



DYSTOPIA OR SITES WITH REAL PLACES: A READING OF WOLE SOYINKA'S ALAPATA OF APAPTA AND MEJA MWANGI'S KILL ME QUICK

 James E. Onyeashie^{1*}

¹Department of English, Augustine University, Ilara-Epe, Lagos, Nigeria.

*Corresponding Author: james.onyeashie@augustineuniversity.edu.ng

Article Info: - Received : 06 December 2022

Accepted : 19 December 2022

Published : 30 December 2022

Abstract

Michel Foucault asserts that Utopias, and by extension, dystopias, are “sites with no real places” This paper argues that dystopias, can be sites with real places. This paper examines this assertion through the exploration of dystopia in Soyinka’s play *Alápata Àpáta* and Meja Mwangi’s *Kill Me Quick*. Reader-Response and Post-Colonial theories form the interpretive yardsticks for this analysis. The examination of these texts reveals that Soyinka and Mwangi actually drew heavily from real-time experiences in their countries in crafting their works, making the settings of their works “sites with real places.” The study recommends that it should not be art for art’s sake but art for social engineering.

Keywords: *Utopia, Dystopia, Satire.*



2583-7354/© 2022 James E. Onyeashie. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

INTRODUCTION

DYSTOPIA

Utopia and dystopia - according to Michel Foucault are “sites with no real places. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces” (2) This paper examines this statement and argues that Utopias may not just denote an imaginary space but real spaces.

Etymologically, dystopia is from Old Greek and it means: Dys = bad, topia = place. The opposite of dystopia is Utopia. Utopia is an ideally perfect place,

state, or condition in terms of politics, laws, customs, and conditions. Dystopia, on the other hand can be described as a futuristic imperfect world. In this world, everything is very bad. In Dystopian literature, what is usually depicted include a nightmarish picture of what might happen to the world in the near future and the usual themes are: rebellion, oppression, revolutions, wars, population explosion, and disasters – natural or man-made.

Through dystopia, writers have the opportunity to educate and create awareness to the reader about issues concerning humanity and society. It is a literary technique employed to discuss reality and issues that might happen in the near future, thereby warning people about the current state of affairs with the government and finally warn people about their

failings. This is why dystopia is usually perceived as a critique.

The usual features of dystopias are:

- Environmental destruction is a source of dystopia
- Nuclear Disaster – fear
- Government control – no dissent
- Religious Control – Controlling the mind
- Technological Control – Spying on characters
- Survival – survival is drives the action
- Loss of Individualism – everyone is cowed into subjection

Arthur C. Clarke opines that dystopia is an imagined state or place in which the illusion of a perfect society is maintained through a totalitarian government and oppressive control. Dystopia as a literary term was coined as a counterpart of utopia; a term which was created by Thomas Moore and it portrays an ideal society. Plato's *Republic* is believed to be the first known work that depicts the idea of a perfect state. In realizing these states, he devised the hierarchy of three classes and each class has its duties. He opines that the state cannot encounter any catastrophe when all classes play their roles responsibly. According to Martin Parker, utopia is a systematic investigation of alternative principles of organization that relies on a re-formation of the principles of social order.

Soyinka's text lends itself to a dystopian reading based on the plot. Reading the play as a dystopian text brings a fresh perspective to the understanding of government oppression through control. Mwangi's work also appropriates the same perspective and he is able to expose the biased nature of the Kenyan government through his novel. Although critics have done an analysis of Wole Soyinka's *ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA* and Meja Mwangi's *KILL ME QUICK*, not many have done a dystopian reading of the play and the novel. This paper therefore seeks to examine dystopian themes as depicted in the texts. The main themes examined center on social crisis, environmental destruction, religious control, government control and other themes. These factors relate to readers who live or come from dystopian states. Soyinka's and Mwangi's texts are about their individual countries and they are able to adequately explain how their unprogressive governments control the citizens and the countries in vice-like grips.

Wole Soyinka is eminently qualified to write about dystopia. In his life, he has known the full meaning of government control. He has written several literary works over the years and some of them are on dystopia. He interrogates the nature of government control and even religious control. At the time of the civil war, he wrote an article for a cease-fire which led to his arrest in 1967. The African Noble Prize Laureate for literature, **Soyinka (1967)** argues that contemporary African literature is at a stage where writers will have to engage with the common state of disillusionment in the continent. Some scholars often discuss how writers make use of their writings to expose the ills of these countries or the continent as a whole in order to rescue them from entering into dystopia.

Kehinde (2004), states that most writers write in order to tell the stories of their people. Many African writers are able to cope with social and political commitment and that their texts reflect the socio-political events in their societies. He explains that since Africa is in a state of Dystopia, its literature is being used as a weapon for portraying the postcolonial disillusionment in African nations. Afolayan also states that the African novel is a realist representation of dystopia. These scholars try to explain that most African creative writers make use of the situations in their various countries to create their literary works.

Wole Soyinka's *Alápatà Àpáta* is a political satire and it demonstrates, through the play, the socio-political conditions of the characters through creating an environment that represents the world. The globe in the text represents the human world and how the fate of the globe might end up being the fate of the actual world. It can be argued that Soyinka employs the globe as a metaphor for redemption of the people from the twisted condition they live in. Alaba is a solid example for the explanation of the relationship between the experiences of the characters with the meaning of life suggested by the globe. This is so because Alaba's life changes once he tries to fix the globe.

Soyinka made use of satire, humor, irony and symbolism of the globe as a metaphor to talk about human conduct. The play shows how the world truly is and it makes use of themes that concern the abuse of power and privilege, corruption in different forms and moral negligence. The characters are hilarious and they are living in a lopsided environment so he uses them to draw attention to the world. This text shows Soyinka's main aim is to change the perception of humans of the world and he makes use of the symbolic globe to do that.

This text focuses on the post-colonial disillusionment and the pains it has caused to the African nation. Mwangi uses his work to examine the hardship of the people in neo-colonial African societies and also how there is usually a close relationship between Africa and its historical context. The novel is socially symbolic in the sense that it reflects the problems of the author's immediate society and also the African continent in general. The novel presents a harsh view of life in Kenya because the author focuses on pressing issues like social classes, races, gender, religion, politics etc. The novel also talks about another major problem in neo-colonial African societies which is the betrayal of trust. This is a problem that actually occurs in the real Africa.

The postcolonial corruption in the text becomes a metaphor for the history of neo-colonial African nations which is full of alienation, depression, and deprivation. Throughout the novel, the reader perceives the pain the masses endure which reveals the dystopian nature of the fictional setting. Mwangi in his text states several details from the regular life and the novel gives an account of the impotent silent majority. He exposes his society's waywardness and clearly states that he is against it. He confronts the new post-independence regime in Kenya and accuses the new state of failing to provide opportunities for the youth.

Mwangi does not directly refer to the government of Kenya, instead he tries to imply the absence of the government from the people's lives. This paper has revealed that the two texts can actually be explored from the perspective of Dystopia but applying the features of Dystopia as guiding yardsticks may not work. For instance, the texts do not portray futuristic apocalyptic settings, religious control, and environmental destruction are not fully represented. However, Government control as a future of dystopian text is very well represented.

Again, from the analysis of these texts, it is clearly established that dystopia can translate into places with defined site. Even with only Government control, the settings of the texts examined are unmistakably, dystopian.

The African Noble Prize Laureate for literature, **Soyinka (1967)** argued that contemporary African literature is at a stage where writers will have to engage with the common state of disillusionment in the continent. Wole Soyinka's *ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA* was first published by Bookcraft Limited in 2011. This drama is a political satire and it demonstrates how the play centers on socio-political condition of the characters through creating an environment that represents the world. The globe in the text represents the human

world and how the fate of the globe might end up being the fate of the actual world. The text might be satirical but the experiences of the characters are also occurring in the real society. This play talks on the idiocies and shortcomings of an imagined society where the people's mindsets are flawed by their greed and self-interest. The play shows how people only think about themselves and how they can gain from others but not give back. This behavior is common amongst the people in power in the society. The protagonist, Alaba believed that the globe was wrongly placed and in an attempt to fix it, he damages it. He believed that the actual world was straight and the fact that the globe was not representing the reality did not sit well with him. His encounter with the globe leads to a dramatic show that reveals the shadiness of the society and its crumbling values. This scene simply explains how the globe serves as a metaphor to show the lopsidedness of the society. As the play goes on, one will see how the crooked globe explains the actions and thoughts of some of the characters.

The globe influenced the mindsets of a couple of characters especially Alaba. The play creates a relationship between the experiences of the characters with the physical and insightful meaning of life suggested by the globe. Soyinka's aim is to make use of the metaphorical globe to redeem the people from the twisted condition they live in. Alaba is a solid example in attempting to explain the relationship between the experiences of the characters with the meaning of life suggested by the globe. This is so because Alaba's life changes once he tried to fix the globe. He kept on staring at it and realized that it was not straight and he believed that the world is straight. In his little attempt to make the world straight, he damages it in the process. He gets into trouble for trying to fix the globe and his life was not the same from that day. This metaphor can be viewed as the basis for this play. Soyinka explains that that globe symbolizes the actual world. Alaba was concerned about the lopsidedness of the globe and wanted to do something about it, he did not expect the world to break in his hands. In relation to real life, there are people who are genuinely concerned with the chaotic state of the country and they decided to make a conscious effort to do something about it and in the process of their kind gesture, they are punished. Soyinka has a similar story; he was arrested for airing his views on the wrong doings of those in power. He made use of his writings to chastise the government and instead of them to take heed to his corrections, they throw him in jail.

Alaba now relates everything that happens to him to the story of him breaking the globe. He tells Teacher who is his friend that he is a butcher because his father blatantly refused to pay to get the globe fixed. His

father told him that he would no longer go to school because he will not pay for the broken globe. Due to his education being cut short, this began most of his trials. He tried several vocations but was not good at any of them. He finally decided to focus on the butchering job of his father. In the play, the globe is a symbolic representation of the universe and it represents the cultural and political difficulties of the world. The globe serves as every possible issue that can happen in the real world. The human experiences in the text can be linked to the crooked shape of the globe. **Itala Vivian (2000)** opines that “In geography and in maps, writers have always found themes for their narration and a source for inspiration. This is due to the natural affinity rooted in the invention of a descriptive system masked as realism, and to the common origin in the gaze, linked to systems of thought and vision that are strictly interconnected”.

In this play, there is a link between literature and the representation of the world. Alaba who admits to breaking the globe when he was in primary school represents the flawed humanity of the entire world. He believed that life was straightforward and not twisted like the globe that was in his primary school, School Hall of Queen Victoria Primary School. In his attempt to fix the globe, he ends up creating a series of issues that expose the corrupt ways of the politicians, soldiers, leaders etc. In the play, the worlds of the characters are described by greed, hypocrisy, selfishness. Alaba is aware of all these foul traits but decides not to be involved with such. He retires from his butcher life to a life of peace in an attempt to reach an ideal life.

Alaba's retirement is actually the cause of most of the challenges he faces. The members of the community misread his retirement except Teacher. Due to him trying to use his initiative, he plunges himself into a series of ridiculous events. It is these series of events that brings him in contact with an already politically, religiously and culturally corrupt society. The characters were not able to understand the reason why Alaba would retire after having such a successful butchering career but this retirement brought to light the conflict of values that was displayed by most of the characters and that enabled the discovery of the actual problem in the play. Alaba decides to enjoy his retirement by sitting on the rock in front of his family house. He had a hundred day mission of doing absolutely nothing but sit on the rock and drink freshly tapped palm wine. The people of the village were very suspicious of this recent development from the world known butcher. Some of the villagers were angry while some thought that he was trying to guard some natural resources that were under or within the rock. The villagers from the students, to the mechanics and even the pastors all tried to develop

their own point of views as to why Alaba has made his retirement decision.

Soyinka made use of satire, humor, irony and symbolism of the globe as a metaphor to talk on the human conduct. The play shows how the world truly is and it makes use of themes that concern the abuse of power and privilege, corruption in different forms and moral negligence. The characters are hilarious and they are living in a lopsided environment so he uses them to draw attention to the world. This text shows Soyinka's main aim is to change the perception of humans of the world and he makes use of the symbolic globe to do that.

Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*

Meja Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* was first published by Heinemann in 1973. Many African writers' texts reflect the socio-political occurrences in the societies. At first, African literature was a tool used to celebrate the heroes of their past and later it was used to for anti-colonial struggle. Nowadays, it is used as a tool for showing the disillusionment in African nations. This means that African literature has a connection with the experiences of her people. This text focuses on the post-colonial disillusionment and the pains it has caused to the African nation. Mwangi uses his work to examine the hardship of the people in neo-colonial African societies and also how there is usually a close relationship between African and its historical context. He uses the text to express the hard life pain the people are going through. The novel is socially symbolic in the sense that it reflects the problems of the author's immediate society and also the African continent in general.

In Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* the reader will have a view of a new fictional Kenya. The novel presents a harsh view of life in Kenya because the author focuses on pressing issues like social classes, races, gender, religion, politics etc. The novel also talks about another major problem in neo-colonial African societies which is the betrayal of trust. This is a problem that actually occurs in the real Africa. Ifidon Ehimika opines that “every society is heterogeneous, and conflict is a feature of interaction among its components”. The novel also exposes how the neo-colonial African societies have replaced a peaceful existence with disharmony, mediocrity and distrust. The postcolonial corruption in the text now becomes a metaphor for the history of neo-colonial African nations which is full of alienation, depression and deprivation. Throughout the novel, the reader will see the pain the masses encounter which will show the irrelevance of those in power. The country in the text is Kenya and since 1963 the country has been facing several deaths, increased

rate in poverty, dehumanization and starvation. The novel just like many other postcolonial African novels shows the height of fear, hate, humiliation and repression. The social injustice of neo-colonialism is the basis of this novel and a case of class stratification can be seen when Meja was sitting in a ditch and people were just passing by going about their day. He observed as the beggars were walking helplessly and also how the pot-bellied executives were wrinkling their noses at the foul stench of the backyards.

Mwangi in his text states several details from the regular life and the novel gives an account of the impotent silent majority. He exposes his society's waywardness and clearly states that he is against it. He confronts the new post-independence regime in Kenya and accuses the new state of failing to provide opportunities for the youth. He complains of how the government neglects the needs and cries of the public. He is not only focusing on highlighting the failures of the government but also mainly on what happens when the government is inefficient. Mwangi does not directly refer to the government instead he tries to imply the absence of the government from the people's lives. The masses are suffering but the government could care less about their problems. They are focused on how they can keep on extorting from the people and not really bothered with how they can help improve their living condition.

In Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* the novel talks on how conflict is unavoidable in human society and he expresses what happens when a person engages in social conflict with one's society. As fore mentioned, it focuses on the exploitation of the masses by the bourgeoisie, the betrayal of public eye, administrative bureaucracy. The text dwells on the suffering that the innocent public encountered and that was a result of the exploitation of the world. In Kenya, there is the problem of class conflict. That is the bourgeoisie refuse to relate with the proletariat because they believe that they are better than them. They are not interested in trying to ease the suffering of the less privileged so they totally ignore their cries. Jude Agho opines that "Post-independence Kenya, like many other countries in Africa, is faced with another rift: a horizontal rift dividing the elite from the mass of the people. Contemporary Kenya has not only witnessed the frustration of the peasants who had hoped for a better life after independence, but their deepening impoverishment and exploitation".

Jomo Kenyatta (1968), in his *Suffering Without Bitterness*, talks about the desires of the Kenyan people from the Mau Mau war, "Our march to freedom has been long and difficult. There have been times of despair, when only the burning conviction of

the rightness of our cause has sustained. Today, the tragedies and misunderstandings of the past are behind us. Today, we start on the great adventure of building the Kenya nation". After several years, the dreams of the masses have still not been met. The nation is still basking in disillusionment and lack of fulfillment and they are not bothered by this stagnancy. *Kill Me Quick* portrays a neo-colonial African society that is in a stage of deadening poverty. The privileged society is in control of the wealth, they are living very comfortable lives with cars, penthouses, expensive clothes and many more. The two major characters Meja and Maina live in a dog-eat-dog world. The living conditions there are constantly deteriorating. The wages are unable to provide for the people and the rate of unemployment is very high.

Mwangi believes that novels of disillusionment express profound rejection of African societies. He does not fully blame the colonial masters; he also blames the neo-colonial indigenous leaders for the pains of the masses. He believes that they are worse than the colonial masters. The lives of Meja and Maina show that the independence has not been very favorable to the masses. Most postcolonial African writers always depict their different states as a place where the rulers have failed to protect the nation and its integrity from the effects of neo-colonialism and globalization.

The authors of these texts are both African and have made use of their texts to mirror the activities and events that happen in their countries. The way Soyinka writes should truly be studied. He is one of the first generation writers in Nigeria and he has written several works in all genres; poetry, drama and prose. He wrote his first plays during the time he was in London. Soyinka is known for writing from his experiences and he makes sure to document them in such a way that they can be relatable for the readers. In most of the texts he writes, he talks about the strife and corruption his country, Nigeria is facing. When he writes, he does not sugarcoat the truth rather he makes use of literary devices like metaphors, idioms to conceal the harsh truth. One might think that Soyinka will stop criticizing the government for their bad deeds because he has been incarcerated before but that is not the case. He keeps on using his voice through his writings to address the heart wrenching issues that are occurring in his nation. In chastising the government, he also suggests solutions to some of the problems. He does not just reprimand them without helping them find a way to move forward. Mwangi is also an African author and most of his texts are centered on the historical and social conditions of his country, Kenya. He writes on behalf of the people who are constantly being oppressed by the government. He uses his work to speak on the negative influence colonialism has had

on his country. He explains that the people are living in disillusionment and are hoping for a better life because that is what the government promised them. Little do they know that that same government is being ruled by the white folk. Mwangi does not usually focus on criticizing the government but rather on speaking up for the people. He feels a deep connection with them because he was once them. He also suffered and believed the lies the government kept spewing out unprovoked.

The main characters in the two texts are not very similar. Alaba from *ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA* has his education cut short and he had to pick up a vocation. He later became very successful in his line of work and was able to comfortably retire but Meja and Maina from *Kill Me Quick* suffered all through the text. They lived slightly better lives in their village than in the city. They hoped the city will offer them better opportunities but that was not the case. They lived like paupers and in the end they were going to die like paupers. In *ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA*, Alaba dealt with the corrupt government one on one that is he witnessed their veil ways first hand but Meja and Maina only suffered from the hands of the privileged folks. The two boys did not have access to those in power. The government was not concerned with the happenings on the street; they only focused on how to make more money so that they can give it to the white man. The two countries are both a dystopian state. That is, nothing positive hardly comes from them. From the texts, Nigerian seems to be in a better condition than Kenya although the timeline for the two texts are not the same. *Kill Me Quick* was written in the late 90's while *ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA* was written in the early 2000's. Kenya seems to be facing a harder time because they had just gained independence so they are yet to be able to fully live without the assistance of the colonial masters. In the text Mwangi talks on how the Kenyan government still pays homage to the white man and that is why they do not have enough funds to give back to the people. Soyinka's text focuses on the corrupt nature of those in government. He does not really speak on the immense suffering of the people. He speaks on how government tries to manipulate the people into getting what they want. They will go to any length to achieve their personal interest even though the people suffer in the process.

The two nations are similar in the fact that they are both dystopian States. They are dealing with constant hardship and chaos from the government and the two governments are not willing to do anything about the suffering of the people. They are also both keen on focusing on how they can drain the people of anything progressive.

Alaba is somewhat an illiterate butcher but he believes in doing what is right and expected of him. He refuses to be moved by the promises of those in power of a higher societal status. Even when his life is threatened, he does not waver; he stands strong for what he believes in. Despite the unfair treatment he has been receiving right from when he was younger, he does not allow it affect him negatively. Instead, he focuses on building his butchering career and creating a name for himself. The dystopian setting which is Lagos is a dysfunctional society that is full of corrupt people and leaders. The symbolic globe brings to light the series of unfavorable events that happened to Alaba. His friend Teacher is his confidant and he helps him with several important decisions in the course of the play.

Theme of Corruption of Power

This is the dominant theme in the play. The play centers round the severe level of corruption in the fictional society. Alaba who is the protagonist is faced with several challenges throughout the text. His problems start when he attempts to fix the globe and fails. He ends up destroying the globe and when he was asked to replace it; his father reduced and withdrew him from the school instead. Alaba then decides to find what to do with himself since education was no longer an option. He tries out a series of vocations like being an Ifa assistant but to no avail. He decides to settle for his father's butchering work. Over time, he practices the act of being a butcher and perfects the skill. He was a very skillful butcher; however the customer wanted their meat he would always deliver to perfection. His work became well known all around the village and also worldwide. There were people that would travel from far and wide to have a taste of Alaba's "suya". He was a very influential butcher so when he decided to retire, the entire village could not understand the reason for that sudden decision. He then develops a new hobby of sitting on the rock in front of his house engaging in absolutely nothing.

He then makes a decision with his friend Teacher to create a signboard to formally inform the public of his decision to retire. They appoint the creation of the signboard to one of Teacher's students Picasso. Picasso is a baby painter who is not very fluent in Yoruba. He is instructed by his Teacher to paint the words "ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA" a signboard for Alaba. He asks Alaba for help with the accents on the words but Alaba misleads him and he ends up writing the wrong accents. He was supposed to write "ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA" which means "butcher on the rock" instead he writes "ALAPATA APATA" which translates to "the ruler of Apata (the rock)". This unintentional mistake circulates

round the entire village and beyond and it becomes a big problem for Alaba.

The conflict in this play that begins to reveal the true corrupt nature of those of higher status is the fact that the rock is believed to have some valuable materials within it. Most people believe that Alaba is fixed on that rock to keep the materials for himself. Alaba is totally unaware that the government and some private stakeholders are interested in mining the rock for its supposed materials. Due to the fact that he is always fixed on the rock, it has been quite difficult for them to gain access to the rock. The government and other interested parties have successfully convinced themselves that Alaba is hiding the materials and they are determined to get him off the rock by all means. This is where the readers will see the extent in which the privileged will go to attain something that is not theirs.

The antagonists in the play are the local governor, the general, the prospector and the king. These men all have their selfish agenda of what they will do with the riches they extract from the rock. The prospector tells Alaba that life is all about resource control and this is a solid instance of what is happening in the fictional and also real life country. Teacher is the only person that truly understands Alaba and his reasons for sitting on that rock all day. Teacher tells him that “doing nothing” will be his new trade mark. This serves as a metaphor for the nation and how they never follow through on all they claim to want to do. This can be seen in their comical praise of ‘nothing’. This metaphor explain how a government will for instance promise to fix some major roads in the state but will eventually not follow through on their promises. The budgeted funds for the project will miraculously disappear and the roads will remain as they were. This is always a problem with the government, they are not trustworthy and it is for this reason the people never having faith in them.

Soyinka makes use influential posts as they are usually the culprits of corrupt activities. The general is a character that at first comes off as different from the rest. Alaba and the general engage in conversation and the general lets him know that he is interested in mining the raw materials that is within the rock. Alaba assures him that he is not aware of any raw materials but the general does not believe him. The general is convinced that Alaba is lying and is very upset with him. Alaba lets him know that there is no reason for him to lie. The general leaves Alaba’s house angry and informs his soldiers to go and mine the rock in the evening. The general is clearly greedy and will stop at nothing to ensure that he gets those raw materials. He decides to invade Alaba’s privacy which is against the

law but he does not care. He is more concerned with how rich he will get if he retrieves the raw materials. His mission is unsuccessful because when his soldiers arrive at Alaba’s house, they realize that they are at the wrong location. The wrongly transcribed the accents on the signboard Alaba and Teacher put up. The soldiers hurriedly leave after realizing their mistake. They became scarred because they know that the general will severely punish them for such a mistake. The irresponsible behavior of the general shows how he allowed his personal desires overcome his duties to the people and the country.

Another character that could have made a positive impact but decided not to be is the governor, Daanielebo. Alaba and the governor were friends while they were younger but due to the fact that Alaba had to leave school their friendship was cut short. The governor was also very interested in mining the material resources in the rock. He was persistent and Alaba informed his that he was not aware of what he was talking about. Alaba kept on assuring him that he was clueless but the governor did not believe him. The governor was certain that Alaba was lying and kept on hounding him to release the raw materials. The governor openly offered him money hoping it will make Alaba change his mind.

Daanielebo: Be careful Alaba. If you cross me, don’t think your reputation will save you. You know what I want. You’ve got what I want. I can pay and pay well. If anyone makes you a better offer, I’ll double it. I’ll even triple it just tell me how much!

From this extract from the text, it shows the governor openly offering Alaba a bribe for the supposed raw materials in the rock. Even though Alaba has told him severally that he does not know what he is talking about, he offers to increase the bribe hoping Alaba will accept. This scene just shows how the government is not even afraid to go against the law because they know nothing will happen. It is also safe to say that the money he was offering Alaba is the state’s money. He was eager to give up the government’s money for his selfish desires. The level of disregard he has towards the state is not good enough for someone whose priority is supposed to be the state. He did not only offer Alaba a bribe but also threatened his life. He told him that he had the power to take whatever he wanted whenever he pleased. He clearly misused his power and used his authority to try and bully Alaba to give him the raw materials. This type of behavior is totally unacceptable especially from the governor of an entire state. In this play, Soyinka made use of characters like the General and the Governor to refer to some of those in power in his country, Nigeria.

He believes that they never take their duties seriously instead they are wandering around lurking for every spare penny they can steal from the government as well as the people.

The text shows how those in authority will work hard to achieve their personal desires. That is the only time one will see them putting in all their strength. The General who is meant to ensure that no harm comes to the people is struggling on how to attain raw materials from a rock. He is not even trying to get the raw materials to benefit the people instead he is putting in that much effort so that he can surpass his rival. The general makes use of the soldiers who are meant for the protection of the people for his own agenda. He misused his power by sending the soldiers to invade Alaba's privacy. There are instances when the subordinate will know that the action their master is asking of them is morally wrong but due to fear and respect for authority they can not go against their masters wishes. This is also another misuse of power on the General's path. He knew that the soldiers would do whatever he asked of them in a heartbeat and used that leverage over them. The Governor is also guilty of this as well. He believed that because he and Alaba go way back he could use that connection to get the raw materials. When it does not work out he then turns to fetish means and even goes on to threaten Alaba.

Theme of Satire

Satire is a genre of literature that dwells on humor and social criticism. This is basically what *ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA* is about, it deployed elements of comedy such as irony, sarcasm, allusion etc. The text is an analogy between the cartographic representation of the world and the warped experiences of the characters and it helps in understanding the need for restoration of the state Soyinka's envisions. The play highlights parts from the drama that are meant to achieve the tragic vision of the human condition. Soyinka uses this satiric drama to reveal the lopsidedness in the social, economic, moral and cultural aspect using Nigeria as a specific context. In analyzing the text, there is a relationship between the fictional globe and the satirical representation of the disreputable human experiences. That is, the crooked globe symbolizes the lopsided world and the globe also brought to light the experiences of some of the characters. It exposed their mindset and thought process which showed that majority of them were twisted.

Satire is meant to provide a critical statement on the moral, social, political about the human condition in every possible aspect. It usually comments on the absurdities of humanity and many African

writers make use of this in their works. Satire is not necessarily a genre of tragedy or comedy but it is known for placing characters in political, cultural or psychological situations that may make the audience emotionally sympathetic towards the character. This can be seen with Alaba where he innocently tries to fix the globe and it gets broken in the process. The readers will be sympathetic towards young Alaba because he was only trying to help. He was not familiar with a world that was not straight because he believed that everything was straightforward. The readers will also sympathize with him when he is sent out of school because his father refused to pay in order to get the globe fixed.

In *ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA*, the satiric intent is directed both to the human society and the cartographic symbol representing it. The globe in the text is crooked the same way the world it is representing is. The satiric act maximizes its prospects to artistically manipulate the image and character of its subject for comic and cathartic effects. This art is best when it jokily makes its subject matter appear decadent and different in order to trigger a sympathetic feeling from the reader. Soyinka successfully does this with Alaba. He portrayed Alaba to be this unusual elderly man who randomly gives up on his blooming profession and decides to spend the rest of his days sitting on a rock doing nothing. This sudden decision has the villagers asking questions and even the readers as well would be wondering what could have caused that decision. This sudden change can be tagged as hilarious because it is very unusual. Alaba was very successful so it was not adding up why he just threw the success away. His butchering skills were excellent and his produce had crossed borders. Some people thought he was mad because he would just spend hours on the rock looking at the villagers go about their day.

Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* offers an argument that satire thrives by choosing an "object of attack" and "wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque and absurd". This means that satire creates its content of a specific subject matter. That is there has to be a pressing issue that is either sad or comical. He says that most times the "object of attack" is given more priority over humor by the satirist. He explained that amongst the various modes of identifying the forms of fictional representation, satiric drama may fall within the low mimesis category because of the manner of its deployment of the "fictional" and the "ethos" of expression. Other satirist like Samuel Johnson, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift etc. also opine that the goal of satire is to correct human misdemeanors and create a sense of morality that will benefit the society.

Soyinka made use of satire to expose the immoral acts of the privileged people in power. His writing was centered on ensuring that the reader was aware of the wrong acts performed by those in power. Soyinka writes from similar events that are also happening in the world around him. In the text, he brings to light how the rulers and privileged folk get away with whatever they want. In the process, he ridicules them and exposes their ways. Alaba is the character that was always in contact with the people of high rank in the society because they all wanted something from him. It was funny how they left their mansions and beautiful houses because they wanted to strike a deal with Alaba. They offered him money and titles but he let them know that he was not aware of any raw materials that are supposedly in the rock. The fact that they made several promises to Alaba just because of raw materials is hilarious. They even went as far as arguing with him and saying he was lying and hiding the materials for himself. It is also comical that all these promises and advances were done in public.

CHAPTER FOUR

URBANISATION AND POVERTY AND POSTCOLONIAL DECADENCE: AN ANALYSIS OF *KILL ME QUICK*

Textual Analysis

Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* portrays the disillusionment in the Kenyan society. He made use of some themes and formal features from his society to talk on either positive or negative experiences. The text is addressed to his society to help them in understanding themselves better. That is he uses this text to bring to light the problems and injustice the people are going through and let them know that their suffering is not normal and absolutely unacceptable. Mwangi is a social critic and he skillfully manipulated his themes, settings, characters in his texts to show the true nature of the society. In order to pass a strong valid message, he mainly talks on sociological, economic and political issues regarding to his society. These issues are usually pressing so he writes on them to inform the masses of the events that the government is keeping a secret. According to Jean-Paul Satre, M. Adereth (1967), "commitment is inherent in the act of writing. To write, [Satre] says, is to talk, and to talk is to reveal an aspect of the world, in order to change it". This simply means that the writers work can be seen as a social criticism that shows the shortfalls of his society and the dilemma of the individuals in it". C. Amuta (1986) states the relevance of social criticism by saying "The writers is not only influenced by society; he influences it. Art not merely reproduces life but also

shapes it. People may mould their lives upon the patterns of fictional heroes and heroines".

Urbanization and Poverty

This text is about life after colonialism that is how the people of Kenya live after the departure of the colonial masters. In many African societies, life postcolonialism has been difficult especially for the lower class. This issue has been widely addressed by several African authors, many of the African text post colonialism have been centered on life and the effect neocolonialism had on Africans. Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick* exposes the poor living conditions of Africans after their independence. The text is about two young teenage boys, Meja and Maina who recently finished secondary school. They left their homes in the village to come to the city in search of a better life but that search was to no avail. They believed that the city of Nairobi would offer them a better life but little did not know living there would end up being their worst nightmare. They hoped to get well-paying jobs so that they could send funds to their families in the village. The two boys crossed paths on the backstreets of the city where all the refuse are dumped. They realized that they were both in the city in search for the same thing, a better life. They tried every possible means to try and get a decent job but they were not given an opportunity, most offices kicked them out even before they could state their intentions.

The urbanization of Nairobi and Kenya in general caused several problems for its people. Meja and Maina are the protagonists in this text and they represent one of the social problems of Nairobi. There are a number of young boys and girls roaming the streets trying their best to survive off handouts and crime. Urbanization is not solely responsible for the desolation of these youths but the thoughtlessness of the privileged folks is also to blame. The young boys did all they could to try to survive, they were willing to sweep the streets, chop wood and even wash plates but the main street dwellers refused to accept them.

"I can also sweep and wash dishes and... he whined, 'chop wood.' 'We don't use wood here.' Meja's shoulders dropped. He tried to shrug but that came out too badly so he shook his head looking at the clean floor of the office. The manager was becoming impatient. 'No vacancy,' he announced. 'But please, any job... thirty... twenty... anything you like,' he pleaded. 'I said there is no vacancy.' (7).

It is clear how desperate Meja is here; he begged to be given any job no matter how mediocre it was. He was very opened to doing anything because he was fed up of the life he was living. He was looking

forward to a change no matter how little and that speaks of his character.

The boys also decided to sell scraps of metal. They saw an old man that was willing to buy but at a ridiculous rate. They hesitated at first but later agreed because the suffering they were going through was becoming unbearable.

“Competing against the whole world, the boys had no chance. So they turned to other things. Old and battered aluminum utensils, copper wiring, bottles, cans and general scrap metal were to be found in plenty in the rubbish bins”. (10)

They eventually gave up because they realized that no matter what they did or how they did it, nothing ever paid. People always tried to cheat them and play with their minds because they had the means to. They eventually gave up and decided to live in the backstreets since that was the only place that willingly accepted them. This part of the text explains how the typical capitalist class who believe in profit maximization despite the needs of the masses. They are not interested in the problems the masses are going through; as long as they are receiving their profit they are satisfied. This is the disillusionment that the people were blinded by. They hoped that their country would be different after independence but their problems got worse.

The boy's lives changed for the good for a little period of time. The fact that the boys were happy about such a miserable upgrade should speak a lot on the amount of suffering they faced. Boi who is an old man was offering them a job at a farm house but lied about the job descriptions. He made them believe that they had liberty to work freely but that was not the case.

“I am Boi the old man said... ‘What do you want Boi?’ Meja asked him... ‘My master,’ the old man stammered. ‘My master wants two boys...’ ‘Where is your master?’ Meja asked ignoring his partner... ‘He lives in a farm twenty miles from the city,’ he said. ‘He is town for shopping and will take you to the farm with him if you want to work for him...’ But Boi told the boys that the white man would leave them alone to do their jobs. That was a lie.” (13-16)

The living condition was better than living in the dumpsters but it was not a great upgrade. There were no living boundaries between the little children and puppies. Their hut was flea and rat infested. This was such an inhumane condition but they preferred it to living in the dumpsters. They were sure that they could eat and even have where to sleep. This new life

did not last for long. Boi became a huge bother to the boys, he kept on pestering them to give him a percentage for their miserable earnings and they refused. Boi then frames them for theft and that gets them kicked out of the farm. Here, Mwangi was simply proving a point which is that corruption is living amongst the rich and even the poor. As long as people have a small ranking over you, they will try to oppress you.

“This is a frame up,’ he cried. ‘We did not steal them. I swear someone placed them there.’ The fat boss watched them, his face flushed with anger... ‘Boi did it,’ Maina went on to say. ‘We did not...’ ‘Come for your pay when you have packed up’, he said. ‘I will take you back to where you were collected...’ ‘Everything has an end,’ he said, trying to keep up his carefree mood.” (39-40)

The boys were positive even though their lives were not going well in any way. They kept on being optimistic and hoping that things will change. They did not allow all the negativity get to them; they served as a form of encouragement to themselves. They were obviously bothered by the fact that their lives would become extra difficult again. Since there were no job opportunities or a means of survival they had to find a way to stay alive. They were hesitant at first of considering crime because Maina remembered how most of his friends were rotting away in prison because of the petty theft they did.

“So,’ Maina went on, all my friends became thieves and robbers... So my friends went into the main streets and snatched purses and they are almost all of them in prison now, for one reason or another. Me, I turned to the backstreets and thrived.” (2)

He knew he did not want the same fate for himself so he turned to something less risky. This narrative of not wanting to be involved with crime did not last long. The intense rate of poverty was literally killing them and that was led them to join the gang. Maina ran into an old friend after running for his and had no idea why he was being chased. It is this childhood friend, Kamanda but now known as Razor that introduced him to the world of crime. Razor noticed that Maina was basically a beggar because he had no work, no shelter and no gang. He immediately offers Maina a gang membership but Maina was too confused to reply. Razor tells him about the activities of the gang and Maina is both eager and anxious. At this point, it seems Maina is weighing his options because he is starting to believe that being in a gang is better than living in extreme poverty. This gang life was never

an option for both him and Meja but at this point they feel they do not have a choice. They feel defeated by all the stagnancy in their life and they decided to take action and joining the gang was their way forward. The suffering and inhumane treatment they received pushed them to abandon their moral views and they can not really be blamed for that.

Mwangi uses the boys to talk on the high rate of inhumane poverty that was going on in the postcolonial Kenyan society. He talks on how the rate of unemployment is high and that is why the country is still suffering. The way Mwangi describes the streets of the city is like a venomous web that draws the individuals to the charm of the city and ends up trapping and crushing such a person. The boys are aware of the fact that they are suffering and living horrible lives but the idea of returning home without anything to give back is killing them. They prefer to suffer than to be mocked by their friends and family at home. They chose their poison, poverty over shame. Mwangi explained that their families would not understand that life in the city is not easy. That is where the issue of urbanization come in, life postcolonialism has brought more bad than good.

Postcolonial Decadence

In this text, what Mwangi does is not directly refer to the government and how they are insufficient but rather to he talks on how they are absent from the people's lives. The government puts up a nonchalant attitude to the plight of the people. They are not concerned with the fact that there rate of death, unemployment, robbery are increasing daily. This theme now becomes a metaphor for the history of neo-colonial African nations which end up being alienated and depressed. It has also brought about distrust, disharmony and corruption which have disturbed the peaceful existence of many African societies. This novel like many other African postcolonial novels depicts a vile environment full of fear and repression. In the text, it was clear that the people were suffering and were afraid of speaking up.

In his writings, he exposes the society's filth, contradictions and conflicts. This is usually the type of society he writes about because he creates a fictional society from the actual society he comes from. The text confronts corruption in the post-independence regime in Kenya and he talks on how the state failed the youths by not creating any opportunities for them to move forward. The text speaks on how the government exploited the masses thereby betraying their trust and confidence in them. Meja and Maina left their villages in search for a fresh and better beginning. At the end of the day, they could only hope for a new start because

the government and privileged folks did not give them a chance. Another very huge issue in Kenya is the fact that there is always a problem of class conflict. The privileged people do not see the need to interact or even assist the poor. They are not willing to help because they are selfish, often they give excuses why they will not assist but the truth of the matter is that the government has not made life easy. They have not created enough jobs so that people can actually try to make a living.

In Mwangi's *Kill Me Quick*, he talks on how the masses are being socially stratified. He explains how they are unable to sustain themselves because the economy is not even in their hands but in the hands of foreign interests. Their main concern is in producing food and exportation of goods and not in the welfare of the masses. It is due to this severe negligence that the people are forced to try and find a life in the city. This is the very problem that Meja and Maina encountered. They believed that life in the city after colonialism would be very favorable but that was not the case. They arrived at Nairobi and life instantly became worse than when they lived in their village. In the village, life was peaceful and everyone lived in oneness without any troubles but the city was an entire different ball game. In the city, they had to deal with marginalization, orders from the westerners and eroticism. The boys were treated differently and were seen as foreigners by the people in authority.

The fact that the boys kept on going through the same dilemma shows the political and social failures of the postcolonial Kenyan nation. Mwangi lays emphasis on the unemployment rate and how it is one of the pressing issues facing some postcolonial African issues. The boys tried several times to find jobs but nothing ever seemed to come up.

"You want me to direct you to some place?" the quarry man asked... 'Can you get me a job? Here in your place?'... He studied Meja again. Then he shook his head. Then he noticed Meja's plight and desperation and he spoke up quickly. 'I don't know,' he said, 'but we could check. We need a few more people to replace another lot that was killed in an accident.' (102-103)

Here, it can be seen that Meja was desperate and despite being horribly treated in the course of the novel he still did not give up on life. It was quite clear that he was not cut out for the job because it required a lot of physical strength but he did not allow that stop him. He needed to survive and he was not going to let some injuries stop him. Sadly, this opportunity did not last long. He eventually returns to the streets and ends

up getting involved in the life of crime. The way their lives turn out is quite sad and the story becomes sadder because the young boys actually wanted to make something out of themselves but the government let them down. The boys countlessly strived to get jobs and to survive in the society. Whatever chance they had to work or ask for jobs, they took it in a heartbeat. They were very diligent young men and were always eager to work but the society failed them. The government gave them no option but to choose crime. They were in no way supportive of the masses; they let their corrupt minds make all the decisions. The government was very inconsiderate and insensitive to the people and Mwangi made it known that the government just left the people to fend for themselves. The boys ended going to prison for the crimes they committed. They knew what they were getting themselves into and they prepared for the consequences.

REFERENCES

- Afolayan, Sola. "A Marxist Interpretation of the Dystopian Society in African Novel." *KEMANUSIAAN* (2011): 18.
- Al-Harbi, Aisha Obaid. "The Creative Writer as a Social Critic: A Study of Meja Mwangi's Kill Me Quick and Going Down River Road." *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Arts and Humanities* (2018): 8.
- Alimi, Nurayn Fola. "A Skewed Universe: Tragic Vision of Satire in Soyinka's ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA ." *UNILAG Journal of Humanities* (2017): 21.
- Awoyemi-Arayela, Taye. "Nigerian Literature in English: The Journey so Far?" *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* (2013): 8.
- Kehinde, Ayo. "Post-Independence Disillusionment in Contemporary African Fiction: The Example of Meja Mwangi's Kill Me Quick." *Nordic Journal of African Studies* (2004): 14.
- Koutchade, Innocent Sourou. "Analysing The Ethnography of Communication in Wole Soyinka's ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA: A Socio-Functional Perspective." *European Journal of Literary Studies* (2019): 18.
- Kumbalonah, Abobo. *Mobility and the Representation of African Dystopian Spaces in Film and Literature*. 2015.
- Lobo, Alejandra Giangiulio. "Reader-Response Theory: A Path Towards Wolfgang Iser." (2013): 18.
- Mwangi, Meja. *Kill Me Quick*. London: Heinemann, 1973.
- Patil, Dr. Charusheela Hanumant. "The Cost of Urbanization and Poverty in Meja Mwangi's Kill Me Quick." *Journal of English Language and Literature (JOELL)* (2017): 5.
- Soyinka, Wole. *ALÁPATÀ ÀPÁTA*. Ibadan: Bookcraft Ltd, 2011.
- Spirovska, Elena. "Reader-Response Theory and Approach: Application, Values and Significance for Students in Literature Courses." *SEEU Review* (2019): 16.

Cite this article as: James E. Onyeashie (2022). Dystopia or Sites with Real Places: A Reading of Wole Soyinka's Alapata of Apapta and Meja Mwangi's Kill Me Quick. *International Journal of Emerging Knowledge Studies*. 1(1), 30-41.