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Politics of Remonstrance in African Discourse: Comparative Critique of Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike,* Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* and Ngugi's *Devil on Cross*

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Highlights:

African Resistance literature is similar to Harlem Renaissance in philosophy

African literary discourse is politically committed to resisting exploitation

Postcolonial and Marxist aesthetics interrogate human condition in African literature

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Abstract: This article is a comparative critique of Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike* (1979), Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988) and Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* (1980). The works examine how the selected texts vary in time and place across Africa, focusing on exploitation and resistance using Postcolonial and Marxist hermeneutics. This article delineates the thematic preoccupations, narrative format and sociopolitical context of the works. Against the different socio-cultural contexts of the selected texts and the genres, the texts show points of intersection in the exploration of their thematic concerns, such as social injustices, corruption, oppression and remonstrance. *The Beggars' Strike* is a satirical piece about a society that enjoys certain spiritual advantages from the physically challenged poor. But, they are despised by the same elite for their overt lack of economic value. The elite are hypocritically disposed to the beggars. Similarly, *Hopes of the living Dead* is a dramatic work that reveals the collective struggles of the leprosy patients to assert their dignity against institutional neglect. In a different but related context, *Devil on the Cross* examines the attitude of the middle class elite on corruption and exploitation perpetuated as a postcolonial tendency at the detriment of the larger segment of the society constituted by the peasants and working class. A comparative reading of the texts reveals how together they have criticized the social ills in the society, and created the consciousness of resistance in the "wretched of the earth," Their deplorable condition is the machination of the elite, not the natural order of human existence. As much as the society is still replete with social injustices and exploitation, the political commitment of literary writers to the development of the society should still be work in progress.

Keywords: Exloitation, Proletariate, Bourgeoisie, Remonstrane, Postcolonialism

Introduction

Remonstrance/Resistance is amongst the various forms of political commitment of African literature. It is a development that is similar to Harlem Renaissance, in that African literature opposes colonial and postcolonial oppression. Remonstrance is a rejection or a well thought-out verbal complaint of an infringing disposition to authority for possible correction to be done. Resistance has to do with passively, verbally or physically rejecting or opposing a force or request. The refusal to succumb to a demand can be on individual or organized level. It could be civil or armed resistance. The two are not synonymous, but one can dove-tail into another, depending on the structure of the plot. African literary resistance does not emanate from Harlem Renaissance, or are they exactly the same Movement. Harlem influenced African resistance literature in its focus on colonial and postcolonial issues. Harlem and Resistance in African literature only share the tradition of asserting black cultural consciousness and rejection; not the same historical movement or resistance emanating from Harlem Renaissance. Harlem Renaissance, a form of rejection, is one of the vibrant movements of African-American cultural and intellectual activities founded in the 1920s (Onyemelukwe, 2004).

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It was centred on reconceptualizing the stereotypical understanding of the West about Africa-America. Harlem Renaissance inspired the Negritude Movement in Paris, resisting the inhuman French colonial rule. "The development of the nomenclature", Momoh (2020) writes, "is closely linked to the peculiar history of French colonialist mission of turning black Africans into Frenchmen by means of education and self-abandonment". Thus, emulating the political thought of the Renaissance, "it is not surprising African literature of which Negritude is a part, is a literature of combat, of commitment" (Onyemelukwe). Constituting the category of vibrant Negritude writers that anchored and propelled the paradigm shift, negating the negative posture of Western literature and affirming the dignity of African culture are Leopold Sedar Senghor, Aime Cesaire, Leon Damas, Richard Wright, Jacques Rabemanjara, Birago Diop, Ousmane Soce and a host of others. These figures devoted their literary energy to the liberation of Africans from the uncouth clutches of the West that focused on "Art for Art's sake" instead of Art that is committed to recreating human condition.

Having had this encouraging take off, African literature has no reason to veer off track in every facet of resistance that is necessary for the development of the society. This is in tandem with what Onyemelukwe (2004) wants us to know about African literature: "following the recommendation of the 2nd Congress of Black Writers and Artists, the African writer is charged to accomplish through the artistic medium of the triple roles of being the spokesman, educator and liberator of his people". African literature is a product of African experience. Experiences of cultural life, political affairs and economic issues emanating from human relationships form the raw materials for the recreation of African literature. Predominant themes in African literature are resistance to marginalization, cultural deformation, social inequalities, corruption, etc. The representation of human experiences through the aforementioned factors depends strictly on cultural context, prevailing ideology and narrative techniques. The culture of resistance, to a large extent, is a trend that runs significantly through African literature. *Things Fall Apart*, for instance, is an evocation of African culture resisting the imperialists' culture. It presents the protagonist, Okonkwo and other characters to embody the strengths and weaknesses of Igbo culture. Okonkwo resisted the infringement of Western culture on the culture of Umuofia till he committed suicide. Ngugi's *Weep Not Child* celebrates how Njoroge and his father stand sternly to resist the forceful attempts by the Europeans to subdue the Gikuyu traditions. Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, Sembene Ousmane's *Xala* and *God's Bits of Wood*, Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, Sow Fall's *The beggars' Strike, Hopes of the Living Dead* and many more examples in point explicate various forms of social consciousness and appropriate forms of protest anchored on Marxism and postcolonial theories.

The three texts that are of primary concern in this study, no doubt, have thematic similarities and dissimilarities because of their related socio-cultural backgrounds. Writers have deployed different narrative strategies to expose the structure of their societies, and how the marginalized majority in terms of resource distribution muster courage to resist the lopsidedness. At individual level, the primary texts of this study have explored various forms of social conditions and attendant resistance. A comparative study of the three texts using the lenses of Postcolonialism and Marxism seeks to establish that issues examined separately can be examined together by way of comparison. That is the lacuna that this article attempts to fill.

Postcolonialism and Marxism as Literary Theories

Postcolonialism

Postcolonialism is a multidimensional theory that examines how colonialism affects the coloniser and the

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colonised, interrogating the power dynamics during and after colonialism. The concept seeks to deconstruct the Western antics that hold sway during and after independence. In the words of Young (2003),

> *Postcolonialism basically aims "to re-examine the history of colonialism from the perspective of the colonised; to determine the economic, political and cultural impact of colonialism on both the colonised people and the colonising powers; to analyze the process of decolonization, and above all, to participate in the goals of political liberation, which includes equal access to material resources, the contestation of forms of domination and the articulation of political and cultural identities.*

The concern of these theory as a matter of academic discourse is on imperialist ideologies and structured power. Postcolonial theory has resistance as its hub. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) argue that the critical matter to the conceptualization of postcolonialism is the notion of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* (1978); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Can the Subaltern speak*? (1988) and Homi K. Bhabba's *The Commitment Theory* (1990). Orientalism is a term couched by Said to represent the East as "Other" by the West; Spivak propounded the idea of subaltern to explain the experiences of the category of people that are not included in the mainstream narrative or scheme of things; and Bhabba, as a critic whose work propels postcolonialism, concerns itself with ideas of hybridity, mimicry, agency and assimilation to comprehend how the colonized people respond to and possibly resist dominating colonialism. Epicentral to the commitment of these works is the manner with which writers of African descent recreate their experiences to reclaim their cultural identities from the unguided kaleidoscope of Africa created by the imperialists; and to evaluate the manner with which colonial literature portray Africans as inferior entities. In an attempt to align poscolonial to the proper conceptualisation, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) believe that "we use the term postcolonial…to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonialisation to the present day". Thus, postcolonialism goes beyond colonial period because of the persisting colonial structures such as political, economic, security and cultural script dependency on the West after independence. This article therefore would tie its criticism to the postcolonial structures and ideologies that still hold sway in Africa, especially capitalism.

Marxism

Marxism in the literary space is a theory that interrogates the social condition that is used in plotting a story. According to Lenin's argument (as cited in Mba and Mba, 2017) "in the social production of human existence, men enter into definite necessary relations, which are independent of their will, namely, relation of production". A broader perspective is offered in an online scholarly article on Marxist theory by Choudhury (2022): "Marxism deals with social, economic, and political factors affecting society. It talks about the ill effects of capitalism on society and economy". The theory is premised on the belief that the class conflict between the elite and the proletariat is consequent upon the slanted productive relations between the ruling class and the exploited category of the people in the society. The consciousness of the exploited class about their seeming irreconcilable unequal social relations necessitated by capitalism would become unbearable to the working class, peasants and proletariat, thus prompting them to resist exploitation till the system is overturned. This would consequently lead to a classless society

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where equality and harmony would thrive. Tenets of Marxist Literary Theory: The potency of literature to create social change has been the argument of Marxist scholars to interrogate the themes of social and economic realities. The working principles of Marxism are hinged on certain precise propositions (Choudhury, 2022): criticism of the texts would be done using only three of the tenets as highlighted below:

1. Historical Materialism: Material and economic conditions are the drivers of human history. The change in human society is determined by the change in the production relations between the owners of means of production and the working class. It is the socio-economic condition of Sow Fall's beggars, Rotimi's lepers and Ngugi's working class and peasants as it relates to the capitalist that would be the focus of this tenet.
2. Class Struggle: The economic condition of the people divides the society into opposing classes of the poor and the rich. It is the struggle between these classes either for the sustenance of hegemony or an overturn of the suppressing capitalist economy that makes for the historical development of the society. Class struggle is defined as social division among people where each class of people struggle and fight to gain a superior position in society and the maximum areas and means of production. "Marxism," Lenin (1976) notes "attempts to study histories as a single process with which all its immense variety and contradiction is governed by one law, namely, the law of class struggle". The texts would be evaluated based on the struggle between the poor and the capitalists in their various dimensions of exploitation and oppression.
3. Material Base and Cultural Superstructure: The superstructure has to do with the various aspects of human culture - religion, law, politics, and its enforcement agents – that are instruments to control the psyche of the oppressed to believe that the exploitative principles of the capitalists are natural. The superstructure of a society is shaped by its economic base which is owned by the elite. As such, the owner of means of production controls legislation, media that won't expose the exploitation. This tenet would assess how the capitalist use the superstructure to successfully.
4. Surplus Value: The theory of surplus value is imperative to Marxist theory in that the owner of means of production commodifies the working class. Labour is measured as an abstract quantity according to the whims and caprices of the elite. Lbour power is inadequately paid for.
5. Communism: The seed of destruction of capitalism is inherent with capitalism. Capitalism is characterized with depravity of the proletariat by the elite. Because of materialism in the historical development, Marx anticipated the exploitation of the proletariat coming to an end through revolution. If capitalism fails to crumble naturally, the rebellious proletariat would resist being further exploited by force of labour, after all, they do not have stake in the factories or capital enterprises.

Towards Analysing *The Beggars' Strike, Hopes of the Living Dead* and *Devil on the Cross.* After decades of colonialists' departure from Africa, the unfavourable experiences and harsh realities of the period still remain intact in our memories. This is consequent upon the fact that the anticipated improvements in our political, economic and social challenges have not been realized. African leaders are not better than the inhuman Europeans that they replaced. With regards to the kinds of Africans that have been on the mantle of leadership since the

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departure of the Europeans, Maxwell (2011) has this to say:

> *The national middle class that takes over power at the end of the colonial regime is an underdeveloped middle class. It has practically no economic power, and in any case it is in no way commensurate with the bourgeoisie of the mother country which it hopes to replace.*

The interest of the middle class does not represent that of the generality, but a selfish one that makes the promises of independence on pronouncement a reality. Ubiquitous in Africa after colonial rule are abject penury, social injustices and corruption. African literature as a mirror of our experiences exhibits commitment to our interactions and nuances. This study explicates *The Beggars' Strike, Hopes of the Living Dead* and *Devil on the Cross* in comparative manner to show the similarities and differences in their portrayal of Africa's postcolonial existence. Writers of these selected works not only raise social consciousness based on the realities on ground, but have artistically infused varied protests against social injustices and exploitation. The injustices and exploitation against the suffering masses vary according to the nature of ailments or economic status of the characters that populate the texts and their respective responses as protests. The texts, according to Maxwell (2011): "capture the crisis of the state in the postcolonial Africa, and its declining capacity for stability and development, as a function of the social or class character of the state itself". This is quite germane because it has to do with how capable the state is in terms of social and economic development. That is, at issue is the relationship between government policy and the social condition of the people. How far has the government satisfied the people's high expectation of positive change? Maxwell notes further that "the social character of a state reflects the nature of its leadership group, its objective, interest and value, and its relative strengths and weaknesses in the class struggle". Therefore, to make improvement in the standard of living, it "is not necessarily going to be docile action rather active resistance to all forms of oppression and regression by the ruling class must be destroyed". This is exemplified in African literary works that are postcolonial and, or inclined towards Marxist aesthetics, particularly Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross*, Ousmane Sembene's *God's Bits of Wood* and *Xala*, Festus Iyayi's *Violence*, Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike*, Osofisan's *Morountodun*, Obafemi's *Wheels* and *The New Dawn*, Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, *Why Are We So Blest?*, *Two Thousand Seasons*, Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* and many more texts from across Africa.

The aforementioned postcolonial works have attracted criticisms singly and, or selected for comparative analysis. However, *The Beggars' Strike, Hopes of the Living Dead* and *Devil on the Cross* selected across disparity in time and place for this study, to the researcher's knowledge have not been found to be given critical attention as combined here. This accounts for the value of this study to the existing body of knowledge. That is, comparison of the three selected texts would be done to figure out the similarities and differences in their themes and narrative techniques that underscore resistance in African literary discourse.

Synopses of *Hopes of the Living Dead*, *The Beggars' Strike* and *Devil on the Cross*

Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* is a dramatic recreation of the unfortunate experiences of the leprosy patients in Port Harcourt, in the colonial Nigeria. The story is woven around Ikoli Harcourt Whyte who

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embodies exemplary leadership qualities. The play explores how the patients, whose collective determination is stronger than their despair resist oppression of the ruling class. The courage in their collective struggle is marked with prosperous future. The themes explored in the text include oppression, neglect, unity and desperation. The story is about Harcourt Whyte whose health condition compelled him to abandon his education to take medication at Port Harcourt General Hospital with other lepers of different ethnic groups. Dr. Fergusson from Scotland is in charge of the patients, of which he hopes to improve their condition at the end of his research. The research which the patients expected to end successfully stops because Dr. Ferguson has to return to Scotland. The patients are disappointed not only on the abrupt discontinuation of the research by the colonial authorities, but, also on the general public in particular that considers their continued presence in the hospital as nauseating. The burden of caring for economically unproductive patients makes the government to consider dispersing them to their various homes.

The government, having neglected the patients for sometimes, now plans to disperse them from the hospital. Harcourt Whyte takes the mantle of leadership to sensitize other patients to eschew tribal difference and be collective in their aspirations. Attempts by government to forcefully displace the lepers meet resistance. The working mantra for the lepers is to "be treated as human beings that they are". Harcourt Whyte's resourceful and visionary leadership pays off as the patients in solidarity, subdue the trauma of their ailments to survive the intimidation to achieve improved condition for themselves. Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike* is a novel set against the background of Islamic religion in Dakar. It explores the conflict resulting from the dialectical relationship between the community of beggars and government officials that have inordinate ambition represented in Mour Ndiaye.

In the city of Dakar, the beggars are ubiquitous – in the nooks and crannies of the city: in the street, mosque, market, close to government offices, motor parks, vehicle snarl up and railway stations. In fulfillment of the requirement of Islamic religion, Muslims give alms to the beggars. Others give them alms for the beggars' prayers to be answered in their aspirations and daily struggles. The large number of beggars and their filthy attires coupled with their *modus operandi* of begging, the government observes is a social stigma to the society, especially when tourists visit Dakar. It becomes imperative that the Department of Health and Hygiene swings into action to clear the beggars off the city centre. Mour Ndiaye, the Director of the Department instructed his subordinate, Keba Dabo to do the needful towards tidying up the street. The convergence of Mour's ambition and his official duty drives his determination to impress the President. Dabo takes charge with immediate cheerful readiness and forcefully drives the beggars to the outskirt of the city. The beggars for the umpteenth time resist in futility government's attempts to drive them away. As the beggars discover that their resistance is ineffectual, they collectively, under the leadership of the heroine, Salla Niang keep away from the street. This is a form of strike that is passive in outlook, but result-oriented. The effect of the beggars' withdrawal from the collection of alms manifest in the unsuccessful struggles of the ambitious politicians.

Mour Ndiaye could not do the purported sacrifice that would clear his way to become Vice President. Mour attempts to persuade the beggars with mouth-watering monetary gifts. But, the beggars are adamant to renege on their collective decision to receive alms. The power of the beggars lies in their quiet withdrawal into their shells. The text exposes irony of life in power dynamics as the beggars, as they now assume the status of the rich, while the rich the beggars. Ngugi wa Thiong'O's *Devil on the Cross* is a satirical work of postcolonial Kenya. It explores the socio-political experiences of Kenyans,

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particularly Jacinta Wariinga whose personal struggles reveal the evils of postcolonialism. The atmosphere of distrust around Wariinga is a consequence of her unhealthy experience with men and work. She suffers exploitation and abandonment in life.

As Wariinga travels to the cave where the Devil's Feast is hosted, she finds Muturi and Wangari, both of whom have the experiences of how postcolonial Kenya is worse than colonial Kenya. The gathering at the cave by the thieves and robbers is not essentially made for Wariinga and her likes, but, for the black comprador bourgeoisie and their foreign mentors. The celebration borders on the thieves and robbers parading in words how much wealth they have amassed, their strategies from exploitation and where necessary make reviews to enhance development in their acquisition of wealth (dehumanization of Kenyan peasants and workers). Wariinga's presence at the Feast makes her to be disillusioned of the hitherto false consciousness that her depraved condition is natural. Attempt by the exploited to disrupt and arrest the capitalists turns otherwise. Wangari is arrested, while Muturi and Wariinga go on with the struggle to create social consciousness for the working class and the peasants. Wariinga comes across the Rich Old Man who had exploited and abandoned her. He is the father of Gatuiria the supposed lover of Wariinga. Wariinga kills him as he attempts to take her back to continue exploiting her. By this singular act, Wariinga seems to have, in part kills exploitation of female individuals and the exploitative postcolonial system. This is because the Rich Old Man embodies exploitative tendencies of colonialism, especially in taking sexual advantage of ladies and relieving them of their jobs indiscriminately.

Comparative Textual Analyses

Marxist aesthetic criticism examines conflict resulting from class struggle, use of the superstructure to create false consciousness and commodification of the body.

Class Struggle of the Elite and the Oppressed: In each of three texts, a common of class consciousness exist between the ruling class and the depraved class. Where the wealth generated is slanted in favour of the ruling class. Ngugi's Devil on the Cross as a sample text is quite explicit despite it satirical posture. Carnival of the oppressors exposes the comprador bourgeoisie in the very presence of their mentors, competing on who has successfully milked the wealth of the workers and peasants. Ngugi qualifies them as "thieves and robbers". Sow Fall's The Beggars' Strike locates class conflict in the productivity of the beggars from the economic perspective of the elite. The economic value of the beggars lie only in their ability to receive alms for their spiritual input in the life of the elite. The excuse to clear them from the street is ironical, because the elite represented by Mour Ndiaye is not aware that he is chasing away the political office that he is aspiring to occupy. The beggars lack social and economic worth in the society. Rotimi's Hopes of the Living Dead is a parody of the class conflict that surfaced out of the abandonment of the poor leprosy patients. The non-existent labour value of the beggars makes them to be neglected. That is, of what value are they to the government if the government continues to spend on spend on their health challenges without monetary value in return? As a matter of class struggle, Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* explores the strength in the collectivity of the leprosy patients with the able leadership of Harcourt Whyte. The patients are from different ethnic groups with different ailments, yet they are able to de-emphasise it to strengthen their collective resolve to fight for themselves as human beings. Harcourt Whyte has a foresight, as he is optimistic about the brighter future that he foresees for the community of lepers:

> *The future, brothers. We won't continue like this forever. Sometimes, I just… sit down on the ground, and I look out*

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> *… over there … I see our suffering in a heap, piled up far behind us. Something of the past. And before our eyes, a tomorrow – green, flat waste land. The day when the world will start treating us like people. Real people. A time when we too shall prove that we are people deserving of respect. The lizard likes to sit down relaxed, brother – like the frog. A long tail happens to be his bad luck. (Hopes p.19)*

In a similar vein, Sow Fall's *The Beggars' Strike* has Salla Niang providing leadership par excellence to the beggars for collective struggle. The constant harassment received by the beggars makes Niang to call for a congregational meeting in her courtyard where she gives a new directive that makes for the prosperous future of the beggars. Since they are not economically and politically viable, the need to withdraw their spiritual services becomes the only potent option. She is unequivocal in her words:

> *It's time we woke up, lads. People don't give out of love for us. That's quite correct. So, let's get organized! For a start, don't let's accept any more of those worthless coins they throw us, that won't even buy a lollipop. Eh, my little talibes, d'you hear! Spit in their one francs and their two francs; spit on their three lumps of sugar; spit on their handful of rice! D'you hear? Show them we're men as much as they are! And no more prayers for their welfare till we've received a good fat donation! Are you all agreed lads? (The Beggars' p. 23)*

The collective struggle of the working class and the peasant is found in the ability of Wariinga, Wangari and Muturi to create social consciousness in the people for appropriate action to be taken against the ruling class.

Using Superstructure for False Consciousness: Marxist hermeneutics points out that the hegemony of the elite is sustained through the use of the superstructure to create ideology that instills false consciousness in the exploited. This power sustenance through the generation of ideologies is for the depraved majority to believe that the status quo is natural, morally justified, that any attempt to subvert it is repugnant to natural and moral justice. Exploring the normal capitalist trend where the superstructure works in favour of the bourgeoisie, in *Devil on the Cross*, the police that Wangari brings to the Devil's Feast make a turn around to arrest the exploited class, and allowing the comprador bourgeoisie to have a field day. It can be inferred that the law enforcement agent is not aware before that the arrest he is brought to make involves the middle class elite. The police belong in the exploiters enclave. Likewise, in *Hopes of the Living Dead* when the Superintendent of police is addressing the patients, he stated clearly the status of the lepers in relation to the economic development of the land when Harcourt Whtye had told him to treat them with human feeling, so that they would be useful to the society:

> *I see. But have you weighed the economic implication of that dream? My dear fellows, the land of Canaan in modern times doesn't follow with milk, I dare say. It does not give off honey, either. It takes money. Cash. And where do you propose to get that? Not from government, I suppose. Good intentions*

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> *aside, no government ever budgets for dreams of Canaan land these days. (Hopes pp.48-49)*

The policeman does not mince words in telling the patients in clear terms how the ruling class only thinks about themselves. To intend the poor class into budgetary allocation is one thing and to utilize the fund is another level that is predominantly exclusive of the *neaveau riche*. The police is also made to forcefully drive the beggars away from the street while the beggars sustain injuries as a result of being adamant to the order from Mour Ndiaye. The ruling class or elite in the three texts make good use of the superstructure to create false consciousness. For instances Ngugi captures the black capitalists using the language that the exploited would consider to be cogent enough to justify the progress that the society has made as a result of modern trends in business. Ngugi clearly make it understandable to the exploited greed and wealth accumulation is what the thieves and robbers euphemistically refer to as modern business. The administrative authorities present their neglect of humanity to be resultant of certain logistic logjam, hiding the class interest which they project and protect. In The Beggars' Strike, the politicians that are involved in moving the beggars away justifiably claim it is to rid the city of beggars who are who are not morally justified to expose themselves to visitors into the country. They emphasized that in modern days of city arrangement, beggars are kept away from the open glare of visitors who may want to tour round the city centre. The elite forget that the cost of keeping the beggars away from their means of survival is of far reaching effect on the beggars compared to the false claim of Ndiaye that is hinged on his selfish interest. The three texts are centrally concerned with issues that affect the generality of the poor, not an individual hero or a single character embodying the problems of himself. In Sow Fall, it is concerned with the different category of beggars; in Ngugi's it the working class and the peasants and in Rotimi, it is the leprosy victims. This is summarized in the words of Harcourt Whyte:

> *Now, I want everybody to remember this. We all are part of this land. We are not fighting the people. We are fighting for the simple things which everybody wants. The strong or the sick; Fulani or Ijo; man or woman; Yoruba or Ibibio; old and young; Hausa or Urhobo; rich or poor; Kanuri or Ibo; everybody wants one thing in life. We all want to go to sleep at night in peace, and to wake up in the morning with trust that there will be food for the stomach, a good day's work for the hands and a roof over the head to return to. Who is the madman here who does not want just these? Let the person raise up his hand. (Hopes, p. 58)*

As the patients differ in their shades of leprosy in the *Hopes of the Living Dead*, so also it is with the beggars in *The Beggars' Strike* where it ranges from blindness, dumbness, deafness to any other form of physical deformity. The sameness in their purpose and determination overwhelm the cognizance that they give to the differences in their ailments, which would have been a clog in their solidarity. The common denominator of the three texts is the political commitment to the sufferings of the dispossessed people, by raising their social awareness.

Commodification of the Body: The lepers' physical conditions are resultant effects of their struggles or engagement in lucrative enterprise to make ends meet. Because such bodies can no longer serve economic

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purpose, they have to be neglected. They are estranged from interacting with friends and unable to engage in labour, especially in Rotimi's Hopes of the Living Dead. In the same vein, the beggars in Sow Fall are only recognized by their value in spiritual perspective, while the elite in the disguise of giving charity to the poor, further their ulterior motive of political office seeking. However, the same category of people whom the elite before considered as necessary for the fulfillment of religious ritual are now nauseating, and constitute no economic value. In *Devil on the Cross*, the inquisitive Wariinga keeps asking poignant questions, especially the profit maximization on the capitalists' money. Muturi explains to Wariinga what it takes for a capitalist to exploit workers for him to get surplus value:

> *My employer used to get building contracts worth tens of millions and more. He had a councilor who used to press his case in the committee that awarded the contract. But the wages of those who made the tens of millions possible were truly nothing – just a few shillings two hundred, three, five. Not much more – and you know how prices have been rising. Our trouble began when we demanded an increase of fifty shillings and demanded too that wages increases were to be linked to the rising cost of living.(Devil p. 72)*

Wariinga as representative of the women in Kenya whose bodies have been exploited sexually and economically dehumanized. The conjoin existence of capitalism and patriarchy did a deadly blow in the life of Wariinga. In *The Beggars' Strike, Hopes of the Living Dead* and *Devil on the Cross*, the elite live in the city where social amenities abound. But, they want the oppressed to be consigned to the slum, the outskirt to live a deplorable life. In *Devil on the Cross* for instance, Wariinga describes New Jerusalem located in Njerica where the working class and the peasants live:

> *The other part of the residential area is called New Jerusalem, Njerica. That is the residential area for the workers, the unemployed. It's where the wretched of Kenya live. But are their shacks houses, or are they sparrow's nest …? (Devil p.130)*

Wariinga goes further to describe succinctly Njerica as a slum:

> *Have you ever visited the slum of Nairobi to see for yourself the amazing sight endless armies of fleas and bedbugs marching up and down the walls, or the sickening, undrained ditches full of brackish water, shit and urine, the naked children swimming in those very ditches? Slum is a slum. Here in Njerica we don't have drainage. Human shit and urine and the carcasses of dead dogs and cats – all these make the area smell as if it were nothing but pure putrefaction. Add to this decay the smoke of dangerous gases from the industrial area – all these are blown towards Njerica by the wind – and add to too the fact that all the rubbish and waste from*

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> *the factories is deposited there and you'll see why I compare Njerica with hell. (Devil p. 131)*

The three texts explore how the irreconcilable schism between the elite and the poor has to be sustained by way of domination as with *Devil on the Cross*; indifference as exemplified in *Hopes of the Living Dead* and disavowal as staged in *The Beggars; Strike*. The climatic tension of the works is located in the attempts by the exploited to close the gap created by the machination of the elite. Dissimilarity lies between *The Beggars' Strike, Devil on the Cross* as having female characters as the rallying points (heroines) of the narratives and *Hopes of the Living Dead* having a male protagonist. Salla Niang is not actually a beggar but her twin children are, such that she assumes herself a beggar to bring the real beggars together in her house. She participates in the deliberations of the beggars to be fruitful, organizes financial contribution for the beggars. In *Devil on the Cross,* Wariinga is the web that connects other characters in the category of the exploited, which is the main focus of Ngugi, whereas, in *Hope of the Living Dead,* it is a male character. The three texts put together would completely account for the two genders representing the totality of the depraved people: beggars, sick people; and working class and peasants. It is noteworthy that the personal experience of Niang is milder than that of Wariinga in terms of dehumanization and oppression. Wariinga who is grievously affected by exploitation tends to be more vigorous in resistance to the new compradors' maltreatment of people.

Devil on the Cross uses Marxist approach to change the society from its exploitative status that is worse than colonial era. The workers sell their sweat, labour to produce commodities for the owners of the means of production. This gives the working class the audacity to agitate for improved wages. On the contrary, *Hopes of the Living Dead* and *The Beggars'Strike* work on subtle but sure means to get result based on the nature of the relationship between the beggars, leprosy patients and the elite. This is because the oppressed in the *Hopes of the Living Dead* and *The Beggars' Strike* are not directly economically productive in the capitalist sense.

Conclusion

The three texts demonstrated an evolving spectrum of African literature asserting political commitment of resistance in more than one genre. To destroy the ongoing exploitation of the poor, *The Beggars' Strike* illustrates the desperate attempts of the oppressed "wretched of the earth" to end the hypocritical ritual gifts of the elite that would keep the rich irreconcilably above the poor. This is done by way of quietly withdrawing their spiritual services to the rich people who consider their presence in the city centre a social menace. *Hopes of the Living Dead* celebrates the belief of the lepers to exploit the value of multi-lingual solidarity and civic collectivism to resist oppression. The lepers, led by Harcourt Whyte make division of labour as an approach to building a new place for survival. The remonstrance put up the lepers make headway as government at a point has to consider their complaints. In *Devil on the Cross,* passive strike and civility do not have place, particularly in neo-colonial Kenya. This is because the black comprador bourgeoisie with their antics need to be eradicated with violence that it deserves. The capitalists show blatant display of their exploitation techniques in words, and label it as modern business, where the working class and peasants wallow in abject penury. Postcolonial interrogation of the texts reveals the struggle of working class/oppressed to change the unfavourable development in their socio-economic life.

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