

RELICS OF COLONIALISM AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION IN SELECTED FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN FICTIONS

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Abstract

The study interrogates relics of colonialism with a view to suggesting ways of promoting regional integration and development. It appears Africans are still suffering from colonial mentality and mental slavery. The more Africans are educated, the more divided they become in the affairs of their countries and regional advancement. The study, therefore, examines some factors that account for disintegration in the sub-Saharan region of the world. With sociological approach and critical textual analysis of purposively selected Francophone African fictions, viz: Bâ 's *Une si longue lettre*, Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, Calixthe Beyala's *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*, and Sow Fall 's *La grève des battus*; the study argues that upholding the use of African indigenous languages, promoting cultural tourism, migration, sustaining African community life style and encouraging cross-border marriages will ensure intercultural and regional integration. The study concludes that Africans need cultural reorientation to re-establish core value systems, which guarantee societal growth, development and sustainability. The study contributes to knowledge in the area of directing debates and more research activities towards this aspect of human life and existence. It also helps policy makers and curriculum planners to make adequate provisions for intercultural studies and regional integration.

Keywords: Relics, colonialism, Francophone African fictions, cultural integration

Introduction

Towards the end of the 20th century till now, culture which is people's way of life, set of beliefs, value system and civilization takes a central stage in international discourses. Evidently, peoples of the world begin to appreciate that understanding cultural diversity, among one another (tribes, nationalities and races) can pave the way for intercultural integration and peaceful global co-existence. Everywhere in the world, there is an established relationship with regard to literature, culture and society. Atanda (443) observes:

The 'rejuvenation' of society suggests the continuous interactions of history, literature and cultures in the 'creative processes'. The interactions will come in form of dialectic relationship. And that is why Berger and Luckmann say that sociology itself should be concerned with society as human product, viewing society as an objective truth. Literature is also an integral aspect of this objective reality.

Literature, culture and society appear to be a place where three paths intersect. Literature, a creative art, which could be in spoken or written words, painting or other forms, expresses human experiences, imaginations, thoughts and observations with reference to a given society; its people, history, culture, tradition, values and civilization during a particular period of time (Ogundokun, 149). The literary sociologists hold that literature is not an isolated entity on its own. It is a careful reflection of something; past or present; dead or alive and it (literature) even probes into the unknown future, all in an attempt to positively shape the human society. Drawing some strength from Arthur Efland, Adegbeye (160) reiterates:

A work of art is ...a representation of the world outside of art – often the everyday social world ...within general education, the purpose of art education is not to induct individuals into the world of the professional fine arts community..., it is to enable individuals to find meaning in the world of art for life in the

everyday world.

Connecting oneself to the above declaration, one can simply put it that literature, a facet of the arts, is a means by which human societies and their world views can be interpreted, understood and assimilated for the purpose of a happy living. Culture comprises artifacts, customs and traditional behavioral traits of a group of people, which can be material or non-material in nature. Material aspect of culture concerns physical things like works of arts, landscape, fabrications and many other visible manifestations of human creativity. Non-physical manifestations like religion, customs, traditional values, beliefs and language are the non-material facet of culture. Babawale (5) asserts that "Culture entails all those variables that are essential to the cause of human advancement for a better living and improved life chances." It is against this backdrop that we have decided to examine intercultural elements in Bâ 's *Une si longue lettre*, Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, Calixthe Beyala's *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*, and Sow Fall 's *La grève des bâttu*; with a view to propagating regional integration.

Discussion

The sophistication of the modern world with regard to globalization, has directly or indirectly affected many aspects of our life. In Africa, to some extent, globalization has caused the destruction of cultural values and cultural identities because of the overbearing tendencies of the western culture over other cultures and civilizations around the world. Gladdens (64) puts globalization as:

The intensification of worldwide social relations which links distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occupying many miles away and vice versa.

This explains the concept of the world being viewed as a *global village*. The use of internet, mobile communication devices and other electronic gadgets are examples of what make globalization effective. That notwithstanding, people cannot entirely do away with their culture; cultural studies and regional integration become a necessity. As a matter of fact, globalization has not stopped the

traditional perception as regards history and geography. Colonialism has equally, perhaps by accident, formed another kind of diversity. Despite extraordinary use of the colonial masters' languages such as English and French, in the case of Africa, the Africans share very little cultural or economic affinity with Europe, America or countries of the Pacific Rim (Layiwola, 13).

Upholding the use of African indigenous languages

Language is the communicative tool through which man expresses his thoughts and his emotions; likes and dislikes in a given community, large or small. Language is primarily in speech form. One of the major aspects of indigenous knowledge is the ability to acquire, speak or use one's native language. Proverbs, chants, folklores/story-telling and music are channels by which language can be displayed as an indigenous knowledge, in the very first place, among other functions it can perform. Art is a means of upholding cultural norms, values and civilizations from one generation to another, oral tradition is not found wanting in this regard. Through folkloric elements of African culture, people can seek and discover their origin as well as promote their identity. Epochi-Olise (111) notes:

African oral tradition, though tied to the cultures, experiences and values of its people, becomes an avenue of transmitting knowledge, wisdom, feelings and attitudes in the society, especially as it helps in shaping the literary world and works of African writers.

The business of self recognition takes a central stage in most revolutionary African texts. This artistic display marks the beginning of the self awareness of the novelists and by extension, of the African people in general. It is the self awareness that brings about the idea of revolutionary consciousness in the committed and liberating literature of the selected African novelists of French expression. The concept of "self" is an assessment of whom you are, for the purpose of development. Using Niakoro in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Sembène Ousmane revolts against the endangering of the African languages in the face of modernization. This is

another kind of cultural consciousness. The old African woman laments:

Depuis ma naissance – et Dieu sait qu’il y a longtemps – je n’ai jamais entendu dire qu’un toubabou ait appris le bambara ou une autre langue de ce pays. Mais vous autres, les déracinés, vous ne pensez qu’à ça. A croire que notre langue est tombée en décadence ! (*Les bouts de bois...* p. 18).

Ever since I was born – and God knows that was a long time ago – I have never heard of a white man who had learned to speak Bambara, or any other language of this country. But you rootless people think only of learning his, while our language dies (*God’s bits of wood*, p. 4).

The novelist craves one’s indulgence on the question of language when Niakoro, the oldest woman in the story lashes out at Ad’jibid’ji for the girl’s ceaseless speaking of the white man’s tongue. She laments that ever since she was born she has never heard of a white man who had learned to speak Bambara, or any other language of her country. But rootless people of her tribe think only of learning the white man’s language while African languages die. It is worrisome that most African languages are going into extinction because the natives have adopted their colonial master’s language as their lingua franca; official languages for administrative purposes, educational and/or commercial purposes at the expense of their indigenous languages. Consolidating the writer’s position on the sorrowful state of abandonment, to which African languages are subjected, he uses Bakayoko to frown at a fellow African, Beaugosse. He says:

Tu peux garder ton français pour toi, dit Bakayoko, les hommes comprendront mieux si tu leur parles oulof, bambara ou toucouleur (*Les bouts de bois...* p. 290).

You can keep your French to yourself... The men will understand you better if you speak oulof, bambara or toucouleur which are their native languages

(Our translation).

The colonial policy of assimilation and that of association in the Francophone African states, as relics of colonialism, can be fingered as one of the major factors which eroded African culture, norms and value system. In the area of language, the colonial policy encouraged the use of the colonial master’s tongue as the language of administration, official language, lingua franca and language of the press as well as language of socialization. As though that was not enough, after the colonial period, the madness of adopting and using the colonial master’s tongue to perform the functions mentioned above continued unchecked. The African elites contributed to the neglect and near collapse of African indigenous languages in their various communities and in different capacities. For example, they do not speak their native languages to their children at home. In schools and colleges, children are taught various subjects in colonial master’s language. Pupils and students are often sanctioned, punished or fined for speaking their mothers’ tongue in schools. The African indigenous languages are branded as vernaculars, so they should not be heard within the four walls of a school. Policy makers, in the post-colonial period, have blindly demonstrated the superiority of the so-called official language over the perceived local languages by legalizing the foreign language as a compulsory and a “must pass” subject for admission into institutions of higher learning or job placements.

It is indeed a self consciousness to have called people’s attention to the lingering language crisis in most African communities. For instance, we see no reason why native languages cannot be used for teaching and learning purposes in African schools. “Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else’s? It looks a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling” (Onyemelukwe, 2004: 160). Against this backdrop, Some African creative writers, therefore, denounce the preference for foreign languages to the African indigenous languages.

Bakayoko reminds us of other protagonists of clear and collective revolt in African literatures such as Tioumbé in Sembène Ousmane’s *L’Harmattan*, and Manuel in

Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneur de la rosée*. They struggle seriously to bring about collective revolts in their different situations. As new generation of African fighters that Ferdinand Oyono prepared ground for in his *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, they actually rejected the existing domination and blind submission between the colonial masters and the Africans and even intensify the antagonistic relation between them. Albert Memmi (164) remarks:

Le refus de colonisateur sera le prélude indispensable à la reprise de soi. Il faut se débarrasser de cette image accusatrice annihilant ; il faut s'attaquer de front à l'oppression puisqu'il est impossible de la contourner. Après avoir été si longtemps refusé par le colonisateur, le jour est venu où c'est le colonisé qui refuse le colonisateur.

The refusal of the colonial master is the indispensable prelude to self-discovery. We must get rid of this annihilating accuser; it is necessary to curtail the oppression since it is hard to stop it out rightly. After having been denied for so long by the colonial lords, the time has come and it is the colonized that refuses the colonizer (Our translation)

At least, in literary creations, some Africans now have their own pound of flesh from their ex-colonial masters. Writers like Sembène Ousmane, Aimé Césaire and Jacques Roumain have done away with inferiority complex and so do not exhibit any form of cowardice in their anti-colonial activities.

Moreover, it is important to point out that *Rebelle*, *La Grève des bâttu* and *Une si longue lettre* are revolts, which are outburst of frustration and/or desperation rather than a trade union struggle which is presented in *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*. Also, *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, *Les vertiges du trône* and *La Grève des bâttu* are collective revolts but *Le vieux nègre et la médaille* and *Une si longue lettre* are individual struggles. Notwithstanding, collective or individual revolt, any of them can bring about the desired social change in human societies. Both collective and individual

revolts are connected with revolutionary consciousness and rebellion. And, what is described as a failure or defeat by the layman is to the Marxist/feminist revolutionary, a potential victory, or no worse than "temporary darkness" (Georg Lukács, 2).

Migration

Movement of people from one place to another, within a given country or outside it is as old as man himself. However, it is a phenomenon that is generating serious debates in recent times between the earlier arrivals and the late arrivals among nations of the world. The major causes of human migration can be traced to factors such as insecurity, poor economic activities, and lack of infrastructural or social amenities, unemployment, famine, poverty and natural disasters like tsunami, volcanic eruption, landslide and deforestation. One could argue that human migration is, therefore, a necessity to human survival. Many African writers of French expression present the issue of migration in their literary works. For instance, Sembène Ousmane often talks about human displacement in its quest for survival. From his first novel, *Le docker noir* to *Le mandat* and *Guelwaar*, the novelist demonstrates that human migration is a necessity. But, whether or not, those characters who embarked on such voyage are successful or otherwise, is not the bone of contention in this study. Aki Bamabas, Ferdinand Oyono's hero in *Chemin d'Europe* and Massala Massala, Allain Mabanekou's main character in *Bleu – blanc – rouge* are travelling characters. Ramonu Sanusi's *Un Nègre a violé une Blonde à Dallas* and Leo Balogun's *L'enfer au pays des blancs* also tap into the issue of migration. The message from these writers is that there is a need for serious examination of this 'displacement palaver', in an attempt to promote regional integration and/or ensure global understanding. It is evident, in practical sense that human migration can bring about intercultural marriages, which will eventually reduce the effects of ethnicity and racism.

Sustaining African communal life style

In the traditional African setting, social security and welfare of the citizens are taken seriously and collectively. This can be seen in their ways of life. For example, Africans believe in extended family system. This

cultural value is displayed in Sembène Ousmane's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Ferdinand Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, Aminata Sow Fall's *La grève des battus* and Calixthe Beyala's *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée*, only to mention but a few. For instance, in Oyono's *Le vieux nègre et la*

médaille, without prior notice, Engamba and his wife are received with open arms during their journey to Meka's medal ceremony at a village, when night comes. It explains the sincere brotherhood that exists in African cultural space.

Nous arrivons à Nkongo avant le repas du soir, cria Engamba à sa femme. On va se reposer un peu, hein ? Nkongo était le premier hameau qu'on traversait sur la piste Zourian-Doum. Il y avait une dizaine de cases délabrées, bâties autour d'un hangar de paille, la case à palabres. Quand Amalia et son mari y arrivèrent, ils devinèrent des formes noires groupées autour d'un grand feu. Quelqu'un leva les yeux au-dessus de la flamme vers la cour.

Passants ! venez partager notre modeste repas, cria-t-il. On ne voyage pas la nuit. La nuit a beaucoup de mystères... Amalia précéda son mari dans la case à palabres.

Que la nuit vous soit bonne ! dit-elle en entrant. Je suis Amalia Etua, la femme d ...

C'est la femme d'Engamba ! dit celui qui l'avait reconnue.

C'est toi, Binama ! dit-elle en lui tendant la main.

C'est moi-même, dit l'homme en renouant la petite serviette-éponge qu'il avait enroulée autour des reins. Où est ton mari ?

J'arrive ! cria Engamba qui attachait son bouc à un piquet dans la cour. Amalia se débarrassa de son panier. Son mari entra.

Je vous salue, les amis ! dit-il.

Nous acceptons de tout cœur, répondirent des voix sortant de l'ombre où l'on devinait des formes que la lumière du feu n'arrivait pas à éclairer. Binama s'avança et lui serra la main (*Le vieux nègre et la médaille*, p. 66).

We shall arrive Nkongo before dinner, Engamba informed his wife. "We could have a little rest, eh?"

Nkongo was the first hamlet on the way, when travelling from Zourian to Doum. There were about ten dilapidated huts built round a thatched open shed: the indaba hut.

When Amalia and her husband arrived, they could make out dark forms gathered around a large fire. Someone raised his head above the flames to the courtyard.

"Travellers! Come and share our humble meal", he called. You cannot travel at night, night has many mysteries..."

Amalia came into the indaba hut in front of her husband. "May the night be good to you," she said as she entered. "I am Amalia Etua, wife of ...

"It's Engamba's wife," said a man who had recognized her.

"It's you, Binama!" she said stretching out her hand.

"Yes, it's me", said the man, reuniting the small towel he had wrapped round his waist. "Where is your husband?"

"I'm here," said Engamba who was tying up his goat to a stake in the courtyard.

Amalia put down her basket, and her husband came in.

"I greet you as friends!" He said.

"We accept with all our hearts," replied the voices from the shadow where

they had gathered around the fire.

Binama came forward and shook Engamba's hand (Our translation).

From the above extract, apart from the fact that the travelers are welcomed, they are invited for night meal; one also learns that night journey is dangerous: "La nuit a beaucoup de mystères..." (Night has many mysteries...). Indeed, sustaining this traditional African life style will bring enduring love and development.

In their creative works, the writers condemn in strong terms the idea of segregated system, where a given society is planned along the class line. A situation whereby the rich, the ruling class and the privileged live in Government Reserved Areas with state of the art amenities while the masses are relegated; rejected and abandoned to their fate in unkempt parts of the society. Through their literary works, directly or indirectly, the writers agitate for an integrated society where the rich and the poor will co-habit, co-present and co-exist and their children will attend the same school and citizens will go to the same hospital when they need medical treatment or checkups.

Promoting cultural tourism and encouraging cross-border marriages

Through tourism, it is possible to enhance the exchange of the material aspects of our culture such as the arts, clothing and food items. When people travel for leisure, they make new friends and develop lasting relationships which can even lead to cross-border marriages. As a matter of fact, Africa, like the rest of the world, has something to offer humanity in the area of culture. That is to say Africa's strength lays in its cultural heritage. Omolewa (31) stresses:

. . . Our culture is our wealth and the African continent is full of so many cultural gold mines. We may not have skyscrapers, castles, synagogues, landmark structures and so on as you can find in other places. But we have the festivals, dance, the music, language, dress, the eating habit, we have all the potentials ... we need to draw attention of the world to our rich cultural heritage that should be sold to humanity...

to boost our direct foreign investment drive.

Part of what is needed is managing the cultural heritage. Proper cultural management will help individuals to think themselves to be "folklorically distinct." This discharge into self-consciousness through the understanding of our cultural diversity, which undulates into refined forms of arts; music, drama, poetry, dance, etc – plays an important role in human development (Oamen, 65). No matter how people perceive them in these present days, proverbs, an aspect of our language, have provided an African world view globally.

From what we have discussed above, intercultural studies can institute regional integration; build social binding and develop sense of collective responsibility in societies as well as in different climes. Awodiya (37) recommends:

The Nigerian government should include art education in the school curriculum. This will help to build students' characters through arts participation in schools. Taking part in arts, culture and history curricula in schools will help in building the self-confidence and strong personality of students. The Nigerian government should embark on an aggressive attitudinal change campaign that will benefit the people through educational reform at all levels from the primary school to the university level, as a way of re-moulding the character of the younger generation.

Conclusion

We have attempted, in this study, to show that in the global dynamics of development, culture has a role to perform. Therefore, it suffices to say that the relevance of cultural heritage to individuals, communities and nations, around the globe, makes it worthwhile at all times. Cultural diversity is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of its economic

growth but also as a means to achieving a more satisfactory, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence (UNESCO, 3). For a better regional integration, countries in

Africa and their citizens should blend in their cultural diversity, accommodate trans-border human migration for economic advantages as well as encourage intercultural marriages.

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