

# Investing in the Culture Industry to Enhance Economic Growth in West Africa

*Henry Kam Kab*

University of Buea

## **Abstract**

This essay examines the role culture can play in effectively advancing economic growth in West Africa through the agency of the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) and the different national governments. Although a much contested terminology, culture remains an untapped area for economic growth partly due to the absence of commitment on the part of the leadership of West African countries and partly to their ignorance of the central role culture plays in innovation, technology, development and growth of regional and national economies. However if well harnessed, the rich cultural repertoire of this region of Africa can provide an impetus for economic expansion, employment and stability more than ever before in a region known more for its numerous conflicts in the past twenty years or so than for its economic growth.

## **1. Introduction**

Available records and recent developments in the economic sector across the world practically attest to the fact that some countries such as China and Japan in Asia have attained economic and technological development by going back to the roots of their indigenous knowledge systems (Nigeria, [www.nigeriannews24.com/.../use-culture-to-create-economic-development](http://www.nigeriannews24.com/.../use-culture-to-create-economic-development)). Such indigenous knowledge systems are rooted in the culture of the Japanese and Chinese and not foreign cultures. In spite of this revelation, modern neoclassical economics tends to downplay the importance of culture in the development of different countries and regions of the world. Some economists assume that human beings are rational utility-maximising individuals, and such maximising behaviour is largely invariant across different human societies but where the rational ability is higher, development follows. Besides, the standard economic growth model pioneered by

Robert Solow examines the inputs of capital and labour and the more recent so-called 'endogenous' growth models and shows how they lay emphasis on the role of technology in economic growth. From this perspective, culture constitutes a kind of residual factor that is important and that people can appeal to when every other explanations which are rooted essentially in economic terms fail (Culture and Economic Development: 3130-3131).

The way a people behave or react to work can be understood from their culture of work. For instance, in some parts of Latin America, there is a feeling of disdain for labour and commerce, sumptuous patterns of consumption, individualistic behaviour and anti-progress attitudes (Leon, <http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/Ias/studies/pdfs/leon.pdf>). Such a culture of hatred for work in favour of sumptuous consumption produces an economy that is not only weak but also is anti-progressive. Investors in such economies need to understand the people's culture of work so that they can either refuse to invest there or take measures that can motivate them towards liking work. If they are not able to change this retrogressive culture, they will quit rather than invest in a non- progressive society. Any investor who has an inadequate knowledge of a people's attitude towards work which is often rooted in their culture of upbringing will compromise growth and expansion in business.

The Liberian National Campaign for Cultural Identity (NACCI) was quick to observe that the absence of cultural ties in Liberia resulted in the division of the people as they were not able to agree on issues of national interest. This had hindered national growth and development in Liberia before the NACCI recognised this weakness and took steps to address it so that Liberians could come together to reconstruct their society (Liberia 2010). Similarly, the National Commission on Culture (NCC) of Ghana in 2008 used different channels to emphasise the need for corporate organisations in Ghana and Africa to incorporate cultural values into corporate management activities for better results. According to the NCC this would assess the degree to which cultural values impinge on corporate performance for the development of Ghana in particular and Africa in general (Osabutey 2008). In effect, the NCC recognised the importance of culture in increasing the productivity of corporate organisations not only in Ghana but also other parts of the African continent.

During a World Conference on Cultural Policies held in Mexico in 1982 The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) upheld the importance of culture in economic growth. The organisation also discussed the importance of human resources development, and

the spiritual and cultural needs of people as far as material needs are concerned. The UN specialised organ particularly observed that a stimulation of creativity in the arts was a way towards the attainment of the material needs of a people who have a collective destiny (Karanko 1992: 58-9). The Japanese had many decades earlier observed that human and material development was very useful in the harmonious coexistence of man and nature or his environment. This shows that the material development of society is possible through the establishment of an effective mechanism that brings together a person and his/her environment which can be better appreciated through a sound knowledge of a people's culture. It is on this philosophy that the Japanese rely to initiate and sustain economic growth which has made the country to be noted for its economic growth and expansion.

Culture is an important component of different peoples of the world and shapes their outlook on life. Although the term culture itself is problematic, we shall in this essay discuss culture as the totality of the lived experiences of a people which include their philosophy or rationale of the organisation of society, production and outlook on life. In fact, culture should be considered as the sum total of all the experiences of the life of different people and ethnic groups. Different people and scholars of culture have discussed the challenges of culture and the richness in values associated with culture and their relationship with development and growth for some countries when appropriately used. In some cases, culture has been used to create serious conflict between people and groups and for this reason the growth of some societies has been compromised and not promoted.

West Africa is one of those regions of Africa with diverse cultures between and within countries. The different people of this region speak hundreds of different languages, practice various religions, and have many histories and traditions but there is a history of interrelationships between these people, their religions and cultures from one place to another (<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m17/activity3.php>). The more different human beings of different cultures and religions come into contact with one another, the more the possibility of an exchange of values of some kind. All these put together may always serve the needs of the people of West Africa better. The long term result of such contact may eventually stimulate economic growth in the region.

Nigeria, for example, is socially and culturally one of the most diversified African countries. Its cultural policy aims at understanding the life of the people, their cultural values, needs and expectations. It also focuses on building up a national cultural identity and parallel affirmation of cultural identities of different

ethnic groups. In addition, Nigeria's cultural policy is intended to develop the cultural infrastructure and to introduce new technologies in cultural activities as well as establish links between culture and education and between education and the different cultural industries, particularly the mass media (Cultural Policy in Nigeria).

This cultural diversity notwithstanding, since 1975, the countries of West Africa came together to found the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) with the aim of promoting economic integration and political cooperation. Since then the fifteen member states have tried to make integration a reality through greater mobility, communication, trade and growth for all member states. In spite of this laudable effort, the region has been known and projected to be politically and militarily unstable in the African continent. Such political and military instability have been frustrating to the mission of ECOWAS in mobilising human and natural resources to ensure stability and growth for all member countries of this organisation. These challenges notwithstanding, ECOWAS has since its establishment in 1975 made more positive strides in some areas of economic and cultural integration than many other regional organisations in Africa such as the Central African Customs and Economic Union (CEMAC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

## 2. Defining Culture

The definition of culture has remained problematic in modern scholarship because of the scope of the issues involved (Gilbert and Reynolds 2004: 306). This problem notwithstanding we intend to define culture in this study to include almost everything about human existence and experience over time. Within the behavioural sciences, culture is defined in terms of a full range of learned human behaviour patterns ([http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture\\_1.htm](http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm)). The English scholar Edward B. Taylor in the 19th century defined culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man [woman] as a member of society" ([http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture\\_1.htm](http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm)). Taylor's definition of culture takes into consideration the experiences and things humankind has produced over time in the process of growing up. Again, the definition emphasises key characteristics of culture such as a people's customs, their works of art, system of organising society that is rational and functional, the values they uphold in life and the reasons for this but above all the way of one's behaviour in society. One common thing to note about the two definitions is that they are clear on the nature of organising society as a key

element of cultural identity and development of any given group of people. The way societies are organised and function is very likely to influence their activities. Such activities include but are not limited to the attitude to work, leisure and the resulting consequences.

Culture is also defined as the collective manifestations of who and what people are, including religious beliefs, political systems, customs, values, intellectual acumen and creative endeavours ([http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture\\_1.htm](http://anthro.palomar.edu/culture/culture_1.htm)). In this definition of culture, the intellectual acumen and creative endeavours of people are considered crucial to an understanding of their culture and associated values. Any culture that lacks ingredients such as creativity and innovation tapped from the intellectual acumen of the people concerned is a culture that is most likely to be vulnerable to decline and eventual extinction. The creative ingenuity of a people has the potential to enrich their culture and by extension its ability to enhance individual growth as well as that of the economy and other associated economies. In fact, experience has shown that a people's culture builds up an individual's creative potentials. Such potentials are crucial to stimulate the production of goods and services. Production can either be sustained or increased depending on a number of factors which include the ability of the people to be innovative and skilful in managing people and resources efficiently. Such values are found in cultures which should be identified and utilised in West Africa to enhance growth and integration.

There are other definitions of culture which take into consideration "every aspect of life: know-how, technical knowledge, customs of food and dress, religion, mentality, values, language, symbols, socio-political and economic behaviour, indigenous methods of taking decisions and exercising power, methods of production and economic relations and so on" (Karanko, 59). Such a comprehensive definition of culture points to one main conclusion: every human endeavour be it economic, social or political is influenced by culture in one way or the other. This is because culture has a visible and invisible influence in almost every human endeavour. It is dynamic and incorporates positive aspects of life because culture in itself is dynamic and contributes to progress of individuals or communities.

The word "culture" has also been defined to include political systems, religious beliefs, history, customs, arts, sciences and education. In this sense, culture defines the collective manifestations of who really people are, what they want to be and also include issues like intellectual acumen and creative endeavours ([http://cultural\\_economics.blogspot.com/2009/09/what-is-cultural-](http://cultural_economics.blogspot.com/2009/09/what-is-cultural-)

economics.html,) which have been discussed earlier. Frey (2009: 20) defines culture simply as an attitude or way of behaving. Meanwhile in cultural anthropology, culture is associated with a common or shared values and practice by any group. It has also been somewhat narrowly defined as "certain activities ... and the products ... which have to do with the intellectual moral and artistic aspects of human life such as works of the visual, performing and literary arts (Throsby 2001:4)."

In spite of the diversity and multiple meanings of culture, there are certain common features which can be identified with what culture is either within ethnic groups or a combination of ethnic groups usually within a country like those of West Africa. These varied definitions either explicitly or implicitly recognise that while no single thing explains the full meaning of culture, a combination of them can do so. These definitions recognise that culture is about the learned behaviour of a people. This is usually based on the knowledge system of the people, their creative abilities, customs and political and economic relations. From this premise, one can argue and not wrongly that economic growth goes hand in glove with the culture of the environment in which this growth takes place. There is need to understand the enabling cultural environment and the appropriate responses of a people of a given environment to probably succeed in a business venture which has the intention of growing and expanding in an economy or different economies. Failure to understand or negligence to exploit the creative ability of a people for the good of the larger society can only lead to more failures.

One must therefore not ignore the cultural environment that will enable him/her to carry out the right prospection and investment which will lead to growth, expansion and integration. Economic growth and creativity are 'birds of the same feathers.' The absence of creativity and innovation and opportunities may work against the determination of a people to make progress a motto. Besides, the knowledge system of a people is the very basis on which society need to lean to develop an autonomous economic system relevant to the immediate socio-cultural and economic needs of that people. Many a times, the value-based system of a people is completely shelved aside for foreign values that help to confuse, contradict and negatively affect economic growth. The multiplier effect leads to insufficiency, and instability affecting people across different socio-political and natural boundaries. The long term ripple effects are telling on families and countries. Karanko (1992: 58) observes that culture is an inescapable reliable determinant of a people's spiritual, material, intellectual, civil and

emotional features and can impact on their very direction of development and civilisation. He also adds that a society without cultural coherence is easily penetrated and disrupted. Such penetration and disruption could be of economic value but detrimental to real growth and integration. Many West African countries are suffocating economically because their economies were easily penetrated, disrupted and destroyed. Culture adverse economic policies have the potential to destroy or frustrate the economic advancement of a people and region.

### 3. ECOWAS and the Promotion of Culture

ECOWAS recognises the importance of culture for the unity of West African peoples and countries. In Articles 29 and 31 paragraphs 1 and 2 of Protocol A/SPI/12/01 on Democracy and Good Governance Supplementary to the Protocol Relating to the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security, it is stated that this regional organisation recognises that culture is essential for peace, stability and development of each member state. The Protocol recognises that each of the culture of every group of the Member State shall be respected and developed and that the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS shall take necessary measures to organise periodic inter-state cultural events such as festivals of arts and culture, symposia and various cultural events on literature, music, arts and sports.

Through events such as the ECOWAS cup in football, and Miss ECOWAS beauty pageant, ECOWAS countries organise a broad array of cultural and sports activities ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic\\_Community\\_of\\_West\\_African](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_Community_of_West_African)). Besides, within the Department of Education, Culture, Science and Technology of ECOWAS culture is valorised by this regional body. The cultural programme of this department of education, culture, science and technology which was approved by the Council of Ministers of ECOWAS is designed to strengthen and develop exchanges, to promote creativity, cultural tourism development, and free movement of cultural products as well as to enable African artists to have greater access to the international art market. It is also designed to ensure that culture is taken into account in the regional integration process for development and to foster a sense of belonging. The broader aim of the cultural programme is to support and encourage creativity within the ECOWAS space, promote cultural exchange and strengthen cooperation with film makers ([www.comm.ecowas.int/dept/stand.php?id=e\\_e1\\_brief&lang=en](http://www.comm.ecowas.int/dept/stand.php?id=e_e1_brief&lang=en); A/DEC. 4/11/96 ECOWAS Cultural Programme). Still within the context of promoting culture, the Social and Cultural Affairs Commission of ECOWAS was established

as one of the six specialised commissions. The other specialised commissions include Trade, Customs, Immigration, Monetary and Payments, Industry, Agriculture and Natural Resources, Transport, Communications and Energy, Administration and Finance and Information (Economic Community of West African States, [www.referenceforbusiness.com](http://www.referenceforbusiness.com)).

#### **4. Discussion: Shortcomings of ECOWAS Culture Policy**

A close look at the culture policy of ECOWAS and its implementation shows that it is peripheral to the core mission of this regional body. From birth ECOWAS focused on the promotion of trade, cooperation and self-reliance in West Africa. Even after the revision of the ECOWAS Treaty in 1993, this regional body for West Africa re-emphasised the need to spur economic integration and political cooperation and culture was simply shelved from the core concern of ECOWAS ([www.referenceforbusiness.com/encyclopedia/Dev-Eco/Economic-Community-of-West-African-States-ECOWAS.html](http://www.referenceforbusiness.com/encyclopedia/Dev-Eco/Economic-Community-of-West-African-States-ECOWAS.html)). The recognition but near neglect of culture as an important element in the cultural integration of a multicultural ECOWAS has contributed to an unstable economic environment for all ECOWAS member countries, although some of them are more stable than others.

Besides, it is not enough for participants to recognise and respect the culture of every group of the member states of ECOWAS if they fail to tap from these cultural specificities to engineer growth in cultural and related industries in West Africa. Some of the greatest cultural challenges are from within different member countries of ECOWAS like Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire and not necessarily between countries and foreign-imposed linguistic differences of the English, French and Portuguese. The inability of the governments to handle this diversity in cultures for good has made it difficult for umbrella organisations like ECOWAS to use culture as a tool to promote economic growth in West Africa.

Cultural activities of ECOWAS such as the organisation of the beauty pageant and the football cup have very little potential for meaningful economic growth that can lead to the employment of thousands of people who are jobless. These two activities indeed are not good indicators of growth for the region. The one thing that these might have done is foster the ability of the people to integrate easily but such integration is not synonymous with growth which has the potential to keep citizens of the region from moving because they will have the opportunity right at home or within the region to nurture their creative potentials. Even cultural exchanges between member states which have been



encouraged by ECOWAS seem not to have produced the desired results several decades after the formation of the organisation. These have not been targeted and so no huge investment has been made in this sector with the conscious aim of boosting the cultural industry so that it could promote employment and growth in industry in West Africa.

Although cultural tourism, free movement of cultural products and creativity have been recognised and encouraged by ECOWAS in the cultural programmes of the Department of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, except in a few countries, much of this has remained wishful thinking. Cultural economics remains an untapped reservoir for economic growth in West Africa. This was publicly noted by experts in Dakar Senegal in 2006. During the Dakar conference these experts brainstormed on the challenges of cultural industries. While they recognised that music, cinema, audiovisual and book sectors were experiencing a certain dynamism, they were confronted with obstacles and difficulties such as piracy, customs and fiscal system problems and the legal environment which was not too favourable for the development of cultural industries as well as high production costs ([www.diversite-culturelle.aq.ca/index.php?id=112&L=1&tx](http://www.diversite-culturelle.aq.ca/index.php?id=112&L=1&tx)).

## **5. Towards a Culture that Enhances Economic Growth**

Culture has been recognised as an important vector of development by ECOWAS and some West African countries but has not been exploited sufficiently for the benefit of member states to make this a reality. While a few countries like Nigeria and Ghana have recognised its importance and tapped from it to develop a cultural industry that has promoted economic growth through various forms of investment and advertisement, most of them have not done so because so many politicians generally regard culture only in the divisive and negative sense. Cultural values and the cultural industry must indeed be consciously pursued by West African countries because culture plays a role in how the production of goods and services are organised, how value is placed on labour and opportunity, how purchase and investment decisions are made and how the resources of the earth are utilised. This is because attitudes about education, individual rights, accumulation of wealth and the importance of private property drive the adoption of economic systems and political institutions (Cultural Economics. <http://culturaleconomics.blogspot.com/2009/09/what-is-cultural-economics.html>).

Since culture shapes the body and influences the skills people acquire (Vander Niet 2010: xi), there is need to recognise its importance vis-à-vis the productive industry if growth is to be maximised in West Africa. Besides, arts and culture-related industries also known as the creative industries provide direct economic benefits to states and communities. They create jobs, attract investments, generate tax revenues and stimulate local economies through tourism and consumer purchases (<http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0901ARTSANDECONOMY.PDF>). While a few countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Burkina Faso and Nigeria have exploited this possibility to some extent, most of them have not realised that the creative or cultural industries are a dependable source of economic growth through culture tourism and other forms of wealth creation and employment. Through arts and culture there is a lot that can be done to complement community development and enrich local amenities that will attract young professionals to an area that will provide them with the opportunity to contribute to growth in a visible and practical way. The cultivator of the arts and culture can create new jobs and also foster an environment and develop amenities that could attract talented young workers. It has been proven in countries like Kenya that tourism built around the arts and culture can contribute to state and local economic growth by providing a diversified and sustainable means for creating jobs and attracting revenue thereby and urging investors to come in and invest their money.

While an effort is being made to promote music, visual arts, literature and film through theoretical and practical ways in some countries of the West African sub-region, a lot still has to be done to popularise these activities in such a way that people will see in them a way of propelling ECOWAS member countries positively forward. These activities play a crucial role in the state's economy and the tourist industry as has been highlighted in the preceding paragraphs. These creative activities which are culture bound have been increasingly contributing to the contemporary workforce, making substantial contributions to industries' products and services, and infusing culture into community development (<http://www.nga.org/Files/pdf/0901ARTSANDECONOMY.PDF>). The craft industry in particular encourages individual creativity, skill, and talent and has the potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property. Any attempts made to bring about economic growth without reflection on how the communities can be brought into the mainstream ends up not achieving the required results. The cultural sector has shown clearly that through it a holistic type of development from the base to the top can be guaranteed for many more years to come.

Since it is culture that determines people's material features and the very direction and type of development and civilisation (Karanko 1992: 58) it will be important to recognise this and invest in and understand the cultural values of the people in order to engage in those economic activities that can be supported by the people. In this way there will be a certainty of economic growth because this economic activity has been established on the basis of cultural values that are development-oriented. Besides, if West African countries want to make long range economic forecasts, they must understand how culture and cultural change will shape future economic choice (Cultural Economics, <http://culturaleconomics.blogspot.com/2009/09/what-is-cultural-economics.html>). This is necessary because cultural conflict is a barrier to exploration and production.

Other West African countries may borrow from the experience of Nigeria because her advertising strategies both use western and traditional African cultural values in their pursuit of wealth and economic growth. This, however, has its own problems in the sense that the western values are not fully appreciated by everyone although some people have no problem with it. It would perhaps be more meaningful and more productive if traditional values are put in place in the advertising industry as many different people will be attracted by it and such a policy can therefore ultimately lead to greater growth and diversification of the economy.

The way to economic growth in West Africa is to avoid the adoption of technology without a profound understanding of its cultural implications. Where it is possible, technology should be indigenous and consistent with cultural norms. Scientists and innovators must fully understand culture, society, politics and history, and develop a holistic way of looking at, assessing, evaluating and implementing new technology (Culture, Technology Adoption, and Economic Development [husky1.stmarys.ca/~hmillar/techcul.htm](http://husky1.stmarys.ca/~hmillar/techcul.htm)). Linked to the need to understand the cultural environment, western-oriented medical practitioners in West Africa need to learn and know the taste of their clients' community, borrow certain aspects of such culture (Ogungbile 1997: 109) if they must work well and succeed in initiating economic growth through a dependable social policy.

There is also the problem of the culture of impunity and non-preservation of the historic sites among the people of West Africa like their counterparts elsewhere in the continent. This is one of the areas of culture that if fully tackled can lead to growth in output and employment for the citizens of West African countries. Experience has shown that the preservation of the historic built

environment can be a critical vehicle to promote rather than hamper economic growth (Rypkema 1999). West African culture ministries and related services should pursue a policy of preserving this historic built environment vigorously as an important source of economic growth and take advantage of the employment opportunities this will provide. Agbontaen-Eghafona and Okpoko (2004) have intimated that using traditional preservative methods in museums are good because of their availability, effectiveness and reliability. Considering the importance of museums in the history of each community and the lessons that can be learnt for future development, there is need to invest in this sector more meaningfully to encourage the development of the raw material sector and the employment opportunities this would engender.

Culture has been identified as an important sector for economic growth and the cultural sector is an important employment generator. Some countries like Brazil and Argentina in South America have used this sector to provide employment and generate growth. In Brazil, the cultural sector contributes 6.7 % and in Argentina 4.1 % to Gross National Product. For the United States of America the percentage is 7.75 % (Culture as an Engine for Economic Growth, Employment and Development, <http://www.oas.org/udse/english/documentos/infl1.doc>). These are great percentages that have led to economic growth. The simple fact is that the culture industry has specifically contributed to the economy, employment and material welfare of a people. One of the few problems that need to be addressed is piracy of cultural products which have not benefitted the producers of this product as much. This is the case with the Nigerian film and book industries where books and films have been pirated with impunity by people who are always ready to reap where they did not plant.

Countries of West Africa should also take advantage of the developing "evening economy" where shops remain opened for long hours and other forms of mixes of economic activities such as cafes, restaurants, arts venues and gyms. These evening activities are part of the culture of many people of West African countries and they help to diversify the town centre economy and provide many other opportunities for their people. Evidence shows that the evening economy is particularly attractive to new economy workers and accommodates the daily lives of busy adults and families (Cultural Economic Development: A Strategy to Leverage Michigan's Creative Talent and Cultural Assets to Spur Economic Growth and Build Community Prosperity, 2005: 10-11).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has tried to show how as complex and problematic as the definition of culture might be, it is an important source of economic growth in West Africa which unfortunately has not been fully exploited in spite of the enormous human resources available. While a few developing countries have tried to make capital out of culture like Brazil, Argentina, the US and Japan knew and made use of cultural activities to enhance the culture industry for greater output. Unfortunately, many countries fear even the mention of the word "culture" and are especially wary of kleptocratic leaders who are always pretending to give the impression that they have created a sense of national unity which remains largely theoretical than practical.

The essay recognised the institutionalisation of culture-related activities by ECOWAS but argued that together with national governments, ECOWAS needs to be more vigorous and proactive in its culture and culture-related activities so that these might boost economic growth. This is because at present, these have not succeeded to move the economies of West African countries towards growth and integration. It is only by tapping from culture and fostering those intrinsic values of creativity, innovation, sense of duty and organisation that West African countries will be able to see that investment in culture after all is an important thing to do and assure a steady economic growth. Culture has been so relegated to the background of national planning that foreign intrusion has only helped to disrupt and destroy West African economies. Let West Africa and other regions of Africa learn from Asian countries, notably China, India, South Korea and Indonesia, most of whom by 1961 were either below or at the same level of development and growth with African countries but have today taken a lead as emerging nations with potentials for expansion and security. Their culture has had an important role in this significant breakthrough in the economy and culture which are now being exported to other parts of the world, especially West Africa and other regions of Africa.

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## Notes on Contributors

**Sola Afolayan** is a lecturer in the Department of English, University of Ado Ekiti, Nigeria. He is a specialist in Literary Theory and Applied Criticism. He has published in reputable journals like *Journal of Pan African Studies*, *Critique*, *African Perspectives* etc.

**Md. Manzur Alam** is Senior Lecturer in English at East West University, Bangladesh. His areas of interest include Post-Colonial Theory and Literature, Cultural Studies, Bangla, American and, 20th Century British Literature and Indian writing in English. He has published articles on V.S. Naipaul, Politics and Literature and ELT.

**Akhter Jahan** is a Senior Lecturer at East West University. She has just completed MA TESOL from University of Lancaster, UK. She has presented papers at several international conferences. She has also published papers at both home and abroad.

**Dr Henry Kam Kah** holds a PhD in History at the University of Buea, Cameroon. He specializes in culture, gender, globalization, conflict and security. Dr Kah has published several papers in peer reviewed journals in Cameroon and abroad. He is Associate Fellow of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria and belongs to scholarly associations like Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), American Political Science Association (APSA), West African Research Association (WARA) and Association of Friends of Archives and Antiquities, Cameroon (AFAAC).

**Syed Manzoorul Islam** is Professor of English at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh and did his Ph.D. from Queen's University in Kingston, Canada in 1981. He specializes in modern poetry and fiction, but has substantial publication on literary theory, Cultural Studies, Translatology and Postmodernism. He is also a noted fiction writer. Dr Islam is a leading art critic and a member of the editorial board of *Jamini*, an international art magazine. He has published two books on the contemporary art of Bangladesh and curated a number of art exhibitions at home and abroad. He has also translated many of Bangladesh's contemporary poets into English. Dr. Islam received the Bangla Academy award for literature, one of the top literary prizes of the country, in 1996. In 2005 he received the *Prothom Alo* best book award and Kagaj literary award for his short story collection *Prem O Prarthoner Golpo* (Stories of love and

prayer).

**Nazia Manzoor** is Lecturer, Department of English, East West University. She has a Masters in English Literature with a major in Culture, Transculture and Global Studies from State University of New York at Albany. Her interests include Popular Culture, Mass Media and Postcolonialism.

**Ramit Samaddar** is Assistant Professor of English at Jadavpur University, India. He is presently working on the novels of Anthony Trollope for his doctoral thesis. His areas of interest include nineteenth-century literature, travel writing and postcolonial studies. He has recently published articles on Victorian women travellers and *fin-de-siècle* women poets.