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INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

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Readings from The Ibadan  
School of African Feminist Studies



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Readings from The Ibadan School of  
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# Wombiture: Digital Wombs and Foetal Subjectivities Or, Talking Futures with Culture as Wombiture

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### Background

The womb is a dense, complex and contradictory space, mankind's primal abode, an ante-natal workshop of cultural production of the fantasia, second only to the earth's primal fecundity in life's sustenance. Post-natal life comes in as a second phase of further mother culturing, nurturing and inducting the infant to the world of narrative possibilities.

To therefore locate culture and literature, indeed all cultural production, in the reflexive subjectivity of the womb is to gesture at three or more pertinent suggestions: the first is a confessional of sorts in acknowledging the reflexive womb at a materialist-philosophical level as the source and primary author of narrative as such, the second, to acknowledge the African womb as primal to the human cultural production as the

oldest inhabitant and creative agency of planet earth, and, the third is to highlight the potential of this as an epistemological foundation for future methodological approaches on the unborn. The unborn here commencing with the human, yet, transcending it in identifying other social unborn of silenced and underserved discourses and concepts in querying normative claims of primal roles and narrative in-media res. Silence, and the silenced are equally core to the methodology and theorising of cultural studies, hence the need to problematise them, locate spaces in the fast, unravelling processes of society, and now on the digital interphase and the current regime of Artificial intelligence, especially in the vortex of knowledge claims and contestations.

Plodding on with earlier reflections on nature and society, our earlier technologies and the nature of their orality and writing(s), coursing through the latter periods of our earlier external storage 'systems' from the cave to the cursor, the image to the digital emoji, etc., cultures have always embodied their myth, gnosis and broad imaginaries of 'life' before and after birth: conception, gestation and the mother's pang. The implications of this are vast and diverse as we can expect and should hardly be an enterprise to which an individual scholar dedicates the self. The current curiosity is of a much smaller area of this vast interpretational potential, and before stating them, here are a few anecdotal impulses that led to the research concern, two or three in the main. The pain arising from the difficulty of recalling vital data on account of the loss of our family 'archive' is topmost, the second being a general curiosity on the nature of narrative, across genres and the ages, and the third being the arrival of a daughter in the family and the keen observations on her all through the processes of conception, gestation and delivery.

meaning "care, cultivation, worship". The Latin root cult means "grow."

The term or concept Wombiture is a neologism derived from the fusion of two words: 'womb' and 'cult'. Here, 'womb' is a container of foetal

details, and of plausibility, and 'cult', a noun extension derived not from the French "culte" as first captured in English in 1617 and meaning "worship", but rather from its Latin etymology "cultus", meaning "care, cultivation, worship". The Latin root cult means "grow." This Latin root is the word origin of a good number of English vocabulary words, including culture, cultivate and horticulture. The root 'cult' is easily recalled via the word agriculture, for agriculture is the "growing" of plants via farming. Although the linguistic principle informing its structure requires a longer elaboration, the disciplinary sense of its usage here denotes the enculturing of the advancing foetus in diverse ways that mothers, parents and society employ wittingly or unwittingly, and to which they randomly coopt the technologies of their diverse eras to achieve. It is in this sense that this conceptual category is anchored on two potential theoretical models: one, cultural stem cells and, two, recall text.

In specific terms, Wombiture will explore the potential of digital wombs facilitating the possibilities of a reading of foetal subjectivities and the emerging implications. It weaves the biological into the social, hinting at the author's concept of 'Recall Text' and Mark Nwagwu's 'Cultural Stem Cells' as viable explainers of social tropes derived from nature but with compelling social resonances in the era of IoT Age. As recall-text, wombiture will serve as an empowering loop backwards as a strategy of developing human agency on the past (including the antenatal phase), and for the now (from the very moment of birth), and anticipated future (till that moment of exit from life, as commonly used). Bewildering as this may appear, that moment is not only here, and it just could be as empowering in its potential use(s) as it could be disempowering of the Other in its abuse(s). Helpful as this phase may be for several aspects of our life and the different disciplines, it more or less represents the more normative, technical-literal reading of Wombiture.

The first phase just articulated, remains of great value to the second phase of Wombiture; and that is Wombiture as Trope, charged with

the capacity for meaning-moulding and meaning-remoulding. Recall-text, as this trope is sometimes referred to, is evidential mythical Sankofa, but only fully philosophically appropriated if used as a trope in discursive engagements. As earlier noted, it is overtly implicated on issues of ideology, power and hegemony, among others. The mode and manner of manifestation of both are bound to overlap, especially as far as memory recall is involved, indicating my preference for “recall-text” in relation to the other descriptor. By imbuing the second phase with the lexical choice of “text”, thereby textualising the mode of this particular ‘recall’, a signal is being sent against a normative interpretation—an effort to reduce it from becoming a floating signifier tied to literalness— and develop an argument for charging the experience with the capacity to historicize, contextualize and pay very close attention to the dangers of mysticism, no matter how much it appeals to the authority of science. It is only in this manner that it can be of some minimal meaning to the humanities and even humanistic endeavours.

## Womb imagining across the ages

Here, attention is cast on texts that have focused on the different ways in which people have imagined the womb, unique child births and extraordinary lives in time-spatial categories. Some are captured in folk imaginings, authors’ reviews etc.

### Classical myths of in utero narratives.

Classical myths often feature in utero narratives that reflect ancient cultural beliefs and values surrounding pregnancy, childbirth, and fertility. Here are some examples:

Zeus and Athena (Greek): Zeus swallowed his pregnant wife Metis, fearing their child would overthrow him. However, the fetus (Athena) continued to grow inside Zeus’ head, eventually bursting forth fully grown and armored.

Dionysus (Greek): Zeus rescued his pregnant lover Semele’s fetus (Dionysus) from her womb after her death, stitching it into his thigh until the child was ready to be born.

Buddha (Buddhist): Queen Maya, the Buddha's mother, had a prophetic dream in which a white elephant entered her womb, signifying the conception of the future Buddha.

Horus(Egyptian): Isis, the goddess, protected her unborn son Horus from his father Osiris' murderer, Seth, by using magical spells and hiding in the marshes.

Mary and Jesus (Judeo-Christian): The Annunciation story features the angel Gabriel announcing to Mary that she will bear Jesus, the Son of God, while remaining a virgin.

These ancient stories continue to influence art, literature, and cultural imagination, reflecting enduring human concerns and fascinations with in utero narratives. Moreover, the classical myths often symbolize divine intervention in human reproduction, the power of female fertility and maternal protection, the destiny and fate of the unborn child, and cultural beliefs about conception, pregnancy, and childbirth – all of which align with concepts and, myths and narratives in African religions and philosophies.

## Exploring Philosophical Dimensions of Wombiture Anamnesis

In the dialogue Meno, Plato opines that all human knowledge is nothing other than recollection of what is learnt in a pre-existing world (Cooper, 1997). This has been described as the major point of affirming the bifurcation of possible worlds: the world of forms and the world of appearance (Russell, 1945). The latter takes its semblance—and imperfection—from the former, which is an archetypal and unchanging world of perfection. The view that what we know in the world of appearance is a recollection of what had been imprinted on the soul in the world of forms is the theory of anamnesis.

In another dialogue, Phaedo, Plato reiterates the connection between the soul and knowledge (Plato, 1911), postulating the connection between the immortality of the soul, on the one hand, and knowledge, on the other. Recollection consequently reflects accumulated knowledge

embedded in the soul through its cycle of existence (Plato, 1911). Plato demonstrates the practical relevance and validity of the theory through Socrates' interrogation of a slave-boy. The slave-boy, ignorant of the knowledge of geometry, was guided by Socrates into revealing the truth of theorems in geometry. Although the slave-boy had never been taught geometry by anyone, this revelation buttresses Plato's theory. The collation of true beliefs bound into coherent knowledge is, consequently, made possible on account of anamnesis (Allen, 1959).

## Athena

Turning to the Greeks, we find an equally enchanting dimension. After swallowing Metis, Zeus took six more wives in succession, until he married his seventh and present wife, Hera. Then Zeus experienced an enormous headache. He was in such pain that he ordered someone (either Prometheus, Hephaestus, Hermes, Ares or Palaemon, depending on the sources examined) to cleave his head open with a labrys, the double-headed Minoan axe. Athena leaped from Zeus's head, fully grown and armed.

## Bataks of Sumatra

In his book, *The Golden Bough*, Sir James George Frazer (1951:16) gives us a good example using the Bataks of Sumatra as it concerns the pre-birth phenomenon:

Thus, among the Bataks of Sumatra a barren woman, who would become a mother, will make a wooden image of a child and hold it in her lap, believing that this will lead to the fulfilment of her wish.

In other words, the pre-birth is a spiritual thinking in the mind of the woman who earnestly wishes to become a mother and therefore dreams of having a baby by making an image from wood, apparently resembling a baby, in order for her dream to come to reality.

## Literary Perspectives on Wombiture Of Gargantua and Pantagruel

From the diverse character typology that literature has thrown up, it thus appears like the future portends the potential of infinite diversity. In Rabelais' Gargantua and Pantagruel, the narration reveals that Gargantua, father to the latter, having been born of a father who was "a jolly good fellow in his day, liking to drink hearty as well as any man in the world" (1946:56), came into the world craving a drink. However, his father's thirst was not the only precursor to his craving as the night of his birth was also a night of great drinking and feasting. The drunkards, having drunk their fill at the feast, made a great many remarks about drinks and drinking. They wondered which came first, thirst or drinking, and whether one wets the gullet in order to dry it or one dries it in order to wet it. As a newborn asking for a drink, Gargantua seemed to contribute to the discussion and also expand the riddles of thirst and drinking as well as the gullet. He did not cry "mie, mie like other children" (1946:69), but spoke coherent words right from the moment of his birth and so joined the conversation that had begun while he was still in the womb.

Another testament to his pre-birth consciousness is the alternate route via which he came to be born. His mother consumed a great abundance of tripe just before his birth and this led to complications during her labour with 'her bottom dropping out' (1946:68). A 'dirty old hag... who had a reputation for being a great doctor' (1946:68) prepared an astringent for her to contract the muscles in her bottom but this only led to more obstruction than was needed and so the foetus of Gargantua had to literally look for another way out of his mother's belly. He thus leapt up, went through the hollow vein and 'climbed over the diaphragm to her shoulders and there he took the left hand path and came out by the left ear'. ((1946:69). This long and winding journey through his mother's body frame no doubt contributed to his thirst at birth. Added to this was the fact that the astringent and subsequent tightening up of muscles made it inconvenient for him to come out the

normal way. Gargantua, with his knowledge of the precarious situation in his mother's physiology, opted to be separated from his mother in another manner rather than wait a moment longer in her body, after all he had spent 11 months in her belly and, by all accounts, would have been 'formed to perfection' (1946:56) for the great deeds he was to do in his time.

## Of *Macbeth* and Macbeth

Here is another instantiation of the broad archetype of the not-born of a woman trope in *Macbeth* the play, and Macbeth the character. On one hand, it launches a psychic debriefing of normativity in the use of language, just as it projects aspects of futures since there is ample textual evidence that a Caesarean section was not of common knowledge at this point to guarantee an intuitive deciphering of the witches' message.

### 1 Text – *Macbeth*

- (a) Act 4 Scene 1: From the Witches to Macbeth.  
"Be bloody, bold and resolute: laugh to scorn the power of man, for none of woman born shall harm Macbeth".
  
- (b) Act 5 Scene 8: Macbeth to Macduff.  
"I bear a charmed life, which must not yield, to one of woman born".
  
- (c) Act 5 Scene 8: Macduff to Macbeth.  
"Despair thy charm;  
And let the Angel, who thou still hast serv'd  
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother' womb  
Untimely ripened"

## Historico-Religious Aspects of Wombiture Of Jesus Christ of Faith and Jesus Christ of History

The Judeo-Christian tradition tells us through the Holy Bible of the virgin birth of Jesus Christ. The Biblical account narrates that the virgin birth of Jesus is the doctrine that Jesus was conceived and born by his mother, Mary, through the power of the Holy Spirit. In the context of this study and the Africa-Yoruba mythopoesis, this sort of conception would necessarily sit well because many African cultures also equally have such versions from the regular female process of child delivery, but also to some other bizarre conceptions and deliveries.

The response of Jose Saramago in his work of fiction, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, would seem to have drawn from both the intended fictional impulse of that genre as well as some class in "The Bible as Literature", as he portrays Jesus in a human-life worldly context, suggesting that, indeed, Jesus rebelled against God because he feared that his people would be put at risk by preaching a universal message rather a culturalnational one; and had gone ahead on the cross to utter the last message saying: 'Men, forgive Him for He knows not what he is doing.'

What strikes us here is the fact that in spite of the author's recast of the Biblical narrative, he does not engage an equally central doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Wombiture Studies should find this quite significant to the extent that it demonstrates how sensitively some ordinary narratives are held, be it of cosmogony, autochthony, founder legends or, as in this case, the birthing of a new era of fresh beginnings. It highlights that narrative is not just powerful, but also of earliest beginnings of an equally antenatal conception of the nature of this particular birth; even when the process is not powered by the high-tech of a sensortransmitter scanning machine.

## Narrative in the Age of Digital In-Utero

This research takes off from the intersection of Biology (as an informing, originating principle), Technology (in relation to digital wombs), and Sociology (regarding the social sciences and the broad humanities of narrative recall). Specifically, I seek to further understand these broad areas that might be of interest to my students and the community of scholars in Nigeria, perhaps even the West Africa corridor where we share similar cultural traits in gnosis, myth, ontology, literature and the arts. In essence, this particular query on the future of narrative and the auto/biography will also interphase with biology, in particular, on aspects of digitised intra uterine developments.

I commenced my research seeking to combine textual inquiry with an ethnographic approach on the details of the process of a child's formation from conception through gestation to the stage of birth in terms of what our mothers say about, and 'to' these foetuses. I also seek knowledge on the cultural reaction to this process by both the child, and the mother, in the aftermath of birth, if the pregnancy were captured in an ultrasonographic digital environment. What are the potential implications of this for the future narrative, of, and by the child on her earliest beginnings? Based on these premises I sought to answer such questions as, 'What is the future of the auto/biography, even the African autobiographical novel?' Might this 'recall text' have initiated some kind of 'new humanity' with the capacity to revise, even reverse, but ultimately propel narrative sequence(s) with a qualitative shift of certitude of past(s) beyond our earlier experience?

This research takes off by drawing connections between our settled notions of narrative and the impulse of technologies to aid us in hinting at potential emergent discourse(s). It examines narrative through the oral, written and digital electronic responses to the dynamics of literary and cultural production in the context of probable, possible, and preferable Futures. At this stage, the research feels compelled to revisit

the characterisation of literary values; why, for instance, are we so mute on the literary value of intra uterine ‘conversations’ of the mother-child stimuli-response, for instance? Or, furthermore, why is the lullaby and other such early child feminine aesthetics not of great literary value? Why, other than the preferential gestures of an unquestioned nomenclatural elite and its stag power structure on valuation?

This research is particularly pertinent for the West Africa narrative space because the trend of ageism and engendering in African narratives and epistemic traditions has endured for so long and created a power base within a literary tradition in which griots and men often become the custodians of a communal knowledge system, albeit based on the old rhetorical tradition and the process of socialisation. The context of memory practices, therefore, was not fully dissimilar to memory practices within the field of rhetoric as captured in the myth of Simonides within the Western tradition.

As a work in Futures Studies, this research is designed to explore the intersections of culture, narrative and the auto/biographical within the field of digital humanities, and seeks to realign age and male gender-based theoretical narratives to the reality of the IoT Age and foetal subjectivitis.

## Familiar-Unfamiliar Concepts

Futures Studies, also known as futurology, is the study of probable, possible, and preferable futures including the worldview and myths that underlie each future. In the last fifty or so years, the study of the future has moved from predicting the future to mapping alternate futures to shopping for desired futures, both at external collective levels and inner individual levels (Masini, 1993; Bell 1996, Amara 1981; Sandar 1999; Inayathullah 2000; Saul 2001). In other words, Futures Studies, or Futures as I sometimes use it in context, and the other less known term, Wombiture, are both implicitly and explicitly implicated in other

discourses beyond their literal-technical provenance. Partly because they are also powered by narrative and representation, there is no avoiding the discourse of ideology, power, and hegemony, highlighting the most obvious. Beyond this, Futures have always been an enduring part of the human experience the diversity of its rendering in myth, gnosis, ontology, legend, and even magic.

Pysychodynamics, even though developed by the discipline of Psychology, has been appropriated by Cultural Studies, not so much as a negation of Jungian and Freudian excursions in the realm of the unconscious, but in its application to almost the least imaginable aspects of living and social processes, especially on cultural and aesthetic issues. We seek to use psychodynamics in this respect to examine Wombiture, in its evolving form as an aspect of Futures, the summary of which can be couched in the potential tensions that are bound to emerge from the interaction of this heightened mode of awareness of the self in relation to the role of the technologies that have supported increased access to evidence and familiarity with antenatal and postnatal existence. The thrust is also to locate this awareness within earlier forms of such ruptures by historicizing the stream of moments straddling the transition from orality to writing, and the different phases of writing that have led to the electronic age, and its subsequent multimedia phase now birthing wombiture in its 'full' hypertextual manifestation.

### What Future(s) Do We Study?

Futures Studies is undergirded by factors of time and change. Although there are multiple entry points to the study of the future, many scholars align on the idea that the study of the future has to do with understanding the temporal conditions that influence the shifts that happen in the world, and mapping the ways in which these can be steered in more positive directions (Inayatullah, 2008 Bussey 2014, Head 2012). These temporalities are often framed by social structures, power, human agency, etc. (Head 2012).

Wendell Bell's two volume *Foundations of Futures Studies*, read as one of the important introductory texts to the field, explores various thematic and methodological concerns of the field including questions of history, meaning and critical realism. Using critical realism, Bell's work explores the liminal space between the philosophy of positivism as regards 'truthful knowledge in an objective world' and the disillusioned postmodernist position, which glances cynically at the real possibility for 'truthful knowledge' (Actuarial Futures 1998). Thus, for Bell, studying the future would be an interface between the possibility of knowing the future and the fallibility of knowledge itself. This perspective allows a subjective model for approaching Future Studies. Gidley (2017) confirms this subjectivity in addressing five distinct yet overlappable entry points into the field, namely: "predictive/empirical, critical/ postmodern, cultural/interpretive, participatory/prospective, integral/ holistic" (Ollenburg 2018). While a lot of attention has been given to the technologies enabling the changes that shape the future, Gidley argues that insufficient attention is being given to developing human agency/intelligence, which also plays a tremendous role in understanding and shaping the future.

The preference of scholars like Gidley for the term 'futures' in its plural form is reflective of the necessary multiplicity of the future. Taking together the arguments of Bell and Gidley, Futures Studies may be said to be largely contingent upon and subjective to space and time, acquiring legibility within the different contexts in which it is being understood.

In a critical futures approach – the poststructural turn – the external world is informed by the reality of the external. While many embrace Futures Studies so as to reduce risk, to avoid negative futures, particularly the worst case, others actively move to creating desired futures (Masini 1983). This must have been the impulse that made premodern attempts to understand the future focus on astrology. By and large, the purpose

of astrology was to help individuals avoid dangerous circumstances by providing an early warning system. The future was not contested. In modern Future Studies, questioning and divergent views are not only incorporated, they are essential to robustness and resilience. Recent Future Studies includes contesting the views of the future as well as ways of knowing it. The unconscious assumption is that through better forecasting, the world, the future, can be more effectively controlled, thus increasing profits and hegemony.

## Futures Studies, Psychodynamics, and the Production of the Narrative Text

Texts have over time been unique tools to express and preserve language. Texts also continually evolve through time and space, and technology has played a critical role in the multiple configurations of texts that have emerged over centuries across various cultures. McLuhan (1964, 1967) describes technology, not as something other and an alternative to the human subject, but as an extension of human consciousness. As Harvey (2006) notes, McLuhan's famously cited 'the medium is the message' reflects the intricate link between the forms in which human beings do language and what they do with language per time. Thus the consciousness of an age informs its technology which in turn informs consciousness. The perpetually overlapping gestures between technology and consciousness ultimately produce narrative texts.

To attempt to project a future for the narrative text, specifically in relation to biographical and autobiographical texts, would thus be to ask: how do the changing factors of sociality and being (and their resulting technologies) frame narrative content and style? How do they interact with memory and how would new experiences of memory transform the ways in which stories are told?

## Psychodynamics and Individuation

The social pressure to be a unique individual is one of the key markers of modernity. In traditional societies, identity is determined by social position and family background. In the modern process of individuation, the autonomous actions of human beings are crucial to the maintenance of a coherent identity. These choices are rooted in the decisions of individuals who maintain their identities by appropriating their actions and carrying them into the future. Since past decisions determine individuality in the present, the concept of life history takes on a central role (Kergegard, 1987; 216). These histories are preserved in memories. As a result, remembrance becomes “an essential element of the final historical being of man” (Godamer 2004; 14). Memory is neither history nor is it defined by the chronology of linear time. Memory comes “from within”. It is an affective connection “a felt knowledge of recent events”.



**Ultrasound and Wombiture: Making the Most of Both**  
Ultrasounds have become highly anticipated rituals of pregnancy, opportunities to peek at your baby and even bring home a “photo”

of her tiny face, hands, and feet. Bobro advises women to make the experience personal by taking a moment to merge the images you saw on a screen with the intimate, personal picture you have of your baby. “Close your eyes and imagine who you think the baby is,” says Bobro. “Have an inner image as well” as the ultrasound photo.

Source: image: [https://d1lhri34tovdcj.cloudfront.net/prod/mom365/optimized-images/istock-843985644%20\(1\).jpg](https://d1lhri34tovdcj.cloudfront.net/prod/mom365/optimized-images/istock-843985644%20(1).jpg)

## Narrative forms: Fiction, Realism, the Imaginary, the Fictive Moment

The Future of narrative in utero promises to be quite engaging in almost all the ramifications of creative renderings, and particularly in relation to time-spatial representation, tense and aspect of representation, genre clarification, and intra and inter-modality, to mention a few. I have analysed a few works in this tone as samples of what we might be expecting soon at a much more complex level.

## Womb of the ‘cyclical’ Man

Perhaps more than any other writer of his age, Wole Soyinka has exceptionally demonstrated an early interest in, and an understanding of an intricate world, one of which the ‘cyclical’ archetype constitutes the nature of being. Soyinka captured this as a world— sometimes mutually inhabited, sometimes in sequence— of the dead, the living and the unborn. Besides being the structure upon which *Forest of a Thousand Daemons* is built, this motif is equally well captured in his essay: “The Fourth Stage” (1976:141-142), *besi*.

There, illusively, hovers the key to the human paradox, to man’s experience of being and non-being, his dubiousness as essence and matter; intimations of transience and eternity, and the harrowing drives between uniqueness and Oneness.

Our course to the heart of the Yoruba Mysteries leads by its own ironic truths through the light of Nietzsche and the Phrygian deity; but there are the inevitable, key departures. 'Blessed Greeks!' sings our mad votary in his recessional rapture, 'how great must be your Dionysos, if the Delic god thinks such enchantments necessary to cure you of your Dithyrambic madness.' Such is Apollo's resemblance to the serene art of Obatala the pure unsullied one, to the 'essence' idiom of his rituals, that it is tempting to place him at the end of a creative axis with Ogun, in a parallel evolutionary relationship to Nietzsche's Dionysos- Apollo brotherhood. But Obatala the sculptural god is not the artist of Apollonian illusion but of inner essence. The idealist bronze and terra-cotta of Ife which may tempt the comparison implicit in 'Apollonian' died at some now forgotten period, evidence only of the universal surface culture of courts and never again resurrected. It is alien to the Obatala spirit of Yoruba 'essential' art. Obatala finds expression, not in Nietzsche's Apollonian 'mirror' of enchantment' but as a statement of world resolution.

If The Fourth Stage is a critical text, below we can still find the dialogue between Mr. Pilkings, Iyaloja, and the bride instructive in Death and the King's Horseman in the same ritual of coming, staying and living, indeed a ritual of life's renewal.

Iyaloja: Why do you strain yourself? Why do you labour at tasks for which no one, not even the man lying there, would give you thanks? He is gone at last into the passage but oh, how late it all is. His son will feast on the meat and throw him bones. The passage is clogged with droppings from the King's stallion; he will arrive all stained in dung.

Pilkings: (in a tired voice) Was this what you wanted?

Iyaloja: No child, it is what you brought to be, you who play with strangers' lives, who even usurp the vestments of our dead, yet believe that the stain of death will not cling to you. The gods demanded only the old expired plantain but you cut down the sap-laden shoot to feed your pride. There is your board, filled to overflowing. Feast on it. (She screams at him suddenly, seeing that Pilkings is about to close Elesin's staring eyes.) Let him alone! However sunk he was in debt he is no pauper's carrion abandoned on the road. Since when have strangers donned clothes of indigo before the bereaved cries out his loss?

(She turns to the Bride who has remained motionless throughout.) Iyaloja: Child.

(The girl takes up a little earth, walks calmly into the cell and closes Elesin's eyes.

She then pours some earth over each eye-lid and comes out again.)

Iyaloja: Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn.

(She goes off, accompanied by the Bride. The dirge rises in volume and the women continue their sway. Lights fade to a black-out.) (2003:62-63.)

## WHAT IS THE FUTURE SAYING?

### Literature and Narrative Language

There may be an emergence of a new genre or sub-genre of literature. A new genre of literature may take form and we may witness a new narrative language, a meta-narrative of sorts.

We may witness the invention of a new narrative form that dictates how

biography and autobiography are written, the point from which literary narrative begins and the language deployed in rendering these pre-birth narratives.

### Realism, Supernaturalism and Naturalism

'Grotesque realism' also flows from this reality, such that the 'mental bodily' is presented not in private, egotistic form, but a second order semiotic reference injected with universal reference. This sometimes informs the high burlesque, and exaggerated form of representation, not of the individual but human corporate being in a flux. This invariably throws forth such images as fertility, growth etc. as preserved in many traditional and renaissance literature.

'Billingsgate abuses' — passion from excessive praise to excessive invective' as in pg. 49. This form handling has accommodation in official culture which is stereotypically oriented only to an immovable and unchanging hierarchy of a parallel structure. In the unofficial culture, the praise comingles with ironic advertisement. They are words excavated from the crowd.

### Alien Perspective

In the sense of Ajantala, a child with the knowledge of pre-birth existence, through civil disobedience, may create social tension, may shake 'social order'. An order of social deviants may be on the rise. How will the record of certain cultural and religious prenatal rites influence the personality and psyche of children?

### New Field of Study

We may witness the rise of a discipline or sub-discipline whose field of study is centred on personality formation of the foetus - "Foetus Behavioural Specialist."

## Sequential Gap

How maternal death at birth and the case of a damaged chip/belt affect the progression of prebirth activity record; how will this gap affect remembrance and memory?

## Theory of Evolution

The evolution of “hyper-intelligent” humans who have a record of activities of their foetal sensory perceptions, who can link their sentiments, understanding, character, vices and virtues and other temperaments to their pre-birth activities.

## Gender and Sexualities Studies

Settled issues are most likely going to be stirred awake, unsettled ones gaining and losing traction, depending on what side of the debate, school of thought, ideological and power equation of the literal discursive site.

## Theology Studies

It is almost obvious that this area of scholarship would harvest some good number of questions, not just from the community but also from their trainees and students.

## Clerics

Perhaps more than any group of people, Clerics have made more pronouncements on such sensitive issues as morality, sexual orientation, marriage, inheritance rights, and the like; this may just be the moment they need to step out and repeat what have sometimes been said age-old.

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## Comments and interventions

Professor Olorunyomi's presentation could best be described as ambitious as it foregrounds a dimension that had remained silenced and feminist interest in the subject. Essentialists would problematise attempts to hypothesize the womb, and regardless of Olorunyomi's theoretical view, considerations of the womb as location for human incubation, would raise concerns from some feminists due to the multi-dimensional nature of feminism. If the infamous phrase "female to male as nature is to culture" is put into consideration, it could be argued that nature becomes culture when worked on and men are culture and women remain as nature due to biological makeup. Wombiture is therefore perceived as an open-ended conversation that scholars would continue to examine as it evolves with time.

A perspective on the potential value of wombiture includes its description as a primordial phenomenon challenged by the Global South waiting for theorisations from the Global North. By this, Wombiture is perceived as an indigenous theory to the rest of the world awaiting instantiated responses when shared by the proponent at international meetings. A bigger picture includes wombiture as a theory that facilitates new forms of understandings of human personalities. The use of nanotechnology to facilitate the possibility of correcting genetic errors in fetus before birth pushed for re-imaginings beyond the instance of the fetus to considerations of the start of a human being as either from birth or from conception. Tracing an individual back to originating as the sperm that fertilised the egg is an opportunity to be advantaged. Olorunyomi's reference to John the Baptist and Jesus was considered to align with

some mothers' narratives of lack of surprise at how ambitious a child matures to be based on recollections of things the child was up to while in the womb. These narratives are ignored due to eurocentrism; with the question "can science be challenged?"

Connecting Wombiture with ecofeminism, an argument that Africa is the oldest inhabited and creative agency on the planet earth raised curiosity of intersections with existing theoretical frameworks and approaches to literary criticism from which Wombiture could be taken further into cultural, social and political approaches on digital humanities and development. The admiration from eco-feminist epistemic foundation emphasises the womb as a biological, cultural and environmental space which links femininity and fertility where nurturing by the mother exemplified the birth and introduction of the child to culture and environment. The argument here is that Wombiture could be a powerful literary approach towards the localisation a universal mode of reasoning within the feminist space.

Olorunyomi's identification of the womb as a contradiction, a mankind prima board, a natal or cultural production informed criticism of his description of the womb from masculinised point of view. The womb should be discussed as woman's humankind prima board, as language is important in perspectives. It is agreeable that life can only be considered after the womb had completed its duties. Olorunyomi's postulation of relation of culture and literature to the womb was suggestive of the womb as the primary author of narrative at a materialist philosophical level, suggesting relationship between culture and the woman's potential for creating new futures, methodological and epistemologies. There is also the curiosity about nature narratives, where the birth of the daughter erases the figure/status of the mother and emphasizes the daughter. The womb as a container of the future, thus present possibility(ies) as culture is traceable to an etiology of care, cultivation, and worship.

Could it then be that the womb is symbolic of nature as feminine and culture as masculine? Through recall text that looked backwards and

digital wombs, which facilitated the reading of fetus projects molding meanings and remodeling of meanings; in the consideration of the womb across eras and citations of several scholars by Olorunyomi, it is striking to read the Greek mythology of Zeus who swallowed his pregnant wife and proceeded to deliver a son through the head, an imagination which was informative of the idea of rebirth when masculinised. The idea of swallowing in feminist psychoanalysis was very much discussed by French feminist philosophers in the talk about swallowing as a process of occasional reclaiming but in the instantiated, swallowing was destructive of the feminine product and rebirth through the head was destructive of the process of birthing. The stories could not unfold without traveling through Olorunyomi's point of view and the journey reveals a rebirth, the outcome of the rebirth and subsequently the circular movement between conception and rebirth.

Olorunyomi's detailed future of writing with the example of, literature, a narrative language, realism, supernaturalism and naturalism, alien perspective, new field of study, sequential gap and the theory of evolution. Questions thus arise on the future of African literature and African stories; was an evolution reminiscent of the theory of evolution expected which would lead to the start of written fetal, sensory narratives of hyper intelligent humans? A perusal of current events was construal of wombs with modern bayonets, disemboweled pregnancies in Congo, Northern Uganda, Somalia and Eritrea. Equally important are narratives on broadcast and print media about wars and how conceptualisation of the future wombs that had been violated would play out in Olorunyomi's narratives. Describing them as products that remained volatile, producing fatherless and motherless narratives that were comparable to autobiographies of child soldiers, Olorunyomi's idea on truth of narratives in autobiographies offers a thin line between fiction and facts.

In admiration of imaginations which reflect dilemma presented in writing, typified in the autobiography Ake, the victim's mother in feminist history who remained the mother of feminist activism in Nigeria

was reduced to an (in)effective character by Soyinka and yet in feminist historical narratives Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti is a prominent fellow. The representation of truth in autobiography as seen in Soyinka's work gives credence to Olorunyomi's discussion of what could be found in and gained from the truth of autobiographies.

Focus on the digital - the 'digital wombs' as fetal subjectivities calls attention to recall text as approach to recover vital data lost in a family archive. The digital womb could be tapped into to recall experiences during prenatal phase and the theoretical womb as site for cultural, social influences and hub of potential knowledge. There were anxieties on the risk of wombiture becoming a tool for big tech encroachments, particularly the early stage of human existence in era where human's most intimate moments are easily identified, monetised and quantified. Conceptualisation of a sacred and very unknown complex space as place to tap into for vital, familiar, archival and prenatal archive with ubiquitous artificial intelligence, educes worry for wombiture becoming tool for normalization of encroachment into intimate end.

Discussants at the seminar revealed personal deduction that child technology appeared as strategy for understanding the Yoruba conception of life as the unborn, the present and the dead. Expressing understanding of the stages of the unborn in Yoruba metaphysical narratives, discussant pondered manner wombiture pointed to the curiosity and acknowledgement of a prenatal existence. Discussants worry that the woman and the womb are recurrent focal subject in attempts to legislate and determine what women do with their body while there were no prevailing conversations about the penis, scrotum sac or life cycle of sperm to human. The philosophical nature of the womb transcends the physical and the participant called for considerations of the womb as a baby irrespective of occupancy.

The current era of politically charged debates about reproductive rights raised questions on how to avoid the use of (wombiture) to legitimize, counter debates about maternal body autonomy, reproductive rights, particularly if the womb is positioned as a space of expectations

considering cultural narrative and social influences. How may subsumption into narratives about prenatal agency that are inherently against maternal agency managed?

Overall, there was the view that Wombiture is inherently metaphysical and narrative-based, and not necessarily making a claim about suppressing maternal autonomy. Also, Wombiture could easily be used for anti-choice rhetoric. In the presentation of Wombiture, due to advancement of science and technology, there were various forms of artificial means of reproduction which queries the place of exogenesis in Olorunyomi's discourse as the human womb cannot just be assumed to be human. Participants note that while the womb of a woman will always be a womb, the problem of identity - what identifies the person? consciousness? or the physical being of the person remains. At what point could memory, the ability to recall things which start at a particular age be personalised?

### Response from Olorunyomi

The most dangerous occurrence possible has been raised in respect of the danger of mobilizing the concerns of reproductive rights especially at human elements who might want to criminalize the womb, the woman and deny her agency to her body. Zones of potential misunderstandings abound, but the concept of the womb in "wombiture" is a metaphor. It is biological and requires establishment of origins and basis, with reference to explanation of cultural stem cells requiring definition of stem cells. The mention of evolutionism in oral literature studies and some of the social sciences is accompanied by tracing of its origins to Charles Darwin. Notably, theorization on the womb is in response to the several autonomous paradigm shifts that requested for better humanity, readied to tell the truth about size, knowledge and philosophy. Wombiture ought to be advanced for humanity sake and knowledge, with the awareness of navigations away from families conversation based on ever present limitations as a man. Women would forgive

genuine errors accompanied by honest confessions but the subject could not be left; it had to be learnt as it was not embodied within all.

Attention needs to be called to foundations as originated in Yoruba philosophical background that do not allow for divides of positive or negative in the sense that the concept of wombiture metaphorically provides that a glass of water is useful to drink without need for extra gulp in a drowning situation. The focus is not about water being good or bad, or the positive or negative in terms of location for positive and location for negative, rather in being situated in the same body. By implication, wombiture has the potential to be used for anything just as theory in itself could be manipulated to achieve a diversity of purposes.

Continuity and examination of future use of the concept of wombiture should be encouraged in terms of opportunistic sperms, as the extent and the knowledge to be yielded as far as the concept is concerned is not known and should not inspire fear for the future. Wombiture is not necessarily great because of self-constitution of oneself into one or into the complexity of some kind of microeconomics of research, for instance an economy. It is not the amount of mathematics done but the overall assumption of what society decides to use the resource for, as well as how it wants it distributed, how much it wants it to go for women, children, society, education and the rest of it or not. To this end, wombiture could mean different things to different people, depending on contexts. What is most important is to look into foundational explanations to unlock further research possibilities.

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