

**Symphony of the Oppressed: Intertextuality and Social Realism in
Osundare and Sow Fall's Aesthetics**

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Abstract

Among many social theorists and development strategists in Africa, issues of good governance along with a desire for a responsible and accountable leadership class, have been the subject of vigorous debate on several platforms. Literary artists, as a coterie of intelligentsia, are not unaware of their own social importance in this debate. Steeped in the universe of social differentiation, this article draws on comparative studies as a critical tool to discuss and bring into the open ideas of how writers, who do not share the same genre form, use the combined dialectical skills of satire and protest. These skills are utilized to create awareness around the postcolonial conditioning of bad governance, immoral politics and socio-economic inequalities that violate human dignity and threaten people's economic rights. Within the context of social realism, some African writers are portraying greed and tomfoolery of the elites as generating significant collateral damage, resulting into the unbridled propagation of poverty, disease and human suffocation; denying the masses productive lives. Looking specifically at Niyi Osundare and Aminatta Sow Fall, this work goes across genres and intersects national borders, privileging intertextual solidarity of texts to argue that the elitists' culture of impunity and reduction of humanity into ghoulish suffocation through bad leadership and inhuman economic policies favors the rich and the powerful at the expense of the poor and the minorities. This paper takes intertextuality and social realism as conceptual blocks to explore how the texts of Osundare and Fall echo each other. Of particular interest here is how these texts intersect, forming patterns of motifs that rebut the efforts to oppress those not within the ruling class. The purpose of this work is to reveal how writers, using literary knowledge and imaginative scholarship, can be advocates for the humanization of their society and the strengthening of good governance.

Keywords: good governance, intertextuality, social realism, social differentiation, symphony of the oppressed, accountable leadership, immoral politics, propagation of poverty

Introduction

Modern African writing in sub-Saharan Africa is a high-profile activity which began in the late nineteenth century (Kaddu, 2016). As writers traverse the continent into the league of societies with strong written cultures, colonial discourses become an important issue for these writers to address. There is often an immediate engagement in a counter-discourse through a combination of totally rejecting colonialism's cultural absurdity and the re-writing of European narratives that had exoticized and skirted the African peoples using stereotypical effigies and so casting aspersions on the continent's belief systems. For instance, Obiechina (1975) holds that Daniel Defoe's *The Life, Adventures, and Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton* (1720) "embodies most of the stereotypes which were to characterize later European writing on Africa" (p. 18). Foregrounding colonial discourse in most early modern literary works is not a misnomer, however, for history records that the British had a colonial presence in Nigeria between 1900 until 1960 when Nigeria gained independence. At the point of making its official separation from Britain, the British colonist had taught the indigenous people about "the superiority of Western practices through setting up of systems of police and courts and legislatures following British laws through sending missionaries to convert natives to Christianity [...] and establishing churches and seminaries and through setting up of schools [...]. And with these ideological exportations came Western 'culture', in the form of music, arts, and literature [...] regardless of the ancient [...] traditions of [...] the inhabitants of those areas" (Kliegs, 2006, pp. 148–49). Fanon (1990) describes colonialism and its devastating effect on its victims thus: "colonialism is not satisfied with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (p. 154).

To most scholars and researchers in the field of colonial discourse, the hegemony is a knowledge production, an active political performance and socio-economic process through which the West intruded on the African world at the late nineteenth century. In the main, the ideology serves as a mirror, a narcissistic projection, on which the West sees itself as a subject and the rest of the world as other. Scholars and experts in political economy hold that "the relationship of economics to politics is the best starting point for unraveling questions about the distribution of power in society" (Ikotun, 2012, p. 33). Most of these researchers have also underscored the economic impact of colonialism to the post-colonial African economic advancement. Aluko (2003) traces the Africa's ongoing economic woes to the colonial conditioning and manipulation, asserting that "a debtor-country is considered credible and entitled to economic assistance, debt forgiveness or debt relief from its creditors only if it pursues policies in accordance with what the market believes to be [...] policies which create the enabling environment for the private sector, and for the efficient operation of the market economy as certified by the Triad and their agents, the IMF and the World Bank" (p. 26). With these conversations already rooted in various genres – the ground was fertile, tilled, and seeded – with written actions and political actions combined, African people fought colonialism for a season. This resulted in independence for several African countries in the 1960s. Many imaginative works of this period started out as seminal books on cultural revival as a form of intellectual crusade against the structure of colonial vestiges, colonialism and western modernity, in particular, which tried assiduously to degrade African ambience.

Though the earliest African writers' rhetorical practice, positioned as a postcolonial discourse, was built around politics and cultural revivalism from the rampaging westernization of the continent, they also attacked head-on the dysfunctional governance seen post-independence. Thus, the political landscape of the immediate post-independence era in Africa largely informs

the writers' aesthetic settings and inspires the imaginative idioms of their creative scholarship. They have accused the political elite of a lack of creative leadership and of standing in the way of achieving good governance systems, denying the people what had been promised throughout the campaigns for independence. Writers, as this article demonstrates, have – in their disillusionment with the post-independence outcomes – sided with the masses.

Steeped in the universe of social differentiation, this article utilizes comparative studies as a critical tool to discuss and bring to light how writers who do not share the same genre form can use the combined dialectical skills of satire and protest. These skills are being deployed to create a broad-based awareness of the key issues of bad governance, immoral politics and socio-economic inequalities that violate human dignity and threaten teeth of economic rights of the people. Within the context of social realism, African writers often portray the elites' greed and numerous unruly behaviors as triggers for poverty, disease and human suffocation. Niyi Osundare's poetic imagination "They Too are the Earth" (1986) and Aminatta Sow Fall's prose composition *The Beggars' Strike* (1981) are just two texts in an intertextual solidarity that critique the elitists' culture of impunity and reject the systematic oppression of the masses. The two writers, discussed here, reveal a shared aesthetic flair that highlights inequality and poverty as being a dominant feature of most economic and social development policies in several African countries. This policy-driven disparity exacerbates the tensions between the dichotomous social groups, dashing dreams of true independence and individual aspiration. This article argues that the site of literature, a communicative act, is one of the several avenues for discussion on national development and policy matters.

Relying on a textually based mode of communication, literature enacts the effects of government policies or programs on the people and brings this to the forefront of public consciousness and debate. In this way, literature offers an ensemble of aesthetic structures to serve as continual feed-back on a government's policy priorities, highlighting the inequality and unfairness of those policies. To draw this discursive map, this article takes intertextuality and social realism as conceptual blocks to unpack how the texts of Osundare and Fall echo each other, generating patterns of motifs that highlight some of the many issues facing those who are oppressed. The songs, through an intertextual chorus, come in the form of protest and stirring satire; they are not pleasant to listen to. The two writers are not writing from within the same genre form, yet, they focus on the same subject matter; their musical notation seeming to agree on the fact that the poor and the disempowered are groaning under the burdensome greed of the elites and the unkind policies of the powerful. The main concern of this work is to unpack the specific nature of the inequalities being experienced by people in Africa, to expose the exploitation and to demonstrate how oppression is odious. The article achieves this through examining the work of contemporary African writers; writers who have given us a symphony of the oppressed. These writers are, as this paper shows, committed to a post-colonial discourse and are responding to Frantz Fanon's "native intellectuals" in his theories of resistance. Fanon identifies these people as the "writers and thinkers educated in colonial schools who not only use their education in the struggle against the colonialists but also remain vigilant in the postcolonial era prepared to denounce an indigenous ruling class" (pp. 166–9).

In the final analysis, we apparently see how writers, using literary knowledge and imaginative scholarships for advocacy purposes, humanize their society and strengthen the debate for good governance. It is what Adeoti (2015) refers to as "the close affinity between art [literature] and politics in its polemics" (p. 3).

Intertextuality and Social Realism: ‘Intersectional’ Relationship, Conceptual Bifurcation

“A writer is first a reader”, Cardin (2006) claims in *Intertextual Re-creation in Jamie O’Neill’s at Swim, Two Boys*. “And is necessarily affected by his readings which leave traces on his works” (p. 24). The legacy of writings having influence on other writings or writers is a growing discussion in literary parlance. This influence, perceptible through identical structures, motifs or styles, implies a filial relationship in literary creation. Nowadays, this notion of influence seems to be too restrictive to deal with transtextual connections and this is why the more comprehensive notion of intertextuality is often preferred. Intertextuality is an inevitable phenomenon insofar as any given text derives from other texts. As a result, there is an intense degree of cross-fertilization in any literature.

The development of interest and scholarships around intertextuality seems to begin with Kristeva who offered the coinage after her extensive readings of Bakhtin works (Haberer, 2007, p. 56). However, attempts at mainstreaming an acceptable definition for the concept have remained largely elusive as scholars and experts have shown more of variations and differences about the term than convergences. While working within the spectrum of the concept, however, experts seem to conform with the general thesis that intertextuality means the displacement of critical interest away from the author, which according to Haberer, Eco has dealt with more explicitly when he says that, “it is not true that works are created by their authors. Works are created by works, texts are created by texts, all together they speak to each other independently of the intentions of their authors” (Haberer, 2007, p. 57).

Realism is founded on the assumption that there exists the individual sensory perception. This was a challenge to traditional literature that made use of plots from mythology, history, legend, and so on, the novel form’s use of realism meant that the individual’s experience was the focus. The writer had to “convey the impression of fidelity to human experience”, so that the plot was always original (Watt, 1957, p. 13). As opposed to “general human types”, Watt asserts that the novel had characters that were individualized and their backgrounds were developed. These characters were such that they appeared as individuals who existed in the contemporary environment. Characters now had both a name and a surname. This individual could be located to a specific space and time. The approximation to reality was successful because of the use of a time scale: the novel’s closeness to the texture of daily experience directly depends upon its employment of a much more minutely discriminated timescale than had previously employed in narrative (Watt, 1957, p. 22).

The effect of literature on a society cannot be underestimated, especially with regard to realist works. Fischer (1959, p. 207), describing the nature of literary compositions, states that “born of reality, it acts back on reality [...] a discussion about the characters and situation in a novel stirs up decisive problem of social life and philosophy. Art [Literature] and the discussion of art [literature] are a forward-thrusting part of life in the socialist world”. Thus, born of socio-political condition, realism depicted the struggles of the working class and Europe’s socio-economic inequality. Realism “reflected the positivist belief that art [literature] should show unvarnished truth, realists took up subjects that were generally regarded as not important enough for a serious work of art” (Stokstad, 2008, p. 1017). Ousmane once said that “what I want to represent is a social realism” (As qtd. in Schipper, 1989, p.139). Thus, as Eustace Palmer observes, Ousmane’s novels are an embodiment of a working-class perspective presented through realism. Ousmane also states “the idea of my work derives from this teaching: to keep as close as possible to reality and the people” (Schipper, 1989, p. 136).

The Aristotelian concept of man as a social being seems to be closely adhered to in all realistic texts. Georg Lukacs argues that this dictum is applicable to all great realistic literature (1956: p. 19). The focus of such texts is on society, rather than the individual. As a Marxist proselyte, Lukacs glowingly agrees with the realistic tenets to the extent that he sees it as “the basis of literature; and that all styles even those seemingly most opposed to realism originate in it or are significantly related to it” (As qtd. In Abd Al-Salam and Morsy, 2017, p. 26). The Lukacsean advocacy for realist literature is formed out of Georg Lukacs’ political experience during the 1920s. Explaining Lukacs’ political career and theoretical postulation further, Abd Al-Salam and Morsy (2017) observe that Lukacs felt that “realist literature would be the best alternative that could enable the working class to achieve the required social change”. Thus, as one of the most influential Marxist critics, he decided to examine literary works sociologically to address the problematic issues caused by capitalism because he “believes that Man in modern societies suffered alienation and self-fragmentation due to the oppressive capitalist division of labor; a crucial problem that can prevent progress in any society” (p. 27).

The belief in the function of literature/art, as a reflection of its society as well as its age, in the progress of human life has been an inherent belief since ancient times, and is regarded as one of the most important approaches in the history of literary criticism. Admitting such ingrained relationship between art/literature and social reality, thinkers and intellectuals of the 20th centuries decided to inaugurate what is known as sociology of literature. Proponents of such approach, accordingly, perceive literature as a document that records or reflects circumstances and changes within any society. Adeoti (2015, p. 3) sharing his thoughts on the future performance of literature in socio-cultural, economic and political vortex of the continent offers that “literature is one of the knowledge tools designed by man from ancient times to dissect and straighten the crooked ribs of a society [...]. It is a vintage observatory from where the writer is strategically placed to observe the goings-on in the society. (S)/he may distort or realistically re-present the picture to create awareness and effect changes where necessary for social transformation”.

We know that imitation and intertextuality explore how the relationships between texts produce “tones” that resonate in new and often unexpected ways. Social realism and intertextuality are well-equipped to uncover the polyphonic qualities of texts because they both begin with the observation that texts are not isolated literary units but complex productions that exist in relation to other texts. Through these relationships, texts do not retain a uniform meaning but are constantly resignified by readers who approach the material from new perspectives. It is the dynamic process of re-hearing how texts relate to one another that social realism and intertextuality seek to decode. Kristeva’s significant contributions to a definition of intertextuality relate to the intertextual presence of the social. In “Bypassing Intertextuality”, Mai (1991) offers a useful analysis of certain passages from Kristeva’s essay, “The Bounded Text”:

the literary scholar’s intertextual task would be to define ‘the specificity of different textual arrangements by placing them within the general text (culture) of which they are a part and which is in turn, part of them’. The intertextual procedure would, ‘by studying the text as intertextuality, consider it as such within (the text of) society and history.’ Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality here resembles very closely a sociological theory of literature. The important difference is that Kristeva no longer conceives of society/history as something outside the text, some objective entity over against the text, but partaking of the same textuality as literature (p. 40)

Thus, Kristeva sees society and history as texts that function in the same way as other texts. Intertextuality becomes the means by which society and history are filtered through texts.

Intersectionality as a conceptual discursive polemic in women's studies or postcolonial studies springs from a need to identify multiple and interconnected forms of inequality and oppression. Nash (2008, p. 9) posits that it is used to study "multiple marginalized subjects"; hence the concept has been used specifically in trying to theorize black women's experiences of oppression. As an analytical practice, intersectionality is, to this day, still within common academic use, considered to focus upon the marginalized, multi-burdened and oppressed. But the feminist theorists' patent on the concept has been reduced to combine and interconnect the complexities of lived experience. For this paper, we embrace intersectionality as a more general approach, looking to constantly identify and challenge the shifting discourses within which power dynamics develop and change. Thus, we reframe the tool to accommodate the analysis of privileged ruling elite in African literature.

Symphony of the Oppressed, Advocacy for the Poor in Niyi Osundare's "They Too Are the Earth"

This is a poem with social vision which focuses comprehensively on the subjects of social differentiation and subalternity. It is a song of woes and symphony of collapse of humanity. The poet makes a clarion call for advocacy purposes, a helpful protest for the redemption of the teeming masses that are voiceless and remained largely in ghoulish existence in the dialectics of the ruling elites' scarcity of positive leadership characters. The poet showcases the life of the poor masses as antithetical to the profligacy of the rich or "ruling/ruining" class, who inflicts intolerable suffering on its people; the resultant of its incompetence, greed and gross opportunism. The political leaders and their cohorts are clueless, rape the treasury and the people "groan" (Osundare, 1986, p. 45) under their unrestrained psychiatric stealing and kleptomaniac looting. Viewed within the space of contest of text and context, the poet seemingly communicates the realities of the Nigerian state in the present democratic space. For instance, Ikotun (2012), while focusing on the problem of leadership in Nigeria and its collateral impact on the economy and good life of the masses quoted Sagay (2010) thus: "in spite of the dismal standard of living, poverty of the country and low income per capita of Nigeria, Nigerian legislators in Abuja have awarded themselves the highest salaries and allowances in the world. In other words, the Nigerian law makers in Abuja are the highest paid in the world" (p. 244). Furthermore, the legislative rascality of the Nigerian legislators is statistical noted as follows: "in 2009, a senator earned N240,000,000.00 in salaries and allowances, while his house of Representatives counter-part earned N203,760,000.00. In other words, a Senator earned about \$1.7 million, and a member of the House of Representatives earned \$1.45 million, per annum. By contrast, an American Senator earned \$174,000.00 and a U.K. Parliamentarian earned about \$64,000.00 per annum". According to the analysis, the cruelty of the legislators pay is much more revealing when the incomes per capita of these countries are placed side-by-side with their Parliamentary pay as follows:

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of per capita income of three countries

Country	Income per Capita	Legislative Pay
USA	\$46,300.00	\$174,000.00
UK	\$35,468.00	\$64,000.00
Nigeria	\$2,249.00	\$1,700,000.00

Source: *The Punch* (August 18, 2010), p. 8.

As a poem of social vision, the poet, using his personal insight, finds the socio-economic condition of the post-colonial Nigerian masses intolerable; therefore, he conscientizes the masses on their oppression. Again, the poet's illumination of disillusionment relieves the African writers' reason for the bitterness against neo-colonialism and the political actors who shattered the dreams of the struggle against colonialism after the independence of most African states. Kehinde (2005) may have given this clue when he offers that "the indigenous ruling class simply replaced the colonizer and began to rule with scorpion where the colonizer had ruled with whip" (p. 91). From every line of the poem, the poet seems to argue that the African elites are using the various institutional structures to punish their subjects rather than use them in the interest of the African societies. Achebe, in his practiced eye as a novelist and critic, seems to urge writers in Africa to engage their arts to imbricate the authentic African life (short of romanticism) and present "human condition". Thus, as cited by Ojinmah (1991), Maduka (1981) writes that to Achebe and "most African writers ... there is a direct relationship between literature and social institutions. The principal function of literature is to criticize these institutions and eventually bring about desirable changes in the society" (p. 5). Osundare appears to have demonstrated this command in his poem under focus. The poetry of life, as shown in his poetical composition, laugh to scorn the realities of the African states in the new millennium that privileges loudly the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) of vain hope and yawning propositions for prosperity and de-escalation of the colonies of the poor. The poet's stirring satire and condemnation of the establishment ideology aligns with the Marxist view that "the suffocating influences of the capitalist manipulation of economic resources, [...] perpetually make the masses socially and economically depressed" (Afolayan, 2011, p. 2). Having said this, a Marxist reading of the poem as indicative of African sociopolitical dystopianism appears to be a possibility. Looking at the idea of Marxist's utopianism, it manifests itself as 'a welfare state' (Afolayan *ibid*, p. 2). And that "a utopian society strikes one as a society which maintains a wide range of social services, and this guarantees for all its citizens a certain standard of living" (Buah, 1978, p. 122, as qtd. In Afolayan, (2011, p. 2). The welfare state is one of the spin-offs from Karl Marx's analysis of human predicaments within various political institutions. To the Marxist's practiced eyes, the bulk of world's population is people who are often the impoverished, whose misfortune has always been "to work for their master, and to remain poor, earning just enough to keep bone and flesh together. In ancient times, they were the slaves: in the middle Ages, they were the serfs; and in the modern capitalist countries, they were the wage earners often called the working classes. In advanced books they are often referred to as the proletariats" (As qtd. In Afolayan, 2011, p. 6).

Osundare appears to capture the scenes of life of the impoverished people, working under strenuous conditions which require their inborn strength for their existential survival in our society in the motifs of exploitation and dehumanization. Most of them are involved in jobs that are so energetic and less than lacking in life-fulfillment. They are, according to the poet, "the millions hewing wood and hurling water [...] muddy every pore like naked moles" whose existence is typified by "unrest" (Osundare, 1986, p. 45). Our cities are packed full of alarm-clock workers who hardly see eye-to-eye with their children during the week. They rise early

to work in order to avoid the dreadful traffic snarl only to sleep, most often, in the same quagmire when going back home. These are workers who are constantly harassed by inflated bills for power supply that is always in short supply or not available at all; payment for the environment that is always filthy and inhabitable; charged for phone services which they struggle with to make their calls through, and so on. We hear their “distant groans [...] as they are being buried alive in hard unfathomable mines”. The societal structures Buah outlines as cited by Afolayan above is a portrayal of capitalist economic system and this seems to capture Osundare’s thoughts in the poem thus: “the swansongs of beggars sprawled out in brimming gutters [...] under snakeskin shoes and Mercedes tyres” (p. 45). Affluence, exploitation and the profit motive are the notable features of the society which the poet appears to observe and in which he lives. The rich are affluent enough to have several and choicest cars to go in for rather ostentatiously expensive lifestyle and not to deny themselves any bodily satisfaction. On the other hand, the poor are really poor and are shamelessly exploited – variously suffered from different forms of racketeering – the defenseless man, with no influence, came off worst every time. When the poor could not contribute to the rich they are simply ignored and left to be broken. Money-making and personal covetousness ruled the land. Men live for their offices; the rulers live for frivolity. Osundare’s symphony of the poor goes beyond the strict composition of metrical lines. He assuredly showcases his literary genius and concern for the masses and society in his play *The State Visit*. The play is an indictment of military rule in Africa. Osundare, using the latitude of the theatre, carpets the military for the gluttonous attitudes of the army Generals and the civilian club members, their warped psychology, larceny and profligacy engender misrule and elongation of poverty among the populace. The play encourages the masses to rise to freedom and liberation on the rights issue of their capacity to raise insurrection that can allow responsible leadership for the prosperity and abundance of life for all.

In his essay entitled “The Trouble with Nigeria”, Achebe is credited to have stated categorically that the trouble with Nigeria is “simply and squarely a failure of leadership” (As qtd. in Ikotun 2012: 236). While agreeing with Achebe, we can extend the frontier of this brutal truth to imbricate the condition of leadership class in Africa. That is, as Akinnaso (2011) holds, the “motives and motivation behind political struggles in Nigeria [...] (is) the absence of neither partisanship nor ideology, political struggle in Nigeria is motivated by personal, ethnic, regional and religious struggles”. Further to this, Ikotun (2012) seems to capture all when he states that Nigerian politicians merely join whichever political party that best facilitates the exploitation of these fault lines in their political struggles. The Nigeria political environment is a cyst of culture of impunity; where absence of standards creates room for laws to be breached; and “above all, where endemic official corruption is unabated, political offices provide quickest access to wealth, more so when that wealth follows from poorly-regulated oil wells” (Ikotun, 2012, p. 236).

However, Osundare contrasts the oppressed with their oppressors, people “who fritters the forest and harry the hills, who live that earth may die”. These are people who live the life of pleasure, debauchery and plunder. The oppressors are really living the life of profligacy and wantonness, no doubt, as Sagay (2010) seems to explain about the National Assembly leaders of the Nigeria’s Fourth Republic that “in 2009, the Federal legislators received a total of N102.8 billion comprising N11.8 billion as salaries and N90.96 billion (non-taxable) as allowances”. Having stated this, the Lawyer-social-commentator then asked the following questions:

- Is the tax payer getting value for this colossal sum in the current democratic dispensation?

- Should 5 per cent of Nigerian’s annual budget be spent on 109 senators and 360 House of Representative members?
- In other words, should 469 Nigerians gulp 5 per cent of the country’s budget, leaving the remaining 150 million Nigerians to receive about N1000.00 each?

Oby Ezekwesili, a one-time Nigeria Minister of Education and now a World Bank official shares her thoughts on understanding the basic economic fundamental that “the wealth and poverty of nations inexorably depend on their domestic productivity and relative competitiveness”. Furthermore, she says that “the economic welfare of every citizen can only be guaranteed by nation-states that are governed by people who understand his basic economic thought. No nation that has developed did so by having leaders who remained complacent in the face of the stark reality of every poor and declining performance of national productivity and competitiveness indices” (Ikotun, 2012, p. 250). Having offer this expert thought to challenge the political leaders to embrace positive leadership which is genuinely transformative but unyielding, again, Ezekwesili surmises that “the Nigerian political and public sector space a ‘less than elite bunch’ that had established a world record of omnivorous and parasitic attitude to the public treasury” (Ikotun, 2012 p. 253).

Osundare’s aesthetics, serving advocacy purpose, brings social issue to the front-burner of the nation’s consciousness driving conversations that birth social change. While in the poem under discussion, the poet raises issues around the socio-economic life of the masses, he as well extends the frontiers of the conversation to include the global debate around environmental degradation. The heavyweight of damage to the biosphere, according to the poet is the deforestation of the environment which is the after match of modernity and capitalists groveling for wealth. The poet blames the policymakers for the rape and abuse of the environment. Thus, in his preface to the anthology, he holds that “in a land where vision and humanistic sympathy have taken leave of the ruling class, hardly is there any policy aimed at stopping the parlous depletion of our natural being. Hardly is anyone aware that today’s profit (for them) is tomorrow’s irreparable loss for universal humanity” (Osundare, 1986, p. xi). It is also the loss of vision that makes the elites consider the masses as insignificant and consequently, keeping them in abject state of exploitation and dehumanization.

Quest for Positive Leadership and Good Governance in Aminatta Sow Fall’s *The Beggars’ Strike*

Many challenges of the post-independence era, mostly on governance and socio-economic issues, have orchestrated thematic shifts of notable significance in representational scholarships in African writings. Losambe (1996, p. xii) holds that “African prose narrative has grown in form and content in parallel with major [...] developments in the continent”. Novelists like Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O, and so on, have all represented neo-colonial leadership failure and disappointment and followers’ cynicism and hypocrisy in the most fervent of aesthetic crafting and dialectical skill in many of their works. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah records the Nkrumah’s Ghana as being entirely morally deficient. Awosika (1997, p. 7) observes that “members of the low classes are avaricious, dubious, vain and ignorant. Bribery is rife among the fairly educated working class while the political elite are plain”. Sow’s fictional universe, *The Beggars’ Strike*, is a testimonial text on the culture of impunity and anomalous political chicanery among the political elites in African states and the followers’ feeble resistance to their waywardness because of their own moral absurdity. The story centers on Mour Ndaiye, the Director of Public Health and Hygiene. An order came from the Presidency through the Minister of Health that

the high ways and the streets – the city should be swept clean of beggars, lepers, the crippled – all forms of human oddities. Mour Ndaiye, as usual, hands over the task of cleaning up the streets of these “wretched of the earth” to his honest, loyal and hardworking assistant, Keba Dabo to carry out. The exercise was successful. The beggars and other unwanted freaks are forcefully ejected from their popular lay-outs – the intersections, traffic-light boulevards, hospitals, banks, markets and Houses of God. Virtually, all places, which these “parodies of humanities” held in captivity, are delivered from them. Thus, the President himself is very happy about the result of the cleaning exercise such that he personally congratulates Mour Ndaiye in a nationwide broadcast.

Thereafter, the President announces to the generality of the people his desire to reshuffle his cabinet; specifically, to appoint a Vice President. Ndaiye, still reveling in the air of presidential accolades and the lust of general-goodwill of the people for virtuoso performance becomes swollen-headed. The funny idea of his possible consideration for the post of Vice-president begins to take foot-hold in him. He thus begins to scheme and search for help, within and without, to increase his fortune and chances of emerging as the next Vice President. Ndaiye sends his devoted, but gullible wife Lolli to his trusted marabout Sergine Birama who often advises him thus: ‘let him have no fear; [...] he can only go forward. He is made to be a leader; it is written in his star’ (p. 4). On a day that Lolli even goes to Birama, to specifically ask about Ndaiye’s chance. The marabout claims, “what I see is very clear. A star which shines, which shines... prosperity, happiness, Mour could have a very great surprise... (p.5). Further to this, Birama asks him to sacrifice a ram. But who will bell the cat? Who will quench the fire of blind ambition that has lighted the soul of Ndaiye which make him emit heat? Thus while appreciating the comforting good-will message which the marabout sent to him, Mour Ndaiye is not satisfied with the advice of his trusted Birama, he requires a specific answer and which must be in affirmation of his desire. Ndaiye, needs to come down to Birama himself and he tells his ambition to Serigne: “A few months ago, the President said he was going to select a Vice-President. I would like you to pray for the President to think of me...” (p. 18). His marabout, Birama, speaking with benefit of insight replies him “That which you desire is in God’s power to grant you. And I think that He will grant it [...] You shall have your wish, if it so pleases God” (p. 19). He therefore asks Ndaiye to make sacrifice of five white ram, which should be slaughtered and distributed to beggars.

With this simple storyline, *Sow Fall* seems to expose the worst side of men of power and the vanity of the governed in the post-independence African states. If, as stated above, realistic texts portrayed the struggles of the working class in Europe’s socio-economic inequality, in African states, the situation is less than welcoming; people contend with the loss of excitement, mirage of hope and acidity of desire for good governance which was believed would have led to development and prosperity of the continent. This is the crux of disillusionment in African literature; and, novelistic form has been a capable outlet in the hands of the writers, as intelligentsia, to express their frustration, disappointment and alienation. Rockwell (1974) argues that “social facts may be revealed by fiction” (p. 117). African writers appear to have bought into this possibility. Many of the writers and critics of the art have loudly view literary compositions as having contributory values to the fortune of the continent through realistic portrayals of historical events, socio-cultural and political conditions. Achebe (1964), Abiola (1991), Gbileka (1997), Umukoro (1994), Adebayo (1987) have all enunciated on the redemptive values of writers and their arts on African continent. Akhmemokhan (2014) citing Echenim, holds that some writers see their vocation as “a sacred mission which characterize society, and thereby creating social and political awareness in their readership” (p. 147).

The public acknowledgement of Mour Ndaiye's achievement by the President in his New Year address to the Nation does not however, suggest that everybody is happy with him. A significant reference is the Minister of State in Ndaiye's ministry who feels threatened by Ndaiye's rising profile and his rumored chance of becoming a Junior Minister in the Ministry while the incumbent Minister of State might have his appointment terminated. Thus, this sickly ambitious and desperate politician begins his own campaign of hatred and falsehood against Ndaiye in the public eye. Ndaiye himself feels unsafe in the atmosphere of the often gently-rendered assurances and advice about fate and belief in God by Birama. He also realizes that many other people in high places in the country are equally strategizing for the post. He begins to look for another marabout. Ndaiye's diligent scouting eventually gets him Kifi Bokoul who has an intimidating track record of spirituality. He thus sets aside Serigne Birama's idea of praying "to God and wait [...] with equanimity for the glory with which the creator would soon summon him" (p. 55).

The new marabout, Kifi Bokoul stays indoor for "seven days and seven nights" (p. 58), asking in the spiritual realm what the fate has for Ndaiye. At the end of the retreat Bokoul gives his findings:

You will have what you desire and you will have it very shortly. You will be Vice-President. To achieve this, you must sacrifice a bull whose coat must be of one color, preferably fawn. The ground must be soaked with the blood of this bull which you must slaughter here in the courtyard of this house; then you must divide it into seventy-seven portions which you will distribute to battu-bearers" (p. 58).

The spiritualist gives further instruction thus:

this sacrifice ... Must not be limited to one district of the town only. You are destined to be appreciated in the four corners of the town, in the four corners of the country; you will be a man of fame: this fame must be symbolized by the manner you distribute the meat from the sacrifice: offer this meat throughout the city, the beggars in every district of the city (p. 58).

The sacrifice also includes "three times seven yards of white, non-silky material as well as seven hundred kola-nuts" (p. 59). Should Ndaiye follow these instructions meticulously, the end product is that, he "will be Vice-President a week later". Thus, the meat of a bull needs to be shared out "*not later than a week*". Filled with joy and thought of certitude of the pronouncement of Bokoul, Ndaiye fails to realize the enormity of the task ahead of him. The "Battu-bearers" are the beggars that he has successfully evicted from the streets, through the indefatigable efforts of Keba Dabo and on whose misfortune he has risen to stardom, as a celebrated administrator. Ndaiye's attitude here is short of cleverness; his desperation to realize his ambition, thus, fails him to immediately detect the irony of fate that has just befalls his circumstance.

As often characterized of politicians and bureaucrats who, on the wings of Providence, are catapulted into stardom, Ndaiye, on the stretch of his rising to estimation in the eye of the public has started to build a harem by marrying another woman, a modern lady unlike Lolli, who is a product of traditional life. Lolli feels the pain of this debauchery and loss of her husband to another woman, but her traditional background neither supports hysterical outburst nor any attempt to challenge her husband's decision. She remembers her mother's warning:

Do you want to be responsible for my death, Lolli? You must know that if Mour divorces you, you will be covered with shame. When a woman has got eight children, some of them old enough to be married, she can't allow herself of behave like a child; Mour is your husband. He is free. He doesn't belong to you. (p. 33).

Lolli's self-effacement however fetches her only rejection from her daughter, Raabi. Raabi's resentment of her mother's stupidity at not rising to defend her marriage fell through because they are products of different times and strokes. To this extent, when Ndaiye brings his marabout, Kiffi Bokoul to the house he has abandoned his wife and her children for long, Lolli still receives him with open arms.

The unassuming instructions of Koffi Bokoul and complexity surrounding its actuality later become the hoist of Ndaiye's petard. To perform the sacrifice, he realizes that the beggars need to be in their natural habitat. But they have been evicted by the man who needs them. What a laugh of fate? Ndaiye becomes more troubled. He thinks of counting on Keba Dabo's support to ask the beggars to return to the street for at least a day to perform the sacrifice. Keba Dabo rejects this unintelligent and self-serving request and, calls off his bluff. Out of expediency and desperation, Ndaiye approaches the beggars at the resettlement village. Salla and Sarr, the two outspoken members of the "parodies of humanities". His entreaties fell on deaf ears when the beggars are unbending in their demands and strongly resolved to have their own pound of flesh from the man they considered as the pillar of their unfortunate eviction from their places of livelihood. All in all, as the sacrifice cannot be made, Ndaiye and Kouli, his driver, are exhausted and went back. Just then the President announces Toumaner Sane and the Vice President of the country.

The thrust of this narrative goes beyond the simplicity of its plot structure and the earthy language of Sow. The text is a prototype of sociology of everyday life of the marginalized, the voiceless in the society. What the writer embarks upon here is the need to free the society of human suffocation which we intermittently create. Thus, just as the writer condemns the attitudes of the rich, the elite and the politicians in the society and their crooked ambitions and misgovernance, she equally lambasts the weaklings, the invalids and the poor who take advantage of their natural and unnatural state or predicament to become social nuisance. The beggars, themselves are a group of people who exploit their natural and unnatural misfortunes to cheat on their patrons. They know very well that their patrons do not give alms out of charity, but rather in furtherance of their own fortune. The speech made by Nguirane Sarr, one of the beggars, while trying to organized a protest against their considered unfair treatment by the state declares that:

we're not dogs! [...] Listen, we can perfectly well get organized. Even these madmen, these heartless brutes who descend on us and beat us up, even they give no charity. They need to give alms because they need our prayers – wishes for long life, for prosperity, for pilgrimage; they like to hear them every morning to drive away their bad dreams of the night before, and to maintain their hopes that things will be better tomorrow. You think that people give out of the goodness of their hearts? Not at all. They give out of an instinct for self-preservation (Fall, 1981, p. 22)

The beggars thus indulge in their undignified business to soar the dependence of their patrons on them. The rebellion of the beggars, however, seems to lack profound moral basis outside its

mere reactionary posture against their offensive and intolerable dehumanization. Invariably, the moral essence of their struggle is of equivalent to murder in the Cathedral. Ideological underpinning lost its steam; the beggars crowded themselves out of something substantial, scrambling for inanity; they fail to epitomize good governance as the highest energy of democratic norm. To this extent, they raise the bar of items to be collected as gifts from their patrons or clients when they are evicted from the streets and lodged at Salla's hide out. They upend the idea that beggars can't be choosers. There is therefore a reversal of role here; the beggars begin to demand what they want and not what their patrons bring with them.

The beggars' knowing conspiratorial hypocrisy together with their clients/patrons is a type of corruption. Corrupt practices, as we know, is one of the festering issues undermining developmental agenda and growth in Africa. As the action of the beggars reveals to us, it seems to conform to the generally held view that in Africa, there is no segment of the society that is corruption-free. It is an insanity that is troubling and embarrassing. Political corruption is characterized in the portrayal of Ndaiye's desperation and clumsy farce. His actions sum up Pogson and Maduabuchi (2013)'s view that "political corruption takes place at high levels of the political system, when politicians and agents of the state entrusted with the responsibility of making and enforcing laws in the name of the people, are using this authority to sustain their power, status and wealth" (p. 190). Nonetheless, the moral of the fictional narrative, according to Sow, in *The Beggars' Strike*, is that being handicapped is not a license to deepening one's indignities. The writer makes us to realize that the beggars are fully conscious of their significance in the society, though what they crave for is to be "treated as citizens with full rights like everyone else. But, it is difficult for them in a society where they are variously demarcated as "derelicts", "parodies of human beings", "dregs of society", "human pollution", "conglomeration of humanity", "running sore" (Fall, 1981, pp. 1–2). These stereotypical categorizations raise the discourse of disability as a social construct and the politics of its spiritual manipulation for hypocritical behavior as well as the proliferation of mass poverty and disempowerment. However, the beggars' immoral attitude is also a type of political corruption. This is because political corruption, as enunciated in the action of the beggars, affects the way in which decisions are made and manipulates political institutions, distorts the rules and procedures of institutions of government.

Another reading of this narrative is Sow's desire for good governance and positive leadership in African states. Citing Fagbenle (2011), Ikotun (2012) holds that good governance is about the people being governed; it starts with the people and ends with the people. It is about the consuming passion of the government to add value to the lives of the masses, to make life easier for them by an ever-thoughtful process of helping to ease their pains and give them the opportunity to come out of their best – each and every one. Good governance and positive leadership walk together. It is a synergy that is proactive; it not only thinks about today, it thinks about tomorrow and the day after tomorrow; about ten, twenty, fifty years hence. More importantly, good governance starts from a leadership that thinks, thinks about the people and about making their lives better. It is about leadership that inspires and dreams big dreams. In Nigeria today, the country is faced with a myriad of challenges: the president and the governors must be able to think through them for solution.

Conclusion

The moral and aesthetic nature of the texts under consideration demands the theoretical reading paradigm intertextuality. Intertextuality informed by poststructuralism is a theoretical approach that enables one to read the moral and aesthetic elements of a work in a productive way.

Osundare's poetic virtuosity and Sow Fall's fictional narrative are augmented by their representation of failure of governance in post-independence African states. By locating the texts within the national space of the writers, Osundare shares his many disappointments about unequal distribution of economic opportunities in Nigeria; it seems to be a clear indication of poor leadership on the part of the elites who are fond of taking care of themselves at the expense of the majority of the people. Similarly, Sow Fall appears to condemn the loss of national values in the face of unbridled corruption and over-estimation of economic interest over and above the well-being of the poor and the challenged in Senegalese society. From the foregoing, the writers portray socio-economic societies that are unfair and unjust in the distribution of political power and economic rights of the people.

African literature, beginning from the early morning of its creation is political. The volume of works around the re-construction of colonial ideology and stirring protest against neo-colonialism attest to this observation. The engagement of intertextual theory in the discussion of the "They too Are the Earth" and *The Beggars' Strike* has reflected the idea of literary works' interrogation of life. Hence, the reading of realism as not only a narrative technique but also a recreation of life that projects a vision of life that is clearly absurd to the writers' expectation.

The two writers, while engaging in intertextual conversation invite us to see, in realistic terms, the implosion of politics without principles and upend the consequences of poor governance in the materiality of social dislocation occasioned by unfair and unequal socio-political environment on its victims. For instance, Osundare appears to make us aware that while exploitation and oppression, the Siamese twins of injustice and bad governance are on the prowl, good reason waited and justice watched. There are striking balances in the texts which encouraged the paradigm of intertextual interrogation. One, the writers choose unfair and unjust socioeconomic situations as the setting of their texts. The writers, taking literary creation as a weapon of social criticism lambast the poor leadership that encumbered the life of the majority of the people; they also show that lack of political power of the masses as the epitome of their loss of economic rights. Furthermore, having observed that the people have almost lost their political value, the writers as the conscience of the societies protest through writings the low hanging tree of opportunities offered the poor and the challenged in most African states. It can be argued, in this connection, that the texts under discussion optimize the intertextual connection that exists between them in the sense that the writings focus on the use of state power by the elites to favor the rich and the influential members of the societies, most often, at the peril of the poor. This insight, the echo of social decadence, corruption, abuse of power and culture of impunity and its impact on the masses, therefore, suggests the claim of symphony of the poor in this paper. Barthes (1981), writing on textuality holds that:

[A]ny text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in more or less recognisable forms: the texts of the previous and surrounding culture. Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc., pass into the text and are redistributed within it. [...] Epistemologically, the concept of intertext is what brings to theory of the volume of sociality (p. 39).

Barthes view on the "volume of sociality" is brought to the text by means of intertextuality.

The writers, using several of the paraphernalia, the stock-in-trade, of their arts seem to agree with Aristotle's theory of leadership since 350 BC which remains relevant in its timeliness and simplicity that a good leader must have ethos, integrity and moral character which confers on

him/her the credibility to ask for followership; that is, a good leader must have pathos or emotional connection with his/her followers. Good leaders must also have logos – they must be able to give solid, compelling reasons for their actions in relation to the common good, to persuade people to follow them.

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