

AFRICAN LITERARY PERSPECTIVES - BETWEEN ACTIVISM AND REALISM: A REFLECTION ON SELECTED AFRICAN WORKS

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Abstract

The belief that Africa lost her paradise shortly after gaining independence is not far-fetched. The desire to wrest power from the hands of the colonial masters threw up a feeling of African solidarity and activism perhaps unmatched by any other part of the world. This was the era where the African intellectual, politician, bureaucrat, market woman, farmer, artisan and student, all rallied round one strident voice: the need to chase away the common enemy in order to enthrone a terrestrial paradise in Africa. Today, several decades after flag independence, the questions still remain: has Africa attained the paradise that was dreamt of during the liberation struggles? Who profits from Africa's independence? In this paper, we survey the responses of some African literary icons – Achebe, Soyinka and Sofola, each in their own way, to this feeling of frustration which pervades across the continent.

Key Words: Post-colonialism, African new criticism, African cosmology, magical realism, leadership failure, development dilemma.

1.0 Introduction

Many African writers express the frustration of their failed states in the aftermath of a wasted struggle for independence. The pre-independence notions of capitalism and imperialism and their resultant values of materialism turned the new black elites into self serving dictators immersed in corruption, while estranging their own people who shared the same struggles and

aspirations for self rule with them. This is where to locate the source of frustration among the intellectual literary watchdogs of African nation states. The precursors of this literary activism were male writers like Chinua Achebe, Sembène Ousmane, Ayi Kwei Amah, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Mongo Beti, Kofi Awoonor, Ferdinand Oyono and Ahmadou Kourouma, among others. They decry leadership deficit as the bane of African nations. Chinua Achebe himself observed in *The Trouble with Nigeria* that Nigeria's trouble emanates from leadership failure and that "Nigeria is less than fortunate with her leaders" (13).

From this foreground, we will critically assess the intellectual activism in *Anthills of the Savannah*, by Chinua Achebe, using the tool of post colonialism. In the second segment of the work, in Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy - A Lagosian Kaleidoscope*, another post-colonial work, we will examine the issue of power play. Here, we hinge our methodology on the symbolism in the play. For some others it is a return to authentic African cosmology. Writers like Ben Okri, Elechi Amadi, Zulu Sofola, Ayi kwei Amah and Wole Soyinka, among others, keep faith with this theme in some of their works. In a kind of "literary decolonization", as Chinweizu et al aspire, they capture some of the traditional African beliefs that are still contextually relevant - the belief in divinities- God the creator, the gods, divinities, the spirits, the elements - sun, moon, stars, the natural environment- the earth, the rivers, land, trees, the forest, the ancestors, witchcraft etc. Hence, in the third and last segment, we will use the African literary perspective of magical realism to read *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola.

2.0 Power play in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*: A post colonialist interrogation

Chinua Achebe's intellectual activism borders on the socio-political state of African nations after independence which took place around the 1960s and the dashed hopes of the people due to corrupt, ineffective and dictatorial leadership. In his novel, *Anthills of the*

Savannah, he peers into the grossly displeasing political landscape of Nigeria and captures the express frustration of the African intellectual on the failed post-independent African state. Shortly after independence, corruption, tribalism, religious bigotry and impunity led to military takeover in many newly independent African states. Power changed hands from one military dictator to another, just as one anthill rises up in place of a destroyed one. In Nigeria, for instance, from Major Kaduna Nzeogwu to General Abdulsalami Abubakar, poor leadership held sway. In due time, Generals Obasanjo and Buhari recycled themselves into civilian Presidents. Neither did the coming of civilian Presidents Umaru Musa Yar'adua and Goodluck Jonathan at the return of civil rule in 1999 bring any respite to the political quagmire. The polity is presently heated with President Buhari not meeting the economic and security challenges of the Nigerian state. This is the picture reproduced in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. From Cameroon to Congo, from Kenya to Zimbabwe and from South Africa to Morocco, the story is not better.

Working on the symbolism of *Anthills of the Savannah*, Fatma Kalpakli sees the confluence of religious and economic class as signifying a closure of the gap between the elite and the poor and people from various religious inclinations since it cuts across all classes that are in attendance. This she sees as representing Achebe's vision for a cross class unity. However, the analysis in this paper focuses on power play in the novel.

The plot involves three close friends, Sam, Chris Oriko and Ikem Osodi who once schooled together in Britain. Sam, the onetime socialite becomes a career soldier who rises along the ranks and steadily metamorphoses into a dictator. He is now the de- facto President of the nation of Kangan. Chris is a wise cool headed intellectual who still believes in Sam's potential for good governance and broker's peace between Sam and Ikem. He is the head of the Ministry of Information. Ikem, a fiery intellectual is the Editor of the National Gazette, a state-owned newspaper. He does not hesitate to engage in a flagrant

criticism of Sam's administration. Sam begins to alienate his close friends and moves to install himself as a life President through a plebiscite. The people of Abazon deny him their votes and so he denies them his intervention in the draught that has been ravaging their country. They stage a peaceful protest to the President who mistakes it for a revolt. He further suspects his close friends as being privy to this protest. Chris warns Ikem on his aggressive editorials but he remains defiant. This earns him a sack by the President after Chris refuses to sack him at the President's orders. Ikem now visits the University of Bassa and engages in a flagrant tirade giving lectures on political issues in the country.

The President mistakes Ikem's joke of the President's desire to cast his head on a gold coin as calling for regicide. He orders the arrest of Ikem, followed by his subsequent murder by the military men in the State Research Council (SRC) headed by Major Johnson Ossai, who is promoted to the rank of Colonel as a reward. Chris sees this as a warning signal to him. He makes contact with opinion moulders one of whom is Emmanuel Obiete, the President of University of Bassa Students' Union. He and the students join in civil disobedience to protest Ikem's murder. Chris goes on air with the BBC correspondent and retreats underground. The SUG President joins him and in disguise they head for Abazon as a manhunt for them is announced. On the way, they learn of the overthrow of President Sam in another coup d'état. In an attempt to save Emmanuel's girlfriend from rape by a militia, he is shot and killed. Emmanuel and his girlfriend head back to Bassa to relay the sad news to Beatrice. The ball rolls over to the women. Elewa, Ikem's girl friend who is pregnant for him and Beatrice, Chris' fiancée now take care of her. Elewa puts to bed a girl and names her Amaechina, which means "may the path not close" in a ceremony presided over by Beatrice.

As a political animal, man generally likes to wield power and exercise overt or subtle control over others. Inside the anthills there are the big and the small ants, the male as well as the female. It is an enclave suffused with activity from all the constituents of the polity. This is symbolic of the power play inherent in the novel between His Excellency President Sam, his friends Chris and Ikem and the women in their lives.

His Excellency President Sam is a symbolic persona of Africa's post independence leadership. Here is a man who came to power through a coup d'état organized by the junior officers of the army and was invited to steer the ship of state as President. He starts off well and gets to his present position through the help of his friends Chris and Ikem, because he "... came to power without any preparation for political leadership..." (12). Then he masters his fears and gradually alienates himself from his friends. Ikem remarks that "much of the change that has come over Sam started after his first OAU meeting. He has been apparently influenced by some of his new found heroes at the summit, like the emperor who never smiled nor changed his expression irrespective of any happenings around him and President-for-life Ngongo, from whom he imbibed the habit of ending his statements with the word, *Kabisa* "I wish I could be like him" (52). From then on he withdraws into seclusion to prepare his own hard face and project of a life President. He begins to cow his friends and the entire cabinet into fearful submission. Chris, his close friend whom he called upon to nominate a dozen of his commissioners, remarks that he engaged him in an eyewink duel of children. "... I conceded victory there as well. Without raising my eyes I said again: I am very sorry, Your Excellency" (1). The President dismisses the dialogue by saying he has no time for "professional dissidents" (4). His Excellency is seen as "the man of action" (4), being envied by Professor Okong, who now adorns khaki safari suits with epaulettes.

Achebe laments the way even the educated, the hope of the black race have been hoodwinked into cowardice. More frustrating is high standing intellectuals that have no "political morality" like Prof Okong (10). Chris remarks, "I am not thinking so much about him as about my colleagues, eleven intelligent, educated men who let this happen to them." His Excellency shuns Prof Okong, who has slid into the depth of pettiness among colleagues to

curry favour from him. The President rightfully puts him in his place and calls him “mister” instead of Professor.

As is the case with many African Heads of States and Presidents, His Excellency retires all military members of his cabinet and replaces them with civilians. He appoints Major Johnson Ossai as the Director of the State Research Council (SRC) amidst opposition from more senior officers. He appends the title “President” to his name and fully transforms into a dictator. The two major appointments he made by himself- the Army Chief of Staff and the Director of the State Research Council help him override rumours of unrest, as well as secret trials and executions in the barracks. He goes on to relish his subjection of those whom he once held in high esteem during his days of apprenticeship. Talking of his treatment of the Attorney General, he says, “it takes a lion to tame a leopard” (22). His Excellency detains his cabinet for one hour for failing to give him information on the delegation from Abazon.

There are many political prisoners today in Africa. The government of the day stifles all opposition no matter how constructive. It is therefore rhetoric to keep inquiring why many post-independence African nations have refused to advance. Now the polity has become reasonably heated under His Excellency’s dictatorship and ambition for life presidency. He knows the disenchantment caused by his misrule even among his cabinet members. He forestalls any intention of resignation among them with a threat, “if anyone thinks he can leave the cabinet on this issue he will be making a sad mistake... anyone walking out of that door will not go home but head straight into detention” (119). He orders Chris, the Commissioner for information to sack Ikem, the Editor of the National Gazette for his unbridled and unflinching criticism of his administration. For the first time, Chris refuses and the president goes ahead to issue him the sack himself. The ordinary citizens are not spared. The six elders of Abazon involved in the

recent match to the presidential palace are arrested. He misinterprets Ikem's lecture at the University of Bassa, where he makes a joke about the President's desire to cast his head in the gold coin as asking for his head to be severed. His rage finds full expression when his hit men, the SRC, led by Major Johnson Ossai abduct and kill Ikem. He accuses Ikem of disloyalty and incitement of students and explains away his death as an accident (168-169). He causes more tension in the country as he deploys the combined forces on a manhunt for Chris who is now a fugitive. In the midst of this imbroglio, there is another coup d'état ousting and killing President Sam. The Anthills thus returns to status quo, beginning another round of military drama. The acquisition of absolute power in governance does no one any good but rather undermines the development and unity of a nation. Until Africa allows freedom of speech and transparency in governance true democracy will remain a mirage. This appears to be the overriding message in *Anthills of the savannah*.

In the novel, Achebe not only explores the capacity of women to succeed where men have failed, he also throws tradition to the back seat. In traditional Africa, the male child is preferred over the female child because it is believed the female does not continue the lineage; it is rather the male child that does. But here, a girl answers a boy's name and fulfils the expected role of a male child. This is a manifestation of power on the side of the woman. The people drink and cheer just before the arrival of her uncle who joins in the celebration. He rather ridicules Elewa's mother:

And while she is cracking her head you people gather in this white man house and give the girl a boy's name... that is how to handle the world... if anybody thinks that I will start a fight because somebody has done the work I should do that person does not know me... (227)

Beatrice brings solution where men have failed. She unites all in a cross-religious, cross-class and cross-cultural setting at the naming ceremony. This signifies that men, who have since

tried and failed severally on the African leadership tuff after independence should perhaps give way to the women to lead the continent out of the woods with their new ideas.

3.0 *The Beatification of Area Boy- A Lagosian Kaleidoscope: A new critic's reading*

Nigeria is a multidimensional society. Her failed state yields the by-product of a complex people, little wonder Soyinka calls it “a Lagosian kaleidoscope”. The rot in the failed state gives rise to a worrisome survival instinct in her people. In this piece of drama, Soyinka employs characters and symbols that give a kaleidoscopic portrait of people and activities with the myriad problems of a failed state. Wole Soyinka shares Achebe’s frustration of the failed post-independence African State. He employs metaphors, symbols and themes that ventilate the abysmal failure of successive governments in the country to deliver the dividends of independence to her people. Amidst the dearth of employment opportunities and infrastructure, as well as other social and economic security challenges, the people develop their own survival strategies. Successive military governments wallow in corruption and arrogant display of affluence. They are insensitive to the needs of the ordinary people. They reduce the country into a materialistic and consumption economy rather than a productive one. The Area boys led by Sanda, seeing the rot in the system drop out of the University, since there will be no job waiting at the end. Together with his area boys they carve out a space for themselves and constitute a force to be reckoned with. The flurry of activities in Broad Street which attract foreigners and big men who come for shopping or other engagements and the displaced Maroko inhabitants all flood into this hub. The Military come to evacuate people in order to seal the street after prisoners have come and tidied the place. A great marriage event between children of two pseudo rich families is due to take place this evening under the chairmanship of the Military Governor himself. Miseyi the bride causes a disappointment when she openly ditches her fiancé for an old

school mate, the Area Boy Sanda. The people, activities, environment and experiences, kaleidoscopic in nature are presented to the reader in this piece of drama set in Lagos with all its connotative meanings.

A shallow reading of the work would assume a marxist, lucid and non mythical interpretation of the highly philosophical writer. However, Idom Inyabri interrogating the paradigm shift assumption in Soyinka's dramaturgy, as inferred from Imo Ben Eshiet (249), postulates that there are two different Soyinkas in one: "The Soyinka of the tragic mask is different from the Soyinka of the comic mask." He therefore argues that there is no "paucity of myth or a departure from it" (246). Our aim in this work is not in the myth but in Soyinka's use of symbolism in the drama sketch *The Beatification of Area Boy – A Lagosian Kaleidoscope*.

Soyinka employs images, symbols, experiences, characters, professions, elements and other contraptions to articulate his musings on the state of the nation long after independence. Lagos is a staccato representation of the corrupt leaders in the form of the military, the nouveau-riche, the literate and illiterate, the beggars, the cream and the dregs of society, as well as foreigners who patronise Broad Street for one reason or the other. It however symbolises a melting pot of all manner of people, races and experiences as depicted in the exchange between Mama Put and the minstrel. The Minstrel praises her specially brewed "kain kain" as unparalleled in Lagos, the reason for which they will not allow her to go back to her Rivers town. She threatens with her bayonet anybody that would attempt to stop her. The Minstrel retorts: "You can't escape Lagos. Even for your Ikot Ekpene, you go find Lagos." Mama Put accents: "Yes, but not in such a strong dose. Lagos na overdose." (16)

Then the Minstrel sings:

I love this Lagos, I no go lie ... When Lagos belch, the nations swell

When the nation shit, na Lagos de smell. The river wey flow from Makurdi market you go find in deposit for Lagos bucket. (17)

Lagos therefore, becomes a kaleidoscope of some sorts. In another vein, Marako symbolises Lagos, that suddenly gets bulldozed and her people turned to refugees by a government that neither cares for her own citizens nor respects the rule of law. Reminding Mama Put of her earlier dream, Sanda, the head of the Area boys says:

You woke up one day and there wasn't any Lagos anywhere.
No warning, no nothing, just – pouff! – Lagos was gone... disappeared
into thin air. And you thought that was a calamity. (20)

This is a reference to the sunrise that woke up all Lagos. Referring to the shop worker who comes to work earlier than usual on this particular day, the Barber says, "... That sunrise must have fooled her. I bet it fooled half of Lagos" (11). The sunrise at the beginning of the play that everyone talks about is an irony symbolising destruction and hopelessness suffered by the inhabitants of Maroko. It is only Mama Put that voices her misgivings of this sunrise without the least cloud in the sky, a sky that brings no good with it. It reminds her of the bitter experiences of the civil war. This reminds one of the sunrise logo of the people on the other side of the civil war (Biafra). Soyinka uses the metaphor of the civil war to symbolise the experiences of the poor, like the inhabitants of Maroko that is demolished for urban renewal. Mama Put laments, "after the massacre of our youth came the plague of oil rigs and the death of farmlands, shrines and fish sanctuaries, and the eternal flares that turn night into day ..." (21). The dislodged inhabitants of Maroko are described as "an animated 'battered humanity' mural of a disorderly evacuation, may be after an earthquake, from which an assortment of possessions have been salvaged" (74). Sanda describes it as "...the eternal nightmare of a Maroko into which one wakes up every day" (103). Meanwhile, the heartless Military officer in his brazen arrogance boasts:

If you'd got up early enough you'd have seen the flames against the skyline... gave Lagosians quite a spectacular sunrise... Lit up for miles around as if an atom bomb had been exploded on the beach... (80)

The author does not spare the materialistic and flamboyant life style of the so called men of God moving in "flying saucers" (26), depicting helicopters. This is a sharp contrast to bicycle, which even the poor see as a rude shock, symbolising retrogression, poverty, decay of infrastructure and antiquity. Reacting to the cyclist, Trader remarks:

... The last time I see bicycle for this Lagos na before oil boom... Na original pedal locomotion, the kind my great, great grandpa dem call iron horse when oyinbo missionary first ride one for Lagos last century...." (26)

The cyclist is an unemployed youth who has written more than two hundred applications for three years and just got a chance for an interview tomorrow. Meanwhile, to keep an appointment with one Sisi, he has to borrow his brother's bicycle "... because man no fit trust public transport again. You wait for bus all day and then, one molue finally arrive enh, then Somalia war begin...." (30)

The judge is another symbol employed by Soyinka to represent the decay in the judicial systems of most post-independent African states. He is a debarred lawyer who is portrayed as mentally sick. His madness is an escape from reality. He keeps talking of the prerogative of mercy which the Military circumvent even though they have the power to grant. They rather batter and discomfiture the judge, before locking him up in the boot of the car (80). That is symbolic of the lack of respect the military have for the rule of law. Thus Soyinka uses symbols of the mundane to express his frustration with the post colonial state of the African continent.

4.0 Sofola's Magical Realism in *Wedlock of the Gods*

This play by Zulu Sofola portrays tradition, poverty, gender disparity, interpersonal conflicts and witchcraft. The playwright brings to the fore the people's consciousness of their natural existence in relation to the divinities and other elements of nature like the sun, the stars, forests, etc. The plot is woven around Ogwoma, who is forced by her parents (Ibekwe and Nneka) into marriage with Adigwu in order to raise money to conduct a sacrifice to restore her brother's health. She is so incensed by this act that when her husband dies she rejoices and sees it as her moment of liberation. She is required by tradition to observe three months of mourning for her husband. However, the stage is set for conflict when both her mother-in-law, Odibei and her lover, Uloko whom she was deprived from marrying because he could not afford the high bride price, discover she is pregnant. Odibei who was already looking for evidence against her now threatens to make her pay for sleeping with another man while in mourning. Moreover, she is by tradition required to marry the deceased man's brother in order to raise children for her late husband. She sees her freedom and marriage to Uloko as not negotiable even against her mother's counsel. Uloko, galvanized the more by the news of Ogwoma's carrying of his baby proclaims that never again will anybody deny him of his love. Odibei performs some charms and hypnotises Ogwoma. She does as Odibei says and drinks a poisoned concoction she had prepared for her. Uloko comes with a machete, sees a dying Ogwoma who stutters what happened and dies. Uloko dashes out looking for odibei and soon returns with a machete dripping with the blood of the slain woman. Uloko has a pact with Ogwoma to marry her whether in death or life. He therefore, reaches for the remainder of the poison which he drinks and dies, in a re-enactment of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

The sudden death of these two lovers would not have been necessary if the parents of the girl did not "commodify" their daughter and lead her into the immoral and premature relationship

with Uloko. Nneka blames her daughter for her abominable act and tries to justify her being marrying off as a normal practice. Her daughter retorts:

No, it is not the way others are given away to their husbands that you and father threw me away to Adigwu. No, mother, you and father were so hungry for money that you tied me like a goat and threw me away to a man I hated. (18)

Odile Caznave in *Femmes Rébèlles* asserts that the character of the prostitute is symbolic of her exploitation by her family:

Certes, la femme prostituée constitue une voix symbolique de la condition de la femme, de son exploitation par l'homme, mais elle souligne plus également de façon plus radicale, l'exploitation par la famille y compris la mère. (24)

Paradoxically, most of the people involved in this conflict are women: Ogwoma on one side, vehement on asserting her freedom and Odibei, Nneka and Ogoli on the other. They are all more incensed by this breach of tradition than the men, threatening and seeking redress with curses and witchcraft. Kenneth Efakponnana Eni writing on Zulu Sofola posits that:

As a feminist of a distinct traditional school, Sofola contrasts the place of women in traditional society with that of Western liberated woman ... Though a woman has to keep the home; her role is not secondary even while subjecting her ambitions to the larger ones of family and society. (167)

However, our concern in this paper diverges from the feminist perspective to dwell on magical realism which is inherent in the *Wedlock of the Gods*. According to Gian Pagnucci, magical realism is characterized by two conflicting perspectives, one based on a rational view of reality and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as prosaic reality. Its setting in a normal world with humans distinguishes it from fantasy. Magical realism anchors on a cosmology that is not based on natural laws or objective reality. It incorporates an element of hybridism and opposes in its technique like the-half-man- half-spirit or the old and the new.

Brenda Cooper, writing on *Magical realism in West African fiction*, sees it as something that arises out of a particular society's postcolonial, disproportionately developed places where "old and new, modern and ancient, the scientific and the magical views of the world co-exist. In *Origins of Magical Realism*, "... it is seen by many theorists as a 'decolonising agent'; written from the 'margins' to create a counter-argument to the view that the coloniser has of them. Magical realism functions in varied ways in the postcolonial world..." (76). It is our aim in this paper to establish how this functions in Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*.

5.0 Issues in *Wedlock of the Gods*

i. Contrasts of Opposites

Poverty and affluence interplay in the drama to render the love between Ogwoma and Uloko impossible in the first instance. However, the death of Adigwu brings new life to their passion. The hitherto silenced girl that was forced into a mercantile marriage four years ago, now in a feminist mood, asserts her resolve this time to marry the love of her life that was denied her four years ago. She laments the levirate system that requires her to marry Okezie, her late husband's brother. "I was tied and whipped along the road to Adigwu. Now that God has freed me they still say I am his brother's wife" (21). Her friend, Anwasia sees her act of sleeping with a man while still in mourning as abominable: "No matter how much a woman loves a man, the gods forbid what you have done..." (9). She tries to convince her that the marriage is required by tradition because Adigwu had no child. Ogwoma retorts that she would rather be buried alive than marry Okezie. The contrast of barrenness and fecundity plays out in the fact that for four years she was childless but few months after her husband's death she becomes pregnant for another man. Anwasia leaks her friend's secret by raising Uloko's curiosity, urging Ogwoma to

tell him. When she finally does Uloko is beside himself with joy. Ogwoma urges him to leave before her mother –in – law who snoops on her sees him.

ii. Belief in the Divinities and the Supernatural

Uloko continues to hesitate and professes his belief in the divinities: “the gods said yes to our love years ago. We allowed the devil to stir our destiny once, but we shall not give him a second chance. I love you dearly...The stars are on our side” (14). Eventually, Odibei, Ogwoma’s mother-in-law meets him there and a new wave of hostilities ensues. The people in this rural community seek redress not in a law court but from the supernatural. The community knows Odibei will haunt down Ogwoma with witchcraft. The vehemence of the women’s determination to carry out their threat is alarming. As Nwoga and Chiawola-Mokee observe, “Sofola’s female characters have exactly the same attributes – strong willed and unyielding, giving way to only the more overpowering social survival imperative for which they could gladly lay down their lives” (7).

Nneka, Ogwoma’s mother is disappointed and considers her daughter’s pregnancy by Uloko at this mourning period a shameful act. She also threatens: “that Uloko will see. He will know that some medicines are stronger than others. He will not disgrace me and go untouched” (20). Meanwhile, Nneka intimates her daughter what will befall her: “a swelling of the body with water leaking everywhere ... even after death no forest will accept your body...” (20). Tension continues to mount for the lovers and, presently, Uloko’s mother berates Ogwoma’s bad upbringing for receiving men:

... while the spirit of her dead husband still wonders in the bush. This shameless dog has enticed my son into an abominable act; I can no more walk on the road. (23)

Complaining to Anwasia she continues: “Her husband died, but rather than wait and let his spirit return to the world of the gods, she has enticed and dragged my son into an act of death” (23).

She continues to lament out of fear for harm the head-hearted Odibei is capable of doing to her son. “Everybody in town knows Odibei that no life is safe in her hands” (24). Ibekwe convenes a meeting of the men in his compound as is the tradition to discuss the issue of Ogwoma’s condition. He excuses his action of marrying off his daughter to the highest bidder because “death hears nothing. Edozie was nearly dead when the oracle stated very clearly that a seven-year old ram had to be sacrificed to Ikenga, our family god...” (30). Nneka on her part is seriously pained by what Uloko did to her daughter. She places a curse on him.

iii. The Spoken Word

Africans believe in the efficacy of spoken words. Hence, Ogoli, Uloko’s mother comes in just as Nneka, Ogwoma’s mother was cursing her son:

I cannot walk on the road; I cannot go the market without hearing wispers; I cannot swallow food without being choked. You will never see peace. What makes you stand up like a man will die like smothered coco yam leaves. Your mother will mourn you.... (39)

Ogoli does not hesitate to return the curse. It is believed that among witches and wizards there is little or no room for forgiveness once the mind is made up. Odibei, ever determined for vengeance, comes in with tokens and makes incantations that will hypnotise Ogwoma. She lifts the medicine pot and speaks: “Let her come to you. Let her drink” (45). She takes up the snail shell and also makes incantations. Then she blows the powdered medicine in the shell of the snail and speaks: “The dead are not dead. Adigwu is not dead; ... The spirit is disgraced ... the spirit cries in anger (49). Nneka’s entry interrupts her and both of them engage in a battle of words. Odibei is led away by her neighbour only to come back later to finish up. “The vulture does not see the corpse and resist it ... Ogwoma cannot hear your call and refuse to answer. Bring her here.

Lead her to me; bring her here not knowing what she is doing. Lead her and make her do whatever I bid” (52).

6.0 Conclusion

Traditionally, witchcraft is an aspect of African cultural belief system whose existence and influence can neither be defined nor denied. It is a case of the more you look the less you see. Its recognition is considered primitive, backward and superstitious. However, its denial amounts to the denial of an existential truth since its authenticity can be substantiated by its victims and culprits. Zulu Sofola’s characters make recourse to witchcraft in the face of anger, sickness, humiliation, danger or conflict. Read as an allegory of the leadership conundrum in Africa, it is clear the forced marriage between the African masses and their greedy, rapacious leaders can yield no real benefits to the people unless they do something extraordinary in order to better their lot.

In this paper we have tried to capture the African intellectual’s frustrations with the crisis of leadership in post independent African states that has dashed the dreams, aspirations and hopes of the founding fathers of Africa’s independence. The new leaders have not kept faith with the people of the continent. They have rather proven to be the same, if not worse than the colonial masters whom they took over from. From Achebe to Soyinka and to Sofola, we have established, through three African literary perspectives of post colonialism, African new criticism and magical realism that the outlook of the continent to the leadership dilemma has been one of frustration, not to the African intellectual, but also to the ordinary man on the street.

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