the newest digital technology.

The decision to focus outputs from our new project on social and political issues was no arbitrary or opportunistic one. At the *Beyond Borders* festival held in Kampala in 1995, the issue of such commitment had been the central to Veronique Tadjo's keynote address:

> Yes, times have changed and issues are different. Our countries have been independent for almost half a century. But how much better off are we today? Can we honestly say

[12] See: news entries here for African and International prizes awarded to *Crossing Borders* Writers: http://www.transculturalwriting.com/radiophonics/contents/other/news/index.html

[13] See: Appendix I for a full list of writers and stories on the project.

> we are through with commitment and can now write in the luxury of our ivory tower while our continent is going up in flames and its inhabitants living in poverty?[14]

But rather than producing 'books for the African readership, in order to actively encourage its development'[15] as she advocated, could the broadcasting of stories that had clear origins in the literary text via orature provide a stimulus for social debate whilst also engaging audiences with literature as a national cultural resource?

In practical terms, the *Radiophonics* project was conceived as a series of incremental stages divided into two main phases[16]. In Phase I, a group of eight writers from the *Crossing Borders* would be identified within easy reach of Kampala; a series of writing workshops would be staged, with radiophonic short fiction focused on social and political issues as their focus; an eLearning network would be set up on the *Crossing Borders* website so that writers could be mentored in finishing their pieces. Meanwhile, negotiation with a radio station would commence and a broadcast series designed in partnership with them. Phase II would follow the broadcast series: workshops would be held with teachers from schools in or near Kampala; a set of teaching materials would be written and produced to underpin them; stories from the broadcast series would act as textual and broadcast exemplars; a writing competition would be held with 16+ students in participating schools to stimulate short fiction writing in relation to social and political issues; the three winning stories would be broadcast in the same format. In this way we hoped to capture both the writing of experienced authors with a serious ambition to work in a professional context, and the creative work, attitudes and opinions of young people still in full-time education.

Workshops with writers were held in the summer of 2006 at the British Council offices in Kampala. These provided radio training and writing development, with a general indication of the focus of the broadcast series; no specific effort was made to steer writers towards specific subject matter. An eLearning network was established with the help of the project's UK research assistant, Dr. Kate Horsley, and negotiations began in Kampala with Sanyu FM, a commercial FM music station. By the autumn of 2006, we had a broadcast partner, a commercial deal and eight finished stories. I set up a process whereby I read and edited each story to the required word-length before recording. No substantial edits were made without consultation, but we had made it clear that radio production was a team effort rather than an individual one. Cutting overwrought stories in this context was often a positive benefit to work that had to be interpreted by an actor and then produced in a recording studio to an exacting degree, leaving space for listeners to imagine for themselves.

By November 2006 I was working with the Sanyu FM producer, Faith Kinani, to prepare each story for broadcasting. Our concept was to move away from a 'straight' reading of the stories that depended upon the human voice alone and to aim for semi-dramatised stories that allied first-person narration to discrete sound effects. The concept for the broadcast format was of a 'live' thirty-minute interactive programme that would involve music, the story, and discussion between the writer, a studio guest, the presenter and members of the public who could telephone the radio station directly to comment. It was felt strongly by some members of staff at Sanyu and the British Council that such phone-in would have to

[14] Tadjo, Veronique, Keynote Address, *Beyond Borders Festival*, Kampala, 2005.
[15] Tadjo, *ibid.*
[16] See: Radiophonics, *Writing in Education 44*, Horsley, K, Mort, G, Spring 2008: 76-80.

be incentivised, so each programme offered a 'prize' for the caller who could successfully answer a question relating to the broadcast story.

Meanwhile the series had been branded as '*Under the Sun*', theme music chosen, studio guests selected, advertising trailers recorded and a broadcast slot selected for Sunday evening when it was felt that families might listen together to the programmes.

In the process of recording and broadcasting a number of fairly serious logistical problems were encountered both in recording with actors and in the production process itself. These could be characterised as issues that might have been avoided by better planning or carried out more successfully with enhanced resources. For example, we didn't reach our target of sound-editing all the recorded stories before I left Kampala in November 2006, so I had to edit them from the UK and exchange files with the producer in Kampala, which was both cumbersome and time-consuming. But by the end of the development process we had devised and successfully put on air an innovative concept that created a new story series for radio that attracted significant audience attention, stimulating them to call in and debate issues.

The themes of the stories often overlapped, but they addressed institutional and political corruption, substance abuse, sexual abuse, education of girls, land corruption, the traumatising effects of war, HIV/Aids, inter-tribal relationships, the tension between traditional and contemporary values and the complexities of love and sex in personal relationships. The radio productions themselves – both the readings and the 'radiophonic' versions of the stories - were a little crude by UK broadcasting standards, mainly due to the immediate pressures on time when reading and production work was carried out. The presentation of the stories on air and their incentivisation through was also sometimes inappropriate to their rather sombre subject matter. The patter of commercial FM music presenters also sat rather uneasily with the exigencies of serious talk-radio. These were issues to be resolved in any future broadcast series.

I returned to Uganda to run workshops with a group of 16 teachers from schools in around Kampala, having written a handbook offering guidance on radio-writing and workshop techniques which I knew would seem very different from the formalities of the African 'chalk and talk' classroom with its large numbers of students. Our aim was to run a radio-writing competition with 16-plus students in after-school clubs where small numbers of students would enhance the quality of contact. Not only had we developed a written resource to aid this, but we now had recorded broadcasts of the Ugandan stories: material that related to the experience of the students in their own country, thus closing the cultural gap between our original exemplar material (from the UK) and the African experience. In Uganda and later in Nigeria, the identification of key social and political issues with teachers was the result of a 'brainstorming' exercise and the outputs from both countries an be found in Appendix II, III and IV to this paper, just as they emerged.

Meanwhile, the British Council reforms were taking effect, placing serious constraints on resources. It became clear that we would not be able to complete Phase II of the project in Uganda, but there was a chance of developing the project in Nigeria, a much bigger directorate, within the Council's Social Diplomacy programme. The match with the intention and themes of our work in Uganda was very close and plans were laid to develop them there. It seemed a daunting task in such a huge country (population 125 millions) with such interior cultural diversity and such a history of military conflict and political dysfunction. But Nigeria also has a very vibrant and outward looking population with a huge diaspora and an ethos of enterprise and invention. As well as presenting us with problems of scale and impact,

Nigeria also promised better resources and support for the project both within and outside the Council.

Radiophonics in Nigeria

Planning for this new phase of *Radiophonics* began in early 2007 and targeted four major cities. Lagos has a population of 8 millions, Kano 4 millions, Enugu 688,000 and Abuja 778,000. That compares to a total population of 1.5 millions in Kampala – figures that demonstrate at a glance the potential for the project to reach mass audiences in regions with very different cultural traditions within Nigeria.

Four writers were chosen to run workshops in those cities – myself, Mike Harris, Simon Brett and Biyi Bandele. A version of my *Guidance Notes* for radio writing would be used to give the workshops a structure within which individual writers could bring their skills and experience to bear. The workshops were advertised in Nigeria and the British Council selected 12 writers to participate in each, giving us a total of 48 stories to draw from. The workshops were held in a two-week period in the autumn of 2007, ironically coinciding with the British Council offices in Nigeria selling off the literature stock from their libraries in favour of books and periodicals dealing with financial and management themes.

By the spring of 2009 we had selected 9 stories for broadcast, had secured the services of Chidi Ukwu of Flint Productions (en ex-BBC World Service producer and himself a writer on the project), and struck a deal with Inspiration FM in Lagos, to broadcast during April-May on a Saturday afternoon slot. These broadcasts would follow the same format as those in Uganda with studio guests, interviews with the writers, and audience phone-in. I returned to Nigeria in February 2009 to run workshops with teachers in Lagos and Kano, as Phase II of the project rolled out on schedule.

July 2009 marked the end of the main broadcast series. The stories went out on Inspiration FM (Lagos), Radio Nigeria (Abuja) and Raypower FM (Kano), reaching an estimated audience of 4 millions. The winning schools competition stories were broadcast in December 2009. The themes of the main broadcast series encompass election-rigging, robbery with violence, unregulated firearms, ethnic violence and war, intertribal marriage, the degradation of important traditions, religious tensions, corruption in the workplace, widowhood rites, education of girls, traditional African values versus modern 'western' values, and HIV/AIDS. The themes from the schools competition focus on genocide (in Rwanda), corruption in the legal system and the pressure on young brides to bear children. Like the broadcasts in Uganda, these formed the selective representation of a very wide range of issues. But in both countries, political and religious hypocrisy emerged as strong themes and, in follow-up questionnaire responses from participating writers, there was a strong sense that change itself and the *rate* of change was a key focus of anxiety:

> Greed – we have completely lost our humanness if there is such a word. Everything has become so commercialized. Yesterday driving back home, we passed by a church and saw hundreds of people each coming out carrying a jerry-can of supposedly "holy" water. But for me the amazing thing was that each person carried a different size, so I bet it goes by the size of your pocket. Otherwise if it is holy water, why not have the

> religious sacrificial quality and give to all who want it so we can rid the world of all the pains in it. Even religion has become commercialized![17]

In Nigeria the following response constituted a 'typical' response:

> Where do we start? Consider: very little awareness among citizens of how to directly engage with processes of government; corruption (the big one); no organised social institutions (welfare etc); very little accountability by people in power; breakdown in communication between government and the people; poor infrastructure; Niger-Delta and the attendant economic and socio-political challenges; the electric power emergency…[18]

During the phone in responses to the broadcasts in both Nigeria and Uganda there was also a strong indication that the 'social contract' between government and its institutions and the people had broken down, that the institutions of religion had followed a path of hypocritical self-interest and that it was up to individuals to resist corruption through personal decisions, however difficult. In a sense, those were conventional responses that reinforced messages of individual human rights, collective responsibility, and the restoration of democracy. But the stories themselves avoided any direct didacticism, remaining nuanced as works of literature and as narratives that showed conflicting pressures, multiple motivating forces and individual human complexity.

Despite some early technical problems with telephone lines the broadcasts worked well without any incentives for audiences to participate. We had an excellent presenter – 'Oscar' - who was thoroughly prepared and adept at linking serious discussion to a 'cool' format with relaxed background music and a very direct approach to the audiences. Studio guests were of high quality, usually drawn from NGO and voluntary organisations, and every programme drew a range of calls from the public, the vast majority of which were focused on the topic under discussion. In Chidi Ukwu's hands, the rather tentative production style of the Ugandan *Under the Sun* series had evolved into a more dynamic concept with sound effects and music linked across stories to create familiar textures. Readings and performance were also of high quality and more voices were brought to bear within stories to create diversity and drama. Above all, Inspiration FM, a commercial music radio station, was serious about talk-radio and its capacity to use creative material to draw audiences into discussion of its broadcast material.

The Writers' Views

Research carried out by the British Council in Nigeria relating to the broadcasts showed that 96% of respondents[19] felt that the broadcasts had generated useful debate; 89% endorsed the short story format; 85% endorsed their use on radio as a means of stimulating debate; and 91% supported the use of audience discussion via radio as a means of stimulating discussion and debate on social and political issues in Nigeria. But the more nuanced questionnaire responses of some participating writers provide some stark insights into both the social

[17] Nancy Oloro Robarts, Uganda, Radiophonics questionnaire response, 2009.
[18] Chidi Michael Ukwu, Nigeria, Radiophonics questionnaire response, 2009.
[19] From a sample group of 56 respondents.

and economic context and the urgency of the relationship between writers, literature, literacy, and social and political debates in Uganda and Nigeria. They echo many of the discussions held during the *Beyond Borders* conference in Kampala in 2005:

> Writers cannot commit full-time to the work of writing because it cannot put bread on the table. The absence of a vibrant publishing industry and related platforms in radio and TV also eliminates opportunities for writers to engage their potential audiences. Lastly, no regular comprehensive training and mentoring programmes and active networks are available for writers to improve their skills.[20]

> Published and broadcast writing already are agents of social change in Nigeria. Our history is replete with examples of writers/playwrights like Hubert Ogunde and Wole Soyinka who use(d) their writings to engender change. Modern day writers like me, against all odds use short stories/plays to try to effect change in the society. However the truth must be said that both the political and the economic climate in the country have not made it an easy ride. More often than not writers end up stacking up their works in drawers or shelves because there isn't the economic power to get these works published or the government of the day is averse to freedom of speech.[21]

> Readership for published works in Nigeria is poor. Our local publishers are more interested in publishing texts recommended for School Examinations. Where they venture into publishing literary works, promotions, discussions and book signings are rarely encouraged. This implies that nothing attracts readers to works of writers who are fortunate to get published. At times such books are nowhere to be purchased. Even among those who went to higher institutions, many are indifferent to literary works published in Nigeria.[22]

The widespread gloom amongst both Ugandan and Nigerian writers about the lack of opportunities in publishing and the lack of readership in Africa was counterbalanced by a positive belief (expressed by all writers), that literature could be successfully adapted for radio where it could both stimulate debate and effect social change:

> Definitely. Radio right now is the most powerful communication tool in Uganda. Discussion panel programmes on all radios are listened to with a loyalty that is scarcely to be witnessed in any other section of our lives.[23]

> There is an element of pride when you hear about a place you know of so well being a centre of attention, either be it on a news item or in a dramatic presentation or a short story. Naturally I would be drawn to want to read the book again by myself after hearing the story. Yes, I believe broadcasting work will raise the profile of literature. I also feel

[20] Julius Ceasar Ssseremba, Uganda, Radiophonics questionnaire response, 2009.
[21] Bunmi Julius-Adeoye, Nigeria, Radiophonics questionnaire response, 2009.
[22] Chiaka Obasi, Nigeria, Radiophonics questionnaire response, 2009.
[23] David Tumisiime, Uganda, Radiophonics questionnaire response, 2009.

> that society really does not understand what it is missing in literature, and once that awareness is created, it is bound to take off positively.[24]

> …stories linked to one's emotions and emotions of anger, sadness, or even disillusionment can engineer personal change and then push for a more wide spread change in the social and political sector of a region.[25]

As one might expect from their personal interest, all the writers I interviewed were enthusiastic about the continuance of such schemes to raise the profile of literature and as a means of addressing urgent issues. Some of the concerns facing African societies – especially that of growing materialism and the widening gap between rich and poor – have clearly added to the diminished status of literature, already challenged by low literacy rates, few indigenous writers on the school curriculum and a rapidly developing media culture that may have bypassed the rich, immediately post-colonial literature, that sprang up in many African countries with the support of UK publishers.

Some Perspectives

The socially and politically significant dimensions of *Crossing Borders* – the extent to which writers addressed and perhaps even sought to negotiate or change aspects of their social condition – was focused with greater acuity by *Radiophonics*. Rather than being a by-product of an educational project, the promotion of social and political debate was its *raison d'etre. Crossing Borders* might be said to have generated a 'latent' rather than deliberately delineating form of ethnography. We still have, stored in the *Crossing Borders* archive on compact discs and hard-drives, the thousands of exchanges that passed between UK-based mentors and African writers. They comprise drafts of creative writing, reflective commentaries and critical response. Even without exhaustive cataloguing and analysis, it's clear that they represent a unique intercultural conversation between individuals in Africa and the UK at a particular point in the twenty-first century that would repay investigation.

If *Crossing Borders* had generated such a rich archive as a consequence of its embedded mentoring process, then *Radiophonics* was a more specific form of ethnography in which writers and their audience engaged in a process that actually sought to identify and explore key issues in their social and political institutions. Given the Lancaster CTWR's 'special emphasis on cultural exchange between practitioners and with social and political institutions'[26] within a Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, then creative writing could be seen as a crucial catalytic element in research that focused on 'social and political institutions' and the ways in which these could be challenged through a process led by literature, broadcast media, the Internet, and interaction, with 'stakeholder' audiences.

The British Council have decided to commit no more funds to the *Radiophonics* project in 2009/10, though it is possible that its methodology might be used within a broader agenda, such as Climate Change, just as it was within Social Diplomacy. Meanwhile, plans to locate the new broadcasts on the existing *Radiophonics* websites will go ahead. Evaluation of the project in terms of the Council's own criterion of 'reaching millions' has shown that this

[24] Nancy Oloro Robarts, Uganda, Radiophonics questionnaire response, 2009.
[25] Amina Tiro Maikori, Nigeria, Radiophonics questionnaire response, 2009.
[26] CTWR Mission Statement, *Ibid.*

has clearly been achieved and the methodology of generating new literature within a wider agenda of social debate strongly endorsed. The project has created resources that will have a much longer life and wider reach through strategic podcasting. They could also be deployed in Africa beyond Uganda and Nigeria in schools and – following the Council's ethos of mutuality – might be broadcast or used in educational settings in the UK to promote greater intercultural understanding.

There has been some discussion of translating some of the *Radiophonics* stories into Hausa and to broadcast them from Kano in northern Nigeria. The use of English has long been debated in post-colonial criticism – notably by Ngugi wa Thiong'o' in *Decolonising the Mind* [27], with its critique of the 'fatalistic logic' of the 'unassailable position of English in our literature'[28]. Globalisation of English and literature has perhaps modified that radical perspective for young African writers, though translation would do very little to uproot the origins of the stories in a 'bourgeois' medium and mind-set. But the essence of *Radiophonics* was to establish a viable and transferable generative research methodology.

The potential for a multi-lingual project (where work originates in indigenous- language workshops led by Nigerian writers) to develop new work for radio suggests an affirmation of social narratives even more deeply embedded than those derived from writing in English. In their thematic focus and dramatic narration the broadcast outputs of the project form a set of interlocking narratives. Authorial accounts of social and political circumstance are then re-located in relation to the parallel personal stories told by individuals calling the radio stations. Such vital activity signals not 'the death of the author' but, an urgency to connect within the exigencies of painfully emergent social and political circumstance:

> At any rate, unlike the European societies of Barthes' background, contemporary African societies confront the crisis of existence in the Twentieth Century within the logic of scarcity, rather than abundance, mass illiteracy rather than a surfeit of literacy, the brazenness of oppression, both inter-racial and intra-racial, and deprivation rather than the effluence of the freedoms of speech and association. The daily lot for many is the rank distortion of choice and life-chances by personalised power strutting at the expense of institutional designs.[29]

A few years into the twenty-first century, this late twentieth-century appraisal seems no less true of much of sub-Saharan Africa. The British Council initiative in Uganda and Nigeria, stimulated in part by internal reform, has achieved a significant stage of what needs to develop into a much wider process of engagement - in print and broadcast forms – if literature is to continue to develop in African countries. It's salutary, if we are led into thinking of such developmental problems as typically 'African', to reflect upon similar debates about public support for literature in the UK.

The potential to link extant textual and broadcast materials together into an educational dimension is considerable and suggests no less a project for cultural agencies and NGO's than to promote the teaching of Creative Writing in African schools and universities. To focus on the material development of a society at the expense of its cultural life is itself a form of distorting imperialism, yet the argument for the arts will always be a small one in

[27] Wa Thiong'o, Ngugi, *Decolonising the Mind* , Heinemann, 1986.
[28] Wa Thiong'o *Ibid*.
[29] Odia Ofeimun, *Ibid.*

within the louder claims made for economic and technological development. *Radiophonics* has demonstrated that literature has a very deep resonance and that it can play a vital role in debates for democratic and societal change. Furthermore, its history and antecedents indicate possible developments that could broaden this in terms of reach, technologies of dissemination, language and cultural significance.

Creative Writing is being taught in some African countries. As in the UK, its emergence will be painful, contested and slow. The establishment of extensive Creative Writing curricula, influential networks (AWP, AAWP, NAWE)[30] and methodologies in America, Australia and the UK, point to the expertise and resources that could be shared in English and translated into indigenous languages in many contexts. The growth of local radio and the growing availability of cheap book production technologies – including print-on-demand - could enable literature to assume a place in the gradual transformation of societies that have to engage with global culture whilst retaining their own.

The British Council has led the way in this area, but may lack the resources, especially in the context of a world economic recession, that can further enable such processes. Research Centres, such as the one we have established at Lancaster can promote and document forms of research that deploy creative writing methodology in a catalytic way and explore the relationship of writing to social change. Whilst that work may be guided and refined by theoretical readings, it also has to recognise that forms of hunger – material and cultural - form an imperative that leaves literature with a fundamental relationship to reality as well as to a more abstract theories of textuality. Otherwise, the death of the African author may be all too literally enacted.

Note: The views in this article are those of the author and can in no way represent or be attributed to the British Council.

[30] *Association of Writers and Writing Programmes* (US). *Australian Association of Writing Programmes*, *National Association of Writing in Education* (UK).

Appendix I

Ugandan Short Stories	
Tortured at Six	- Ebenezer T. Bifubyeka
Ghosts	- Roy-Moses Kalyesubula
Passion or Poison	- Irene Luyiga
Not Enough Reason	- Amaguru Jackline Olanya
Telephone Call	- Nancy Oloro Robarts
Get Back on my Feet	- Julius Sseremba
Last Words	- David Tumusiime
Deep Waters	- Adrian Baryamujura Tumwebaze
Nigerian Short Stories	
My In-Laws	- Bunmi Julius-Adeoye
The Blood of Innocents	- Ifeanyi Ajaegbo
Seesaw Selection	- Richard Ali
A Paddle in the High Seas	- Mike Ekunno
The Death of Innocence	- Justeena Cheta Iroegbu
The System	-Tiro Amina Maikori
An African Astronaut	- Sola Mosuro
Home at Last	- Chiaka Ukachukwu Obasi
Dancing Gods	- Chidi Ukwu
Nigerian Schools Competition Winners	
Days of the Black Sun	- Adeniyi Adenug
Painful Exchange	- Nkiruka Anyanwu
The Triumph of Justice	- Grace Chinwe Okafor

Appendix II

Radiophonics Uganda, Kampala

Social Issues identified by Participating Teachers

Global Warming
Climate Change - drought and flooding
Wetland preservation
Environmental degradation
Oppression – personal/political
Poverty/wealth
Slum housing

Management/exploitation of natural resources
Drug abuse – illicit use/self-medication
Exams and exam pressure
Land acquisition/ownership
Gender inequality
Child abuse/child labour
Sexual identity
Unemployment/underemployment
Labour exploitation
ICT advancement/human isolation
Urbanisation – traffic jams
STRESS
Sexual health - HIV/AIDS STD's/
Epidemics/Endemics – Ebola, Malaria etc
Family breakdown/stress/structure/parents in law/step parents
Political violence/war
Cattle rustling
Religious tension/tolerance/exploitation/fanaticism
CHOGM summit
Road accidents
Cosmetic abuse - skin bleaching etc
Negative effects of media
Child support/nutrition
Educational politics - use of mother tongue etc
Prostitution/sex industry
Corruption – local/national
Modernisation and change
Cultural erosion
Political development and transformation
Traditional practices – FGM, male circumcision, bride price, early marriage
Sexual perversion – incest/bestiality
The lost generation (generation x)
Post-war trauma
Natural disasters – floods, earthquakes, landslides
Witchcraft/human sacrifice
Street urchinism
Property rights
Child trafficking
Illiteracy
Sexual abuse of students by teachers
Sexual abuse of junior teachers by senior teachers
Self-belief/cultural confidence
Disapora of educated Ugandans

Appendix III

Radiophonics Nigeria, Lagos

Social Issues Identified by Participating Teachers

Female genital mutilation
Bride price – the 'selling' of women
Education of girls
Child labour exploitation
Child sexual abuse
Early marriages – arranged or forced
Peer pressure on young people
Bullying
Sexual harassment
Tribal incisions
Drug abuse
Fashion/nudity/non-traditional dress and values
Poverty
Lack of education
Prostitution – young adults
Superstition & witchcraft
Single parents
Cultism and secret societies
Kidnapping
Illiteracy
Armed robbery - amongst the young and by organised crime
Cyber crime
Financial fraud
Religious fundamentalism
Election rigging
Tribalism – exploitation of ethnicity
Environmental pollution
Climate change
HIV/Aids
Widowhood practices
Corporate embezzlement
Infertility – how it is perceived
Proliferation of churches/mosques without true religious values
Polygamy
Political militancy
Examination malpractices
Poor personal and social communications
Poor political leadership
Laziness among the young
Globalization

Emigration – brain drain
Human trafficking

Appendix IV

Radiophonics Nigeria, Kano

Social Issues Identified by Participating Teachers

Armed robbery
Hired assassins
Kidnap for ransom and ritual
Street beggars and poverty
Polygamy and extended families
Early marriages – arranged/forced
Illiteracy
Political intolerance
Child and human trafficking
Environmental pollution
Drug and alcohol abuse
Lack of clean water
Power distribution and power cuts
Lack of good roads
Poor transport system
Poor health services
Examination malpractice
Juvenile delinquency
Poor teaching environment and facilities
Domestic violence against children and women
Peer pressure to succeed/be affluent
Poor emergency medical response
Lack of affordable housing
Poor prisons/lack of rehabilitation for offenders
Lack of awareness of social values
Lack of driving skills
Unemployment
Bribery and corruption
Religious intolerance
Inequality of women
HIV/AIDS
High adult and infant mortality
Class difference
Discrimination against migrants
Witchcraft and superstition
False and corrupt religious institutions

Widowhood practices
Divorce
Child sexual abuse

About the Author

Dr. Graham Mort
Graham Mort is a university lecturer and poet who has produced eight full-length collections of work; he also writes short fiction and radio drama. He is currently director of the PhD programme in Creative Writing at Lancaster University and is a distance learning specialist. He is director of the Centre for Transcultural Writing and Research and designed and ran the British Council 'Crossing Borders' mentoring scheme for African writers (2001-2006), which engaged writers from the UK with writers from 8 countries across sub-Saharan Africa. He was the UK adviser and designer for the 'Beyond Borders' literature festival, held in Kampala in October 2005, which attracted writers and delegates from 17 Anglophone African countries across the continent. Graham was a co-applicant on a major AHRC-funded research project, 'Moving Manchester: Mediating Marginalities' which has recently been commissioned to catalogue and research the writings of migrant and diasporic communities in Greater Manchester since 1960. He is currently developing a new radio writing project - 'Radiophonics' - for the British Council in Africa. Graham's most recent book is, 'Visibility: New & Selected Poems', (Seren, 2007). A new collection of short fiction, 'Touch', will appear from Seren in 2009. He was awarded the International Award for Excellence in the Arts from the International Journal of the Arts in Society in 2007, when he also won the Bridport Prize for short fiction. www.graham-mort.com, www.transculturalwriting.com

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