**ABSTRACT**

*European missionary education in Africa has always emphasized the supremacy of the European cultural ideals over those of the so-called lesser races particularly in Africa. Thus, they have always provided the European parameters as the basis for adjudging the literary merits of the works of African scholars. Therefore, literary standards set by Graeco-Roman scholars such as Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Longinus, etc. are the* ***fait accompli*** *by which all literary works are to be assessed. To this end, a United States of America-based academic, Farook Kperogi, a PhD and Associate Professor, uses Plato’s* ***Republic*** *as the basis for commenting on the maiden poetry collection of an emerging African writer, Olumide Olaniyan. This paper takes a deconstructionist approach by rejecting the comparison made with Plato’s work, and analyzes Olaniyan’s work from the postcolonial Afrocentric framework which portrays him as an authentic Afrocentric literary artist.*

**Key words: Plato, Olaniyan, Kperogi, Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism**

In the blurb of Olumide Olaniyan’s 83-page 2017 Ibadan-based Kraftgriots publication of 60 poems called *Lucidity of Absurdity*, Farooq Kperogi, a PhD and Associate Professor of Journalism and Emerging Media, at Kennesaw State University, the United States of America (USA) makes the following remarks:

In Plato’s Republic, poets are to be ostracized because poetry is putatively an authentic simulacrum of reality. But in powerful, inspired, and evocative verses, Olumide Olaniyan’s *Lucidity of Absurdity* explodes the Platonic distrust of the veridical capacities of poetic imagination. With clear, vivid imagery and strikingly resonant metaphors, Olaniyan’s poems both encapsulate and illuminate quotidian reality with such clarity, such manifest authenticity, and such delightfully homespun witticisms that Plato would certainly make an exception for this poet….

To be sure, Plato holds a spellbinding literary allure for Kperogi to borrow the eyes of the Athenian scholar to see through Olaniyan’s poetry. Plato (428? – 347 BCE) was the son of Ariston, an aristocratic father, and Perictione, a mother vaguely related to the 6th-century BCE Athenian lawmaker, Solon. He was Aristotle’s teacher and founder of the Academy in 387 BCE, the foremost citadel of learning in ancient Europe. However, the primacy given to Plato by Kperogi and other scholars in their literary analysis courts deconstruction. Indeed, the analogy to Plato does grave damage to Olaniyan’s effort because whereas Plato’s authorship of *Republic* is dubious, that of Olaniyan is quite authentic. Evidence against Plato’s authorship is weighty. Martin Bernal, a Jewish-American historian, links Plato’s *Republic* (written between 380 and 370 BCE) to an earlier treatise, *Bousiris* (written around 390 BCE) by another Greek scholar, Isokrates, on the same subject as the *Republic*. Further, James (107) goes on to cite ancient historians including Diogenes Laertius, Aristoxenus and Favorinus who stated that the *Republic’s* subject matter was lifted from the *Controversies* authored earlier by Protagoras (481 – 411 BCE). Protagoras had gotten the idea from the Kemetians (ancient Egyptians); while the *Republic* and *Bousiris* also drew heavily on the Kemetian sources (*Black Athena* 106). Karl Marx despite his racism against the black Africans confirmed the Kemetian influence in his *Das Kapital*, published posthumously in 1885 and 1894 CE that, “Plato’s *Republic*, in so far as division of labour is treated in it, as the formative principle of the state, is merely an Athenian idealization of the Egyptian system of castes (Bernal *Black Athena* 106).” All these cumulative evidences led James to conclude that, “the subject matter of Plato’s *Republic* was neither produced by Plato nor any Greek philosopher” (James 109). He cites Plato’s earliest commentator, Krantor, who, writing within few generations of Plato, said:

Plato’s contemporaries mocked him, saying that he was not the inventor of his republic, but that he had copied Egyptian institutions. He attached so much importance to the mockers that he attributed to the Egyptians the story of the Athenians and the Atlantines to make them say that the Athenians had really lived under this regime at a certain moment in the past (Bernal *Black Athena* 106).

In addition, James (106) states categorically that, “First, Plato was not the author of the *Republic* and second, the allegory of the charioteer and winged steeds, is not a product of Plato, but is derived from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, in the Judgment Drama.” James explains that Plato had spent some time, probably around 390 BCE, in Kemet (ancient Egypt), which gave him substantial materials to reflect in his later works. Furthermore, Bernal points out that in *Philebus* Plato went into extensive detail on the Kemetian Tehuti (Greek Thoth) as the creator of writing, language and all sciences. In another place Plato complimented the Kemetian art and music and called for their being used in Greece (Bernal *Black Athena Writes* 368). Besides the *Republic*, Plato appears to be a serial plagiarist of other works as James further disputes Plato’s authorship of *Timaeus*, pointing out that the doctrine of the Demiurge had been taught by the Persians more than 600 BCE through their leader, Zoroaster and by Pythagoras (500 BCE) through the concept of Monads. Indeed, he cites a damning evidence against Plato where he wrote, “According also to Diogenes Laertius *Book VIII* p. 399 – 401, when Plato visited Dionysius at Sicily, he paid Philolaus, a Pythagorean, 40 Alexandrian Minae of silver, for a book, from which he copied the whole contents of the *Timaeus*” (James 109). He therefore concludes on the same page that, “Under these circumstances it is clear that Plato wrote neither the *Republic* nor the *Timaeus*, whose subject matter identifies them with the purpose of the Mysteries of Egypt.” Earlier, he said, “the original source of the doctrine of a Demiurge in creation was Egypt, and it dates back to the creation story of Egypt 4000 BCE which is to be found in the account given by *The Memphite Theology*; an inscription on a stone, now kept in the British Museum” (James 102). The point being made here is that Plato’s authorship, as much as Aristotle’s authorship of several books across multiple disciplines including *Poetics*, is dubious while that of Olaniyan is not. While those two famous Greek scholars may be fake, Olaniyan is quite original.

In any case, why should Olaniyan or any authentic black African writer be even compared to Plato or Aristotle given their ancestral pedigrees? As a black African, Olaniyan is a great descendant of the black African pioneers of written literature in the world who started writing over 5,000 BCE (Murray 194). They include **Imhotep**, the authentic father of medicine (NOT Hippocrates) who lived and wrote on medicine and architectural designs of the pyramids and temples around 2700 BCE; **Ptah Hotep** who wrote around 2414 BCE, and currently has the oldest book in the world; **Merikare** who wrote on rhetoric and the art of human relations around 1990 BCE; **Sehotipibre** who wrote on the virtues of loyalty, monarchy or legal authority around 1991 BCE; **Amenemhat**, contemporary of **Sehotibre** who wrote on the art of human deception; **Amenhotep** who wrote around 1400 BCE; **Duauf** who wrote love books, and urged the youths to embrace learning by reading around 1340 BCE; and **Akhenaton** who wrote on religious philosophy around 1300 BCE, etc. (Asante 35). These were great African pioneer writers some of whom preceded the Graeco-Roman scholars by over 2000 years yet, modern black Africans hardly know them because of the defective colonial education system established and promoted in Africa. African educational curriculum is only awash with European and Asian (Arabs) authors many of whom had travelled to Africa to obtain scholarship in the great Egyptian temples and monasteries. To date, Africa boasts of the oldest universities in the world – the al-Karaouine University of Fez, Morocco and the al-Azhar University of Cairo, Egypt. They predate the earliest varsity in Europe, the University of Salamanca in Spain (Al-Bishak 30). So here is a challenge to African education curriculum experts to dispense with Eurocentric history that over-glorifies the literary achievements of the Europeans and integrate the Afrocentric perspective to correctly teach the literary history of the world, particularly African literary history, to African students.