

Literature and Leadership Crises in Africa: Current Realities and Future Prospects

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Abstract

The paper critically examines diachronically, the phenomenal mediating role of literature in challenging character deficit exhibited by political leaders across Africa since the dawn of the wave of independence of many African states. Writers employ different genres to portray crisis of leadership that manifests through draconian problems like poverty, endemic diseases, civil wars, and abuse of political power, corruption, weak institutions, dilapidating social infrastructure and deplorable education system among others which are the basis of stunted development across the continent. The utilitarian attribute of literature imbues it with the implicit insight to explaining aspirations and pains of the people thus bringing to the fore the failure of leadership in strategic areas. The study, which is executed through random selection of related texts across all the genres of literature, explores the works of writers from different African regions and how they exploit the idiom of that society to interrogate problems peculiar to the environment. In relating their stories, different narrative strategies adopted are interrogated as they reflect the gravity and enormity of these problems, and also to interpret their perspectives or the solutions they proffer. It is evident in this study that literature as the closest imitation of human society does not only serve as the arbiter of values and social responsibility, its protean nature reflects the incisive critique of the nature and conditions of the human society, and the opportunity to redress all abuse and promote a better society.

Keywords: Africa, literature, leadership, politics, society, literary criticism

Introduction

The concern of this paper is to situate literary scholarship within the broad discourse of leadership in order to define the relationship between these two human activities. This paper will particularly focus on the course of literary intervention in leadership crises in Africa and several other related themes that revolve around the three main concepts of LITERATURE, LEADERSHIP and AFRICA which are the main ideas on which this paper is established. The issue of quality leadership and good governance which have continued to elude most African states since the dawn of

self-governance in Africa makes many writers of the African descent to writhe in discomfort because of the diverse negative implications of this endemic socio-political scourge. The literary mediations of writers from different parts of Africa, which are examined through random exploration of their work, condemn the insensitivity of leaders at the corridors of power, reprimand official brutality, criticize insatiable greed and deprecate indiscriminate pilfering. They mock in scathing idioms, opportunism and favouritism, against all odds, inspire hope by providing solutions based on their evaluation of events. The language and techniques adopted by each writer at rendering their thoughts provide the window to assess the gravity of the problem of leadership as some of these writers hardly subscribe to moderate approach in relating their opinions about the subject of leadership. This discussion will be implemented under the following objectives:

Examine, briefly, the recent past and present realities of leadership and governance in Africa;

Discuss the intricate relationship between literature and society in terms of raising awareness and lifting imaginations;

Exemplify leadership motifs in African literature;

Discuss some strategies of literary narratives and criticism in Africa;

Examine the connection of literature and development;

Discuss disservice of European literary prizes in Africa.

Leadership and governance in Africa: Recent, past and present realities

The problem of leadership was first faced by the African continent between 1950s and 1960s, at the dawn of the struggle for democratization and self-rule by African states. Over the time, the quality of leadership has depreciated and become a major issue in the establishment of the democratic process and its success. However, the leadership problem remains vague in the mentality of Africans because of the repercussions of colonialism. Colonialism has produced, to a large extent, risible caricatures of political leaders in Africa, many of who struggle with their identity and sense of insecurity. We are confronted with the absurd realities of awkwardly created nation states and consequences of ill-prepared political elites foisted on the people by skewed processes. The result has been economic plunder and the rise of authoritarian leadership, even when strident declaration of political ideologies is affirmed. The pertinent question, at this point is: where does literature come in, and what roles does/can it play in promoting/enhancing quality leadership in Africa? Largely because the subjects of leadership and governance are rather sensitive, scholars, researchers and creative writers often find literature a potent tool in presenting, projecting and analyzing the ideas of leadership and governance through the adoption of different conceptual and scholarly methods that are enunciated below.

African Writers and Exemplification of Leadership Motifs

Writers who express different thematic concerns and ideological persuasions, and are from different climes, pre-occupy themselves with the responsibility of not only

projecting the theoretical interest of 'art for art sake', but vigorously and deliberately chart the course of the utilitarian function of the art. In other words, writers who subscribe to the Marxist ideology, for instance, are concerned with the issues of super structure and class struggle – two essential elements of economic and political conflicts. The fundamental doctrine of Marxism as regards literature is that form and content are inseparable elements of literary aesthetics to promote the idea of a writer. Also, sociological writers like Buchi Emecheta, Cyprian Ekwensi, Alex la Guma, Sam Aluko, Meja Nwangi, Camara Laye, Ferdinand Oyono, Festus Iyayi, Albert Camus and Ngugi wa Thiong'o produce works of letters which reflect the importance of social security, human dignity and the essence of well-being.

One must not forget how Ngugi wa Thiong'o inspires revolutionary ideas that reverberate the political landscape of Kenya. His novels chronicle the grim conflicts in Kenya, from the coming of the settlers through the *maumau* movement to the time that the country attained independence, and the disillusionment caused by the new set of leaders. It is pertinent to point out the fact that the publication of *Weep Not Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965) and *Petals of Blood* (1977) partly provided the momentum, in no small measure, to the attainment of Kenya's independence. Ngugi's literary presentation of the struggle against the white settlers and the collaborators was done through Kikuyu, his native language, and English, the language of the colonizers.

Ngũgĩ has always been critical of the historical writings on Kenya as a nation. He believes that the history already written about the country has been distorted or repressed by colonial invaders. His writings are a radical revision of the past, in which the formerly silent natives have reclaimed their freedom from the colonialists. For instance, Ngugi wrote *Matigari* in 1987 which was accessible in Gikuyu and was swiftly absorbed into popular culture that frightened the authorities. When the then president Daniel Arap Moi heard that a man called *Matigari* was wandering around Kenya asking difficult questions, he gave orders for his arrest. On the realisation that the man was in fact one of Ngugi's fictional characters, copies of the book were seized and destroyed. As Ngugi explains in *Moving the Centre* (1993), this formed "the first case in our history of a fictional character being forced into exile to join its creator". This shows the importance of language and literature, and its effect on the development of a country. Ngugi believes that a people must attain five survival variables in order to escape the trap of enslavement and arrested development which are 'physical survival, economic survival, political survival, cultural survival and psychological (or identity) survival' (Ngugi 1993, 94)

Unfortunately, post independent African nations have persistently had to grapple with the disorienting problems of bad leadership precipitated by monumental corruption and greed. There is, therefore, a general feeling of disappointment among the masses caused by the ruling class. Many African countries also had experienced the brutalities of military regimes. In *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Chimamanda Adichie

explores this thorny aspect of Africa's history using Nigeria, her country, as the prototype of the larger African society. Coups and counter coups were frequent occurrences in Nigeria with promises of a better deal for Nigerians. The press is muzzled as anyone who attempts to tell the truth is severely punished. Ade Coker, editor of *The Standard* is consequently murdered for publishing two sensitive stories about the disappearance of Nwakiti Ogechi, a human rights activist and the complicity of the Head of State in an illicit drug deal. The novel exposes the hypocrisy and corrupt activities of the military junta. One civilian regime is overthrown by the military with serious condemnation, only for the same regime to perpetrate more horrendous criminal acts than the previous regime had been accused of. Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), written in an intriguing journal-keeping method that relates accurate historical details and first person narrative style presents the tragic fate of four characters Lomba, Bola, Alice and Joshua who are victims of a despotic military regime in Nigeria. A climate of fear, uncertainty and brutality becomes the reality of the people who are fast losing their sense of humanity and dignity is portrayed in a language that resonate disgust and distrust for anything institutional or leadership. The daily life of the characters is steeped in despondence which is a fallout of inhuman measures enforced by the military government of the time to repress dissident movements and human rights agitators.

It is this same vicious circle of corruption and bad leadership that Chinua Achebe captures in *A Man of the People* (1966), with Chief Nanga representing the corrupt civilian regime, while in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) the excesses of the military regime in Nigeria are demonstrated by the ruthlessness of the Head of State, General Sam.

African writers have shown that poetry could also be a veritable political tool. Odia Ofeimun, a contemporary Nigerian poet, also does not believe in the notion of 'arts for arts' sake. He looks at art as a tool that could be used for the emancipation of the proletariat. Commenting on the role of the writer in politics, Ofeimun intones:

It is possible to tell the truth and on the basis of the positions you take, try to change public policies.... I think a writer will be deceiving himself, if he believes he can draw a line between himself as an artist and himself as a citizen of society who has positions that he considers right and deserving expression (*Talking with African Writers*, 66).

The above comment implies that the writer should at all times tell the truth, even if it hurts the powers that be. This opinion is further buttressed by Ofeimun in his collection of poems, *The Poet Lied* (1980). In an interview, Ofeimun explains:

The Poet Lied is not really just about a poet. It is based on an assessment of the symbol manipulators, the leaders who manipulate symbols by which the whole society interprets the life that people live in the country.... (*Talking...62*).

It is therefore logical to say that the writer who demurs at telling the truth is a collaborator, manipulating symbols just like the political charlatans in power. The

issue of betrayal of the masses by successive governments, in his country, is central to Ofeimun's writings. He believes that the government ought to have done a lot more for the people, given the abundance of human and natural resources in Nigeria.

Ofeimun is equally angry with the masses for being placid in accepting the status quo without a bit of resistance. He is of the opinion that more than anything else, it is the people's complacency that encourages the greed of political elites to batter the economies of African nations, and pilfer the continent's wealth to satisfy their slavish greed. In his poem, "The Messiahs", Ofeimun confirms the perception of the "Leader-Messiah" (a metaphor for greedy and selfish leaders in Africa) as irresponsible. Its ironic tone reflects the attitude that rather than save the people, the "Messiahs" destroy them through incompetence, greed and extravagant lifestyle. The leaders feed the people with lies, as they are usually surrounded by "Political pimps and truth benders". Again, in "National Cakes" the poet uses vultures as a metaphor for unpatriotic leaders who are incapable of performing patriotic acts, but only feed on what others have produced. This concept of vultures is a reflection on both economic and political attitudes of irresponsibility. He writes:

Vultures don't bake their national cakes
They just swoop on the ripe carcass of may be, human cattle
We too, hate to be bakers
And so, we despoil the sunrise we seek.

Since the "vultures don't bake national cakes", *they* "swoop on ripe carcass" produced by other patriotic citizens. In "The New Brooms", the poet recalls the proverb, "a new broom sweeps better than an old one". Ofeimun then interrogates that idea by relating it specifically to the political development in his society where a military regime has replaced a civilian one. In stanza three of the poem, he states:

To keep the streets clear
They brought in world-changers
With corrective swagger sticks
They brought in the new broom
To sweep public scores away

But in spite of the promises that the new brooms would sweep clean the dirt in the nation, soon after their emergence, "The streets were blessed with molehills of unwanted odds and bits". This exposes their hypocrisy as they soon become more corrupt and filthier than the leaders they chased out of power.

Poets have also gone a step further by not just writing and complaining, but by also proffering ways out of the imbroglio the country has been enmeshed in by its near inept leadership. Through various poems, Nigerian poets have proved to be visionaries and inspirers for the citizenry who dream of a better country.

In examining the dictatorial personality in "Maradona", in his collection of poems *Illuminations*, (2009, 52), Obafemi sees a former Nigerian military head of state, as a dribbler, a seller of his people and a con man: someone bent on personal aggrandizement to the detriment of his nation and people, and a betrayer of his country to multinationals and world powers:

“Your practice to donate
 This huge (Es)state
 To the whiny and lets of multi-nations” (Obafemi, 2001: 46)

Like others before him, he becomes a deaf ruler because he cares not for the people. He seeks power from the barrel of the gun to suppress the people. For him, just like Habib, “The Time-bomb ticks away”. Ultimately, he would be unseated by the people through “MASSIVE out-cry” because if he does not “HAND OVER”, he would “Be HANDED OVER” (a negative prophecy).

Continuing this personality analysis, Dasylyva (2006), in “Dancing *Sigidi* in the Rain”, looks at another past military dictator, in the leadership saddle of Nigerian government. This poem is a no-holds-barred invective-pouring exposé on this much hated personality in the Nigerian political space. One needs to explain Dasylyva’s allusion to the Yoruba *Sigidi*. The *Sigidi* is a clay-moulded diabolical figurine that is conjured to afflict its victims but must not get near any liquid substance, as it would crumble. That military ruler becomes the *Sigidi* that must dance in the rain, his government’s power, according to the poet, is derived wrongly as he is a “Usurper-General”, a source of horrendous affliction and torture. Identical with the first dictator, his people’s blood defames him as, “Human flesh, his corned beef / Running blood his *tombo*” (a type of locally-brewed alcoholic drink). His physical structure is a far cry from a perfect one: “With a pair of tent-pegs; his small frame / Blistered with pride on two cancerous legs.” He is a diseased man spreading “diseases” and infesting his country with fetid sludge of corruption.

Dasylyva labels Nigerian leadership in extremely demeaning nomenclature: “area boys”, “teddy wolves”, “gamblers’ congress”, “looters”, “bandits”, “bastards” and “vagabonds”. These are lost leaders who have commercialized religion, monetized politics and looted the national treasury throwing all morality to the wind. Throughout the poem, which records the leaders’ misdemeanors and high treasonable betrayals, Dasylyva advocates just one solution: “arrest”. This arrest can be through different avenues and methods: “hollering”, going up in arms and upturning the corrupt leadership from its position. The people must stand and work for a situation and time when “we insist: patriotic and purposeful leadership / Must pilot to the Promised Land this colossal Stateship.” For him, the state can be rescued but the people must act first, fast and “arrest” the leadership from all its negative frivolities.

According to Ofeimum, people need not wallow in self-pity and recrimination adjudging and apportioning blames: “we need no mourners in our stride, / no remorse, no tears.” The country and her people must stand fast and be focused. Minds must be made up never to allow the sorts of people, situations and circumstances that, in the first instance, propelled the country to the negativities of the past. These people, situations and circumstances must never be allowed into governance and controlling positions again. He advocates one solution and one

encouragement in the poem ‘The Messiahs’’: “Only this: Resolve / that the locust shall never again visit our farmsteads.”

In trying to effect changes, through mythic recreation, Osofisan recycles the primordial Yoruba narrative ontology to enunciate disturbing contemporary socio-political reality in *Another Raft* (1988), *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (1991), *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* (1992) and *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen* (1992), where the use of symbolic and allegorical representations are cleverly woven with social analysis in a profound display of the mastery of the English language and story-telling techniques. Invariably, these texts could be described as the aggregate creative interpretation of a dysfunctional postcolonial state where social insecurity and political uncertainty are caused by dereliction of leadership.

Writers and narrative strategies

In highlighting the plight of the people, Ofeimun uses metaphors, symbols and other devices to relate his message. In “*The New Brooms*”, the title is a metaphorical reference to new leaders that have just come to power. Ironically, however, these new brooms still fail to sweep clean the garbage “in the country”. “The Messiahs” employs irony to describe greedy and selfish leaders. Symbolism is perhaps another device which Ofeimun uses in his works, and these symbols are again metaphorical in this literary milieu. The use of vulture for instance symbolizes ‘rot’ and ineptitude. The vulture does not make any effort to kill a prey itself, but rather depends on rotten preys killed through the efforts of others or natural disasters. The poet paints the imagery of filth that typifies corruption by using words like ‘garbage’, ‘swollen gutter’, ‘dung’, ‘decay’, ‘night soil’, etc. These words express the poet’s feeling of nausea, similar to Armah’s portrayal of the Ghanaian society in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). Generally, Ofeimun’s language may be irreverent and, perhaps impertinent, but nonetheless we must understand that his writings are a belligerent reaction to mal-administration and injustices that are commonplace in his country. Experience has shown that changes in leadership in Africa do not improve the lot of the masses. Ofeimun’s ideas can be compared with Ayi Kwei Armah’s Ghana in *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born* (1968) that it only amounts to the same old dance of corruption and bad administration, perhaps with a different style. It is this same agenda and vision that Nigeria’s Niyi Osundare pursues in his collections, *Tender Moments* (2006) and *Waiting Laughter* (1990). Wole Soyinka’s *Opera Wonyosi* (1981) deals a brutal satirical blow on the political elites who will not stop at anything criminal to acquire power. Their improvidence riles the playwright to make his sarcasm scathing despite Soyinka’s preference for dense techniques that are evoked to address many themes and socio-economic and political matters. Soyinka uses lampoon and extravagant ballad opera to amplify the scope of the decadence but the same technique almost overshadows the poignancy of his language. Similar dramatic techniques are adopted by Wole Soyinka in *From Zia; with Love* (1992), and *A Scourge of Hyacinths* (1992) in which scorching satire

denigrates abuse of power and moral bankruptcy amongst leaders who engage in drug trafficking and related crimes, the same crimes explicitly condemned as rife among political elites by Chimamanda Adichie in her novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). The text, *Morountodun* (1982), is Osofisan's documented analysis and dramatic discourse about the revolt of ordinary farmers against the high-handedness of the Nigerian government in its taxation policy and implementation amongst other social ills. The play is the factual record of the revolt of the *Agbekoya Uprising* of September 1969 in Southwest Nigeria. (*Agbekoya* in Yoruba language means 'Farmers Reject Suffering or Oppression'), shook the government to its roots. In reacting, the government shows its callousness and oppressive attitude towards the common man by launching ferocious attacks on the farmers. In *Morountodun*, Osofisan employs myth, legend, and carnival-like ambience to interrogate the past and to create new, useful and relevant values for the present. This is to effect changes in the dispensation of justice, oppression and political rascality as exhibited by governments, their officials and the so-called elite.

Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977), and *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988) Olu Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender* (1993), Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit* (2002) and Ahmed Yerima's *Mua'dhin's Call* (2011) using verbal comedy, absurdist aesthetics, realism and satire, in the order of the texts, explicate disturbing incidence of arrogance of power, abuse of civil authority, perversion and desecration of collective values, official heist, favouritism and large scale corruption that induce misery and poverty among the populace. In fact, a comparative study of Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* (1984) and Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit* (2002) presents an intertextual discourse that relies on near farcical and satirical portrayal of human and institutional degradation by leaders who ascribe little or no value to the 'exalted' positions they occupy. Predominantly, writers in Africa have gained mastery of their art which is demonstrated in variety of narrative styles and techniques employed to relate different political and socio-economic situations in their respective countries.

Literature and Society in North Africa

We can evoke the somber atmosphere in Tewfik al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach*, (1973) which examines different shades of leadership positions - family, political, and religious - through the absurdist dramatic worlds of humans and animals. The play presents a somber environment where the characters are helpless minions in the cycle of chaos and ceaseless struggles. Its allegory depicts a foreboding that eclipses any possibility of hope because of the prevalence of moral decadence and political corruption in the post war Egypt. Salih Al-Tayyib's *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) explains the crisis of identity that afflicts the sensibility of Arab-Africans, which manifests in social and political friction that split the people of Africa into factions. The divisive politics of race that escalated into political blocs in the sixties, after the formation of Arab League in 1945, which continued to seethe after the formation of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, now AU,

is as a result of indecision and lack of unity among African leaders who could not provide a common identity for the African people. One writer who has exhibited some propensity at criticizing the political establishment in North Africa is Nawal Al Saadawi. She is an ardent advocate of women rights but chooses to deride politicians in *God Dies by the Nile* (1976), a novel that interrogates the impact of power game on peasants. She employs the metaphor of social institutions through her main character, Zakeya, to explore many dimensions of oppression in Egypt. Albert Camus, a French colonial writer, who wrote in Algeria, chooses the moderate genre of autobiography to narrate his material encounters, although a witness of the liberation struggle and post liberation travails in his adopted country. Regardless the perceived inadequacy of these writers at making their characters to be dynamic so as to embody the collective aspirations of the society, the themes of their work have been executed to express fundamental issues that affect the well-being of their people.

Literature and Society in East Africa

Literature in East Africa fermented and matured in the crucible of violent revolution and bloody struggle for independence in nearly all the countries in the region. The first generation of East African writers honed their literary skills in the trenches as warriors and nationalists. Literary works from countries like Kenya and Uganda are redolent of the spirit of protest and resistance that characterized the time of their production. The creation of “committed literature” was thus a necessary task of the writer.

One such committed writer is Meja Mwangi. His works are thus pre-occupied with post independent disillusionment and unfulfilled hopes in Kenya. His urban-based novels give accounts of the constant struggle for survival that mark Nairobi’s poorest sectors. This pitiable situation is a result of bad leadership and corruption that are common features in post independent Kenya. *Kill Me Quick* and *Going Down River Road* (1976), illustrates pictures of stinking back alleys, slums and severe social problems that accompany them. There are issues of inadequate housing and jobs, non-existent waste removal services, corrupt government officials, alcoholism, theft and the likes.

Ayo Kehinde (2004) believes that the contemporary African novel is a vast phenomenon. However, that magnitude is perhaps the least of the difficulties facing the critic in attempting to give a fair view of this ever-growing turf. He observes that a more formidable problem arises from the fact that African writers are writing two different kinds of fiction. First, there is the social-realistic narrative convention that has been familiar to readers and still exists. Second, there is the other kind in which a new language prevails; this is relatively unfamiliar to many, perhaps even most readers.

Ayo Kehinde (2004) has tried to examine Mwangi's views about the plight of the masses in neocolonial African societies. This is premised on the awareness that there is always a close relationship between African literature and its historical context(s). In *Kill Me Quick*, the reader encounters a new realistic fiction from Kenya. Mwangi has been greatly influenced by Leonard Kibera's realistic description of the contemporary urban world of Nairobi. His fiction reveals that one major unfortunate problem runs through the (neo) colonial African societies – disorientation and betrayal of trust. Mwangi's novel also reveals that in African neo-colonial societies, the seeds of disharmony, mediocrity and macabre corporate distrust have been sown; corruption and rampant scarcity of personal integrity have replaced the hitherto peaceful existence. In fact, the novel has altered the traditional map of African fiction beyond recognition because of his undisguised depiction of postcolonial decadence and the harshness and abruptness of its style (Griffiths 2000). The novel is a chronicle of the existential and societal realities of the neo-colonial Kenyan nation.

Kenya, the referent society of the text, according to Kehinde (2004), has been enmeshed since 1963 in the crucible of deaths and births, agony, poverty, dehumanization and deprivation. These, despite their differentiating phraseologies, work towards the same objective: the vitiation of human dignity. Hence, *Kill Me Quick*, like many other postcolonial African novels, reveals an atmosphere of fear, hate, humiliation and an aura of repression, in forms of arrest, exile and execution. It highlights the dictatorial and oppressive tendencies of the imperialists and neo-colonial rulers in the different African nations.

At the end of the emergency, the ends do not justify the means. The loss was simply too much to justify the efforts. This is a betrayal of ideals and trust. The utter uselessness and senselessness of the anarchy has become the major preoccupation of contemporary East African writers. The neo-colonial African society depicted in *Kill Me Quick* is in a stage of stultifying poverty. The wealth is in the hands of a privileged minority, which surrounds itself with country houses, cars, washing machines, television sets, and all the consumer durables that are associated with an acquisitive middle class. The economic position of the peasants is extremely precarious.

In *Going Down River Road* (1976), Mwangi probes deeper into the effect of the city environment on individuals in the city. He chooses to do this with the illiterates and semi-literates of the societies, who live from hand to mouth, are in the majority and provide cheap labour. Mwangi does this through a representative character, Ben, who bears the burden of the city, its harsh realities, cold ethics and its fierce, almost brutal fight for survival. Ben's dismissal from the army for selling weapons to armed robbers is a reflection of the rot in the Kenyan society. The society was bereft of values as no one cared to ask questions about other people's sources of wealth. The resources of the country were, therefore, being plundered by the privileged ruling

class and their cohorts. In answer to Ocholla's comment that he should have known better than to trust gangsters, Ben proclaims:

Nothing was impossible in those days. Everybody was scrambling for big money, and no one cared how you made it. You could have sold the whole goddam country to eager buyers; a lot of those guys in the big cars on the avenue did just that. I was a poor salesman.
(Mwangi 54)

It thus becomes obvious that corruption was the fastest means of social mobility and wealth. Majority of the hemmed in members of the Kenyan society therefore, had a bleak future and resorted to prostitution, crime or simply drowned themselves in a very potent locally brewed alcoholic drink called 'Kill Me Quick', to drown their frustration. It is worth noting that the novel *Going Down River Road* is both a metaphor and a fact. The *Development House*, and the *Karara Center* are both concrete and metaphorical. While the workers or part of the society is being underdeveloped, the building is developing. Similarly, the underdeveloped segment of the society gathers at the *Karara Center* for drinks like a ritual. Mwangi hopes that his writings can help effect social and political changes by first changing the consciousness of the people.

An objective analyst of the malaise of postcolonial African nations, Mwangi, does not lay all the blames for the avalanche of pains in Africa at the doorstep of the colonial masters, rather he believes that the neo-colonial indigenous rulers are even worse than the white colonialists. The lives of Meja and Maina in the text suggest that independence in African nations has not been very beneficial to the masses. Therefore, there is a recurrence of undisguised bitterness against the black African rulers who have betrayed their nations. This is reflected in the characterization, tone and language of the novel. This supports the assertion of Edward Said (1993):

Blaming the Europeans sweepingly for the misfortunes of the present is not much of an alternative. What we need to do is to look at the matters as a network of interdependent histories that it would be inaccurate and senseless to repress, useful and interesting to understand (19).

Literature and Society in South Africa

In South Africa, before the abolition of the obnoxious apartheid system, the situation gave rise to protest literature. Most of the writers that emerged during this period were, therefore, concerned with the issues of injustices and social inequality enshrined by the apartheid government. *Letters to Martha* (1968) is Brutus' individual effort in defence of a common destiny of the South African black majority. In spite of his arrest and imprisonment in 1963 for writing protest poetry, he remained undaunted. As an artist, Brutus' reaction to the tragedy of the South African nation is of three-fold: to heal and restore the life of the ordinary black South African and indeed the human race, to create a new vision for a purposeful growth, regeneration and glorification of man in South Africa and to mobilize the

collective conscience of the masses to restore full political and social rights to the black majority in a free South Africa. In “The mob”, Brutus reinforces the campaign against the Pass Law that restricted free movement, settlement and economic rights of black South Africans. This effort instigated street protests, leading to the Sharpeville Massacres in 1961 and the subsequent passage of the Sabotage Bill by the apartheid regime in 1962.

The gruesome inhumanity of apartheid that has continued to characterize the historical and material experiences of black South Africans, as illustrated by many more writers, is a reflection of the political anomaly established in South Africa. Let us consider Alex La Guma’s novella, *A Walk in the Night* (1967), as one of the enduring literary statements on apartheid. The work exhibits a prevalent mood of forlorn bleakness that is accentuated by grisly violence and cold blooded murder. All the encounters in the novella are presented at night time, an ominous symbol of terror that is associated with Sergeant Raalt, Michael Adonis, Joe and Willieboy. Their individual experiences emphasise the atmosphere of despair and siege induced by the Anglo-Boer apartheid government. *The Stone Country* (1974), also by Alex La Guma, portrays a dreary South Africa with sarcastic humour through the experiences of Toffy Williams, George Adams and Casbah Kid as a country in lockdown behind stone walls where everybody is a prisoner, a jail warden or a convict, which are inexorable atrocities brought upon people by apartheid. The use of everyday idiom and playful illusion in Athol Fugard’s *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1973) does not reduce the grave implications of a stifling socio-economic and political structure as depicted in the minimalist technique of the play. Life is experienced through psychic renunciation of living one’s dreams as if it were reality and living as a shadow while the true self lay buried in conscious forgetfulness. The immolation of Sizwe Bansi from which Robert Zwelinzima resurrected, tragically, foregrounds ‘digitalized’ humanity where numerical symbols represent human demography, and where humans are dispensable elements in the process of economic production. In the meantime, J. M. Coetzee is another distinguished writer from South Africa who may not be considered as a politically relevant writer because the focus of his works is the impact of the colonizing power of language in the postcolonial context whereby interrogating ‘the very nature of authorship and authority’ and ‘the power relations inherent in textuality itself’ through which he interrogates the nature of language and narrative to weaken the hegemony of imperialism in all human encounters (Gikandi 2003, 166).

Literature and Development in Africa

In the last few decades, the emergence of different leaders in the over fifty independent postcolonial states across Africa has affected the fortune of literature and art adversely. This development is evident in the pervasive turpitude that is woven into the structure of leadership and the society. From the Classical period to imperial Rome, to the British Empire, and all the literary periods that evolved from Modernism or other ‘post’ literary movements to the emergence of written literature

in Africa from its cradle of the oral art. Art replicates the ideological and creative expression of a people's collective consciousness and the interpretation of their relationship with the entire universe. It does not matter the distortion that colonialism has brought upon the thinking of elites who cannot see properly through the eyes of their people's humanity. Literature can serve as the mirror of rectitude, creating ambience of renewal for leaders and their people (*Moving the Centre*, 83-87). It is perceived that literature can serve as the gauge of a people's socio-cultural awareness and spiritual conditions. Beyond its implicit attribute to criticize different social classes and renew the commitment of a people, it possesses conservation attributes to preserve humanity from falling into the abyss of murderous bestiality. Literature may exemplify the standard of a people's social vision; a continuous struggle to maintain the equilibrium of justice and order, and to inspire people to lofty standards of ideals and honour. Consequently, the political and cultural impulse that produces a work of art often engraves its imprint on it as benchmark of values and principles it propagates. The culture of a flourishing literary culture like that of Africa has suffered a setback because of many repressive regimes that have and still occupy the corridors of power across Africa. Incidentally, this development may stimulate culpable amnesia that could result in lame complicity which may breed value gaps and oppression in the absence of 'writer-prophets' to warn of looming danger. Such prescience has been noticed in many works among which are Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966), Ayi Kwei Armah's *Fragments* (1970) and *2000 Seasons* (1973), 'Appolodoros on the Niger' in Wole Soyinka's *Mandela's Earth and other Poems* (1988) and Ben Okri's *Infinite Riches* (1998). Although these works are dense in symbols, metaphors and allegories using different narrative styles, their themes present a unified perspective that reminds the people and leaders in Africa of the dangers of delusion of power, decadence and spiritual blindness, which are socio-cultural delirium that affect the psyche of leaders in Africa.

Recent African literature and the Political Economy of Prize-Winning

It is relevant one makes a brief comment on African literature and the political economy of prize-winning. This is the title of a bold academic presentation that scrutinizes the way Africa is portrayed by emerging African writers, and how this is different from the portrayal of the continent by the older generation of writers. In a paper presented at an international conference in Pretoria at the University of South Africa, Wole Soyinka spoke on 'The Fictioning of a Continent' under the topic 'Children of Herodotus', in which he dwelt mainly on the processes by which colonial European writers fabricated and circulated distorted accounts of what was accepted by the world for decades, even centuries, as the history and conditions of Africa and Africans (Soyinka 2012, 23-44; Soyinka 2012, 56-97).

In his characteristic sarcasm towards old-fashioned Western attitudes, Soyinka describes the various dishonest methods and motivations behind the colonial mission to portray Africans as barbaric, uncivilized and lesser humans. Over the past few decades, many scholars have expatiated on how these acts of deliberate

misrepresentation served, among other goals, to justify Machiavellian imperialist intentions. It was also a crucial part of colonial Europe's construction of its own supposed cultural superiority and defence of its criminal destruction of indigenous cultures and imposition of tyrannical rule across the world. Furthermore, the Congolese scholar, V.Y. Mudimbe in *The Invention of Africa*, presents a disturbing scenario of a carefully executed programme of diabolical distortions of history, cultural landscape and socio-economic structure of Africa in order to suit the denigrating racial narrative of the West.

Though Soyinka's lecture did not necessarily provide any major new insights into these familiar issues, but it has helped to recall the sad fact those decades after the end of official colonialism, the 'Fictioning' of Africa continues in new, subtle and perhaps more malicious ways. This then brings up the idea of "writing what *they* like", a reference to how recent African writings may have been collaborating in current misrepresentations of Africa, just because of prizes. Such writings may have the direct objective of pleasing the predominantly Western readership of these writers and the judges of these financially juicy literary prizes. It is supposed that no committed writer should write for prizes, but should concentrate on the purity of art to liberate mankind from the shackles of mediocrity and moral corruption that hold down the society in its vicious grip.

An Epilogue on Xenophobia in South Africa and the Carnage in Darfur

Finally, one wishes to add few words on the tragic and horrendous xenophobic attacks that are becoming rife in South Africa. This development appears to be a paradoxical turn of events in the sense that the whole world fought the obnoxious apartheid regime in South Africa through diplomacy, sanctions and literature and clandestine financial supports before the people were liberated from the repressive regimes of the Anglo-Boer minority. Works of Alex La Guma, Alan Paton, Bessie Head, Dennis Brutus, Athol Fugard, Peter Abrahams, Wole Soyinka, and several others are still in print and remain fresh in our minds. These are part of concrete efforts that led to the political and partly economic liberation of South Africans. But today, perhaps the reality of economic survival has nudged South African youths to re-liberate their economy from the grip of non-South Africans, by rising against other nationals, living in South Africa. I call this a paradox of survival. That is a signature of outright leadership failure, at both ends of Nigeria and South Africa.

Another horrific situation that has defied all manner of interventions is Sudan. For many decades, Sudan has been a gory theater of extreme violence where the soil is often soaked with blood, rather than water. If the slaughter spree that occurred in Rwanda in 1994, and the internecine wars that wasted countless souls in Liberia and Sierra Leone could deserve some filmic interpretations, it is supposed that the human wasteland of Darfur, and the crisis of South Sudan, should have prodded the conscience of scriptwriters to have it inscribed on the cinema walls in many cities

across Africa, although a shame of the continent, in order to confront the hypocrisy of leaders and, to initiate actions that will lead to reconciliation after many years of gross violation of human rights and dignity. The supine moralizing of Tayib Al-Salih, the major writer to emerge from Sudan, in *Season of Migration to the North*, in which a vision of accommodation and mutual harmony is presented, does not have a sequel of radical works to arbitrate and criticize systematic and persistent annihilation of a section of the country. Slavery has mutated in Africa, particularly in Sudan, taking institutional and political dimensions where brothers, many of who profess the same religion, slaughter one another in order to enforce the ‘eradication of black African racial identity’ from the land of the racially ‘superior’ Arabs (*Harmattan Haze* 2012, 68). This is another humanitarian challenge that writers are implored to confront, considering the indicting and exorcising power of literature. It is envisaged that leadership, at any level, and in any area of human endeavour, should exert its privileges to improve the quality of life and dignity of humanity regardless of the tribal or racial demarcations by which people are categorized. Tragically, this lofty prospect has continued to be a dream in Africa where people are frayed by the terror of living in hopeless expectations, and petrified by the nightmare of insensate leadership at different levels.

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