

A BIOGRAPHICAL READING OF DAVID RUBADIRI'S AN AFRICAN THUNDERSTORM AND OTHER POEMS

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Abstract

Personal experiences of David Rubadiri, as a Malawian born in colonial Africa and rising into literary and academic prominence in its postcolonial state, shaped his literary endeavours. This paper explores how Rubadiri's poetry serves as a critique of Africa's postcolonial state plunged into disillusionment and hopelessness by its rulers. The paper deploys Biographical Criticism as a guiding theory from which significant contextual background reliance is justified. The analysis dwells on his only poetry collection, *An African Thunderstorm and Other Poems* (2004) which spans across his writing career and depicts the socio-political malaise plaguing the (post)colony.

Keywords: Africa, disillusionment, independence, Malawi, post-colony.

Introduction

Following the end of colonialism in Africa, many African writers shifted their cause from direct confrontation with the colonist to a new war against the postcolonial state with its repressive institutions. Among other social critics, African writers suffered greatly as despots imprisoned, exiled and even murdered those who opposed injustice in the newly independent nations. Examples of writers who suffered post-independence terror and exile are many: Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Okot p'Bitek, Ayi Kwei Armah, Bessie Head, Alex La Guma and Dennis Brutus. As a result of their experiences, the motif of exile

became prominent in their works (Oripeloye, 2015). Closer to home, Jack Mapanje, Frank Chipasula and, of course David Rubadiri, make the list of writers scattered into exile by the repressive regime of Hastings Kamuzu Banda in post-colonial Malawi. This paper focuses on the poetry of Rubadiri to appreciate his response to both colonial and postcolonial repression. The paper attempts a biographical reading of the poetry not only to highlight the influence of personal narratives in Rubadiri's writing but also to gain a fuller understanding of the poetry.

David Rubadiri: A Brief Life Story

Born on 19 July, 1930, David Rubadiri was 34 when Malawi attained its independence on 6th July, 1964 – becoming a republic two years later in 1966. He had as such lived through over three decades of colonial subjugation, a humiliating and dehumanizing experience under the British. Rubadiri attended Makerere University in Uganda from 1952-1956 where he graduated with a BA in English Literature and History (Singini, 2018). He later went on to obtain a Master of Arts in English Literature at King's College (Centre for Creative Arts, 2009) in addition to receiving a Diploma in Education from the University of Bristol. He then taught at Dedza Secondary School from 1957 to 1958. In 1959, he was detained during the State of Emergency in Malawi, along with other anti-colonial freedom fighters.

At Malawi's independence in 1964, he was appointed the country's first permanent representative to the United Nations. However, his relationship with the Hastings Kamuzu Banda's led Malawi government soon went sour after he stood in solidarity with those who opposed Banda's growing dictatorial tendencies. He resigned in protest just a year after his appointment, and never returned home. As Jack Mapanje observes "Rubadiri's disagreement with Banda's repressive regime in the 1960s had forced him into such long exile that he was often mistaken for an East African, largely for his conspicuous contribution to the development of the East African literary scene" (Mapanje, 1995, p.81). Rubadiri went on to teach at Makerere University in Uganda for a number of years. In 1971, General Idi Amin overthrew the country's first postcolonial president Milton Obote. A military man, Amin soon unleashed a reign of terror, cracking down on dissent and creating an anti-intellectual atmosphere. Four years later,

David Rubadiri was forced into exile again, attaining the status of a double exile, in Kenya (Horn, 1979).

While in Kenya, Rubadiri joined the University of Nairobi and also had a brief stint, with Okot p'Bitek, at the University of Ibadan (Nigeria), at the invitation of Wole Soyinka (Centre for Creative Arts, 2009). During his stint at the University of Nairobi between 1976 and 1984, Rubadiri was a regular at the Kenya National Theatre where he served on the Executive Committee of the theatre for five years (Mwagiru, 2018). He spent his remaining years of exile as professor of education at the University of Botswana. When Kamuzu Banda lost the 1994 general elections, paving way for a new dawn for multiparty democracy in Malawi, Rubadiri was again appointed Malawi's Permanent Representative to the UN. Upon completion of his diplomatic tenure, he was named Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malawi in 2000 and retired in 2004 (Mwagiru, 2018). The University of KwaZulu-Natal's Centre for Creative Arts in 2009 described him as one of Africa's most celebrated and widely anthologized poets to emerge after independence. Rubadiri passed on in his home country (Malawi) on 15th September, 2018 (Mwagiru, 2018). This brief life story offers insights into some of his poems that this paper engages with.

Biographical Criticism as a guiding literary theory

A biographical approach to literary criticism is very significant for this work as explained earlier because it allows a reading of the author's work through the lens of his own personal life. Biographical Criticism involves "the relation between a written work and the biographical experiences of the writer" (Ellis, 1951, p.971). As posited in the theory, the writer's life may shed light on his or her literature and the literature of the era, rendering it necessary to know about the author and the political, economic and sociological context of his times in order to truly understand his literature (Gushchina, 2009).

With insights on Rubadiri's life as both a literary and political figure, it is easy to place the analysis of *An African Thunderstorm and Other Poems* within the right context with which the poet perceived the state of affairs in (post)colonial Africa. In this regard, the paper deploys Biographical Criticism because the theory assumes that the relationship between art and society is organic as it views a literary work in relation to the standards and social milieu of the period in which it was

produced. The theory assumes that “by examining the facts and motives of an author’s life, the meaning and intent of his/her literary work can be illuminated. In other words, this kind of criticism sees a literary work chiefly, if not exclusively, as a reflection of its author’s life and times or the life and times of the characters in the work” (Guschina, 2009, p.27). In short, the theory seeks to illuminate the deeper meaning of themes, conflicts, characters, settings and literary allusions based on the author’s own concerns and conflicts. Although a good work must have the potential to have its textual meaning explicated through methods such as close reading and strict textual interpretation (Schiavone, 2013), it is important to remember that “the literary text, rather than being a fully autotelic entity that can, and indeed should, be interpreted and or/enjoyed in its solitary self, is something that can fulfil its multiple functions in a rich contextual field defined by such externalities as the reader, the world and last but certainly not least, the writer” (Farkas, 2002, p.17). The paper therefore exploits such externalities to extract meaning from the poetry of Rubadiri. For a fuller interpretation of the poetry, the paper also borrows a few insights from postcolonial criticism in order to frame Rubadiri’s engagement with the vicissitudes of the post-colony.

The postcolonial state in *An African Thunderstorm and Other Poems*

Assuming his social responsibility as a writer, Rubadiri launches a strong critique of the postcolonial state in this poetry collection. Although the collection was published in 2004, the poems were written over a long period and were anthologized in various literary magazines, journals and books. Some of the poems in this collection are as old as post-independent Malawi itself – written from the early sixties. In terms of themes and experiences, *An African Thunderstorm and Other Poems* is punctuated by sarcastic tones and ironies of a struggling postcolonial state. The dejection caused by the bourgeoisie can be summed up as a tragedy that befell Africa upon attaining independence. This is espoused in a variety of themes which appear to be part of a wider war that was being waged by writers and poets of his generation against the state which had degenerated into socioeconomic and political chaos. In the collection, Rubadiri brings interrelated themes and experiences of disillusionment, political repression and social failures to the attention of

the reader. He does this while setting colonialism as a benchmark from which the problems of the post-colony are better understood.

The colonial benchmark

In the collection, Rubadiri did well to set a colonial benchmark in some poems for formation of right perspectives on the ills of the postcolonial state which he tackles. Apart from setting the benchmark, Rubadiri also brings interrelated experiences of disillusionment, political repression and social failures to the attention of the reader. These experiences appear to have been directly influenced by his personal experiences as noted earlier.

Rubadiri's encounter with African history is very important in putting into perspective the theme and experience of his widely anthologized poem "Stanley Meets Mutesa". The poem acts as an entry point into the troubles of Africa in both colonial and postcolonial periods. The poem explores the origins of colonialism in Africa as it was through such expeditions as Henry Morton Stanley's in Buganda (now Uganda) that often resulted into Europeans flocking into Africa as missionaries and traders. The meeting that Rubadiri explains is not fictional – after his visit of the kingdom in April, 1875, Stanley wrote that Buganda would be an ideal country to establish missions, and for European trade (Stanley, 1899). And that way, as Rubadiri writes in the last stanza of the poem, the West was let in:

The gate of reeds is flung open,
There is silence
But only a moment's silence-
A silence of assessment.
The tall black king steps forward,
He towers over the thin bearded white man,
Then grabbing his lean white hand
Manages to whisper
"Mtu Mweupe Karibu"
White Man you are Welcome.
The gate of polished reed closes
behind them
And the West is let in.

Here, we notice that as the gate into the kingdom opens, the decision to let the white man in is not critically reflected upon by the authorities. The silence that marks the reflection is so brief. It is the pain of knowing how the West capitalized on the warm-heartedness of the African to ravage and plunder the continent that acted as a catalyst for Rubadiri to jealously stand guard against any further looting by whichever system that was to replace the dehumanizing and racist colonial establishments across the continent. In “Stanley Meets Mutesa” the two historical figures that meet represent far greater forces than their two selves and the individual territories they historically stand for. On the one hand, Stanley, the “bearded white man”, represents all colonial invaders such as the British, the French, the Portuguese and the Spanish whose primary motive for funding expeditions into Africa was largely the need for territorial expansion. On the other hand, Mutesa, “the tall black king”, represents the African kingdoms that fell prey to the marauding beasts. This history was dear to Rubadiri who spent critical years of his youth in Uganda later returning to teach at Makerere University as an exile in the late 1960s. Such bemoaning of the friendliness/warm-heartedness of the African that let colonialism in has often been explored in other equally great literary works such as Achebe’s “*Things Fall Apart*” (1958) and Kenyatta’s “The Gentlemen of the Jungle” (1938). “Stanley Meets Mutesa” can be interpreted as emanating from Rubadiri’s perception of colonialism and the natives’ tragic encounter with it.

Further, Rubadiri depicts restlessness in the face of colonialism – the tide from the West – which ushers in a sense of instability and exploitation in another implicit attack on Europe’s deception through colonialism in “The Tide that from the West Washes Africa to the Bone”. The poem decries the bloody aftermath of the hypocritical and racist motivation behind European activity at the centre of colonialism in Africa. In the poem, Rubadiri attacks the colonial regime for the death and destruction it caused on the continent:

The tide that from the west
Washes the soul of Africa
And tears the mooring of its spirit
Till blood red the tide becomes
And heartsick the womb –

The tide that from the west
With blood washes Africa
Once washed a wooden cross.
(Rubadiri, 2004, p.20)

The tide in the poem erodes the very basis of existence – the soul. By washing the ‘soul of Africa’ and tearing the ‘mooring of its spirit’, Rubadiri depicts the destruction of African roots, its cultural and social systems and the chaos that followed when the evil of colonial desire besieged Africa. The bones and blood that characterise the tide symbolise death and suffering that was unleashed through the very colonial administration.

Disillusionment and the attack on neo-colonialism

At the fall of colonialism, many people hoped independence would guarantee them better lives as previously enjoyed by the minority colonial administrators. However, such optimism soon degenerated into pessimism and disillusionment as it became apparent the people’s ideal postcolonial state was still a far-fetched idea. The decolonization looked more of a delegation of administration to African elites by the colonial administrators where the African countries would be run like remote farms on the colonialists’ behalf. As Frantz Fanon puts it, the national middle class that took over power at the end of the colonial regime “discovered its historic mission: that of intermediary” (Fanon, 1961, p.157).

Existent among those optimistic about the postcolonial state, the feeling of disillusionment is recurrent throughout most of Rubadiri’s poems in both subtle and explicit forms. We see this subtlety in “On parting from a First White Love” which can be considered as creating the impression of a lover who bemoans the existence of the socially constructed differences of his and her partner’s worlds – the other White and himself Black – which leads to a break-up as they seem to belong to worlds rolling on indefinite parallel lines. The form of disillusionment this experience creates is demonstrated by the persona through his expression of nostalgia to their mingling in ‘one drunken month’ in the first stanza (Rubadiri, 2004, p.27). Rubadiri appears to decry the aftermath of a disastrous colonial encounter right to the emotional level – tearing the heart of a subject of the post-colony – where it is even

impossible for a Black and White lover to exist as a unit without inviting trouble:

If your heart and mine
Have mingled in one act of purity
Think not then
That I that loved
Now left to remember
Ever will live to regret
The joy of one drunken month.

Written in 1964, the poem might have been inspired by political events in the newly independent Malawi and other countries in East Africa which had become independent at almost the same time (Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda in 1962, Kenya in 1963 and Tanzania in 1964). The choice of 'First White Love' in the poem's title is very important to our understanding of social constructions formed out of racial and colonial prejudice in the society in which Rubadiri lived which appeared to interrupt even basic life. It is the interruption through the differences that leads to the parting of the two. Colonialism and its beliefs comes as disturbance because we see that the parting between the two lovers is almost amicable and without bitterness. This is why the persona would rather blame their parting not on the lovers themselves but on "the two worlds that begot us/with vengeance". We draw this understanding from the following lines in the second stanza:

If the fault be not in us
But that from two worlds we came,
Then let the worlds that begot us
With vengeance take the blame.
(p.27)

While Rubadiri bemoans the pain that is caused by the social constructions that lead to the separation of the two in the poem, the transitioning to the post-colony is equally disastrous, this time in the socio-political arena. In poems such as "Kampala Beggar", a worsening socioeconomic plight of the postcolonial state which necessitates the need for continued aid from the West is laid bare. The experience, symbolism and imagery that surround the beggar in the poem are

representative of abject poverty and other social failures that plague many African countries. This is best depicted right from the first stanza where we are exposed to a brutalising yet true reflective image of the impoverished African's painful life experiences through a description of the Kampala beggar:

Dark twisted form
Of shreds and cunning
Crawling with an inward twinkle
At the agonies of Africa (Rubadiri,
2004, p.34).

After the description above, three stanzas that follow capture the realities of city streets in postcolonial Africa where beggars are a common sight, symbolizing a state of dire poverty and deprivation. As put in the second stanza, these beggars can be seen "praying and pricing passers-by" (Rubadiri, 1964, p.34). Having lived in Kampala following the exile from Malawi, Rubadiri might have been shocked by the levels of poverty that continued to terrorise Africa, and must have found the presence of beggars on the streets of Kampala as the pinnacle of a troubled post-colony.

Rubadiri uses two terms, 'beggarness' and 'beggarhood', in the "Kampala Beggar" and another poem, "Begging Aid", to summarise the state and status of begging which postcolonial Africa has been plunged into. Although this beggarness forms part of the agonies of Africa as a whole, the experience is different for the bourgeoisie who, while accepting the status of beggarhood at the global stage, belong to a national upper class that remains untouched by the socioeconomic ills. The acceptance of 'beggarhood' by postcolonial leaders is not uncommon. Former Malawi president (1994-2004) Bakili Muluzi used to announce to Malawians with pride his ability to beg from Western countries for his people (Tariro, 2016). Further, the mentioning of the dollar in the fourth stanza serves to remind the reader of the continued colonial dictates that determine postcolonial Africa's economies through what Tembo (2015) views as economic hit men (after John Perkins's *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*). Having lived through both the colonial and postcolonial eras, we can posit that it is this sorry state that drove Rubadiri into such a powerful critique of the post-colony through

exposure of the misery of the common man which the beggar assumes in the “Kampala Beggar”.

Similarly, “Begging Aid” presents one of the worst tragedies of the post-independence African state as lived through by Rubadiri. The poem appears to denounce conflict and deification of politicians who rose to power after independence. The postcolonial state, thanks to the help of the bourgeoisie collaborator, has been reduced to the state of ‘beggarhood’. While the poem appears to mock leaders for relying on begging and in turn subduing control to donors with their conditionalities as observed by Tembo (2015), the underlying tone is sarcastic. The second stanza is particularly devastating:

Whilst the manes age
In the Zoos
That now our homelands
Have become,
Markets of leftovers,
Guns are taller
Than our children (Rubadiri, 2004, p.37).

That our homelands have become zoos is symbolic of how the postcolonial state has quickly transformed into a cage of pain and suffering by the rising autocratic leaders whose only care is about how to maintain their power. The imagery of guns points to war and violence, phenomena that have plagued most of Africa since independence. These are experiences Rubadiri himself witnessed in Uganda as Idi Amin toppled former president Milton Obote and the Amin madness that followed thereafter, forcing him to flee to Kenya. Throughout the poem, Africa’s continuous cry for aid from the West, the very source of our undesirable socioeconomic plight, is what Rubadiri attempts to disapprove of. The continued begging is the pinnacle of our worsening socioeconomic plight. But our leaders will do nothing – they are simply sustaining their status of ‘big circus lions away from home’ (Rubadiri, 2004, p.37). The poem appears to be Rubadiri’s satirical attack on African leaders who have been reduced to beggars while at the same time reigning terror on their own people. The elders who, in the African context are supposed to provide direction, have been stupefied and rendered impotent. Ironically, the leaders bring “toys of death” from

their begging sprees. It is these elders, with their mismanagement of the postcolonial state and their reign of terror that forced Rubadiri into double exile – a driving force behind some of his poetry as he sought to fight tyranny through literary activism.

Political repression

Aside the economic setbacks that ignited literary activism in the postcolonial state, governments' suppression of dissent through brutal crackdowns sparked fire and reinvigorated literary and political activists in the fight against despotism across Africa. Political repression became characteristic of most postcolonial African states at independence. Rubadiri's "Two Epitaphs" illustrates his disillusionment at what befell postcolonial Africa. The poem celebrates the cause Christopher Okigbo (Nigeria) and Yatuta Chisiza (Malawi) died for. Rubadiri introduces them as having died trying to save the people from the yokes of suffering and dictatorship afflicted on the people by the elites that had hijacked independence. We encounter this in the epigraph to the poem:

*Major Christopher Okigbo was shot dead in Biafra.
Yatuta Chisiza was shot dead in Malawi
Died that Africa may live with integrity
(Rubadiri, 2004, p.45, italics in original)*

While Okigbo died in 1967 in the Biafran War in Nigeria, Chisiza also died the same year having taken an almost similar course of action. He led a brief guerrilla incursion into Malawi in October 1967 (Chirwa, 2007). From the "Two Epitaphs", Rubadiri's admiration for the two revolutionaries can never go unnoticed. In the second part of the poem, Rubadiri's praise for Chisiza is explicit – demonstrating disapproval of the tyranny of Dr. Banda, Malawi's first president in independence:

'Old soldiers never die'
The saying goes –
So too to Yatuta
So too to the cause
He lived for. (Rubadiri, 2004, p.46)

Through the "Two Epitaphs", we are able to visualize the sacrifices critics of the postcolonial regimes in Africa were able to make

in order to right the wrongs their leaders committed against the very state they were meant to protect. It is through such sacrifices that Rubadiri found himself in exile with his continued activism against a regime that could punish dissent with death. In his opposition to the dictatorship in Malawi, Rubadiri himself chose to forego benefits of a diplomat to protest against the Kamuzu Banda regime, a feat that saw him spend most of his time in exile, until 1994 when there was change of government.

The status of Rubadiri as an exile comes out clear in “Yet Another Song”. In the poem, he laments about the ‘new totems’ which he helped to raise with tears of ecstasy but now watched them as:

They grew
Taller than life
Grimacing and breathing fire.
Today
I sing yet another song
A song of exile.
(Rubadiri, 2004, p.50)

This poem represents the peak of Rubadiri’s disillusionment as an exile. It starts with Rubadiri expressing pain and regret that despite having sung against colonialism together, the liberators the people fought side by side with had now turned the masses into their prey. This is what Fanon (1961) calls “the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period” (p.152). By and by, these liberators alienate themselves from their comrades-in-arms, the masses, and grow taller than life. The magnitude of terror reigned on the masses is depicted when Rubadiri alludes to them as ‘grimacing and breathing fire’, creating images of an all-destructive dragon. In a 2015 article in *The Nation* titled “Writing from Exile”, Ayami Mkwanda similarly observes that in the poem, Rubadiri highlighted his experiences with the one party regime and criticized the dictatorship (Mkwanda, 2015). This feeling of dejection, resentment, anger and despair is what a lot of writers and political activists went through under most of the regimes that posed as pioneers of the independence struggle.

Rubadiri intensifies his attack on the postcolonial state, this time seemingly targeting Banda and his regime in Malawi, in “Master of the

African Night”. In the first five stanzas, the description of a typical night in the village with drums, dances, fire and ululations would arguably be taken as representing the joy that filled many nations as the masses hoped for better times ahead in the wake of independence. Rubadiri presents the ‘lone weary’ herd boys heading home after a long day in the fields to prepare the reader for an understanding of why the joy in the night is worth it – to forget all the misery while simultaneously celebrating their current status which was attained through their own labour. Soon though, the “fires fade to ashes/the night chills/as one by one/the dancers dissolve into night” (pp.43-44). But this joyful night, with the people already retiring to bed, is overtaken by an angry roar from the jungle that sends the drums to sleep.

In the freezing darkness of the forest
Mysterious
Life is just on the wake
As an angry, malicious, contemptuous roar
Tears the night like thunder
Sending the drums to sleep
(Rubadiri, 2004, p.44)

The lion reigns with terror – its roar alone, malicious, contemptuous and angry, sends to sleep the sound of joy represented by the drum. It is this malicious roar that led to Rubadiri’s dissent, knowing how dangerous the path Kamuzu Banda of Malawi (and other African leaders – for example Idi Amin whose dictatorship also led to his exile from Uganda) had decided to take. The poem, set at night with its images of falling darkness (evidenced through use of descriptive expressions such as darkening hill slopes; darkness swallowing day; dark bodies emerging; dancers fading into the night; the cynical owl hooting goodnight; and the inky darkness of the night), can be a deliberate ploy by Rubadiri to portray the postcolonial condition in a state where tyranny reigns. Light that appeared to characterise the dawn of independence is swallowed by the decadence that marks the post-independence state. Both the darkening hill slopes and the darkness that swallows the day are representative of the evil that befell the postcolonial state: murder, plunder, poverty, exile and a general disregard for human rights among several other socio-political problems,

all perpetrated by the new elites. Power in this nightly rule is in the hands of one iron ruler:

Simba –
He stands and looks
Then cynically yawns
A burning majesty
In the inky darkness of night –
Master of the African night.
(Rubadiri, 2004, p.44)

Simba is Swahili for lion. Its cynical yawn that releases “a burning majesty” into the night may represent the repression that Banda in Malawi and other dictators on the continent unleashed on their people. The joys of independence, as are the dances and ululations in the poem, were short-lived as most critics of the postcolonial regimes soon found themselves running for their lives. Rubadiri was one of them. Banda himself was referred to as a lion – a *Simba* in the poem, and often “affected the lion-tail fly whisk of an African king” (McNeil, 1997, p.15).

While dissent and despotism were at loggerheads on the continent, Blacks elsewhere were also restless. They were pitted against systems that were structured to sustain the oppression they had suffered since slavery days. Rubadiri must have witnessed such experiences as well when he worked in the US and stayed there briefly after parting ways with the Banda regime back home. Yet, in spite of such problems – which were reminiscent of the struggle that was keeping him away from Malawi, Rubadiri must have hanged on hoping that a second liberation was on its way. Such optimism also appeared in his poetry. In “Black Child”, the poet-persona alludes to a burning fire in the eyes of the African child following years of repression both by the colonial regime and his/her own people. Rubadiri describes the black child’s gaze as one that goes far into the distant void. In the poem, Rubadiri deals with the difficulties of being Black in a world that systemically functions against Blackness. This represents his personal experiences having lived through colonialism which had racism as its basis in Malawi, and having lived in the United States in the mid-sixties when anti-Black racism was very prominent. It is against such experiences, we

may argue, that *Black Child* was written as a way of encouraging both the self and fellow Blacks to keep going on a path of full social and political emancipation from colonial bondage and racial segregation, rendering them conscious of their space as Blacks on the global stage:

Black child,
I see your wings
Sprout and grow
I see the dull eyes
Catch fire and glow
And then you must fly.
(Rubadiri, 2004, p.31)

As one can observe through the last stanza, the poet presses the black child on, he urges him/her to keep trudging forward. Rubadiri knows that the dull eyes will eventually catch fire and glow. And then, the black child will rebel again. Just as in *Hey Black Child* by Countee Cullen during the Harlem Renaissance after World War 2, Rubadiri sends across a message of hope through the young ones. And surely, the oppression was to face its end with mass protests in the early 1990s in Malawi by people who might have been very young in the early days of independence – these black children, and through similar events across the continent in countries where the postcolonial rulers reigned with terror. In some countries, the suffering was only exterminated through violent uprisings and after long periods of struggles.

Social failures

In his existence and encounters as a subject in the post-colony, Rubadiri also experienced the disillusionment that characterized politically conscious citizens upon independence. This resulted from the social failures that became prevalent in the postcolonial state, with most African countries having degenerated into socioeconomic problems perpetrated by the post-independence regimes. Such experiences also appeared to form part of the critique Rubadiri launched against the postcolonial state in his poetry.

In “Thoughts After Work”, Rubadiri explores elitism/social classes that became characteristic of a postcolonial Africa. These classes are a deliberate creation by the government, an apparent emulation of the colonial system which has been perpetrated further by full embrace

of capitalism. The irony with the biographical experience of Rubadiri in the poem is that now his new exile is his home to where he rides a storm silently, to the sounds of laughter from (ghetto) children expressed in the first five lines of the poem (Rubadiri, 2004, p.30). The irony of being an exile amongst one's own people – a tragedy that marks the African middle class in a largely impoverished, jobless society in the post-colony – is laid bare in the following lines:

Heavily from my office
I walk
To my village,
My brick government compound,
To my new exile. (p.30)

The persona belongs to the working class and feels alienated in his government compound from the surrounding poor villages. Here, Rubadiri creates the impression of a mansion standing tall amidst poor village shacks. Also, although Rubadiri does not make any explicit reference to such houses or any as surrounding the brick government compound, the laughter of children the poet-persona walks past quietly entails a typical high density settlement usually marked by poverty which the government compound does well to protect him from. This is evident in the last six lines of the poem:

I perch over a chasm,
Ride a storm I cannot hold,
And so must pass on quietly
The laughter of children rings loud
Bringing back to me
Simple joys I once knew. (p.30)

This feeling (of exile) is ambivalent though as the very sound of children laughing evokes joyful memories of his childhood. However, the gravity of the alienation is denoted by the use of 'exile' to refer to his compound, knowing how unpleasant the feeling of exile was to him and several other writers.

Pertaining to this, in "On Meeting a West Indian Boat at Waterloo Station", Rubadiri decries a postcolonial world that never really changed for colonial subjects, who were now free. The people's

dreams in the former colonial empire denoted by “West Indian” (representative of Rubadiri’s encounters with subjects of other postcolonial countries at the Empire’s centre, Europe), of a better tomorrow, remained as such – a dream, or at worst turned into a nightmare with the dreamer longing to be roused in a room he/she appears to be sleeping in solitude. The postcolonial state is a shattered dream. But Rubadiri in the poem realizes again that wherever you go, there:

...are no new worlds
No new truths
No new identity
But only
An old world
That speaks the same truths
(Rubadiri, 2004, p.27).

Ironically, the people from the post-independence state keep running to the West in search of a better life. These are the same countries whose political systems are responsible for the plunder of their homes in both the colonial and postcolonial eras. And so, it is unsurprising that in the foreign lands – the West represented by London (Waterloo Station), the centre of the British Empire, the exiles find life unwelcoming even in their modernized states where “TV masts scrape skies” and the exiles – the new burrowed humanity – “creep each day like vermin to work”. The poem’s last stanza, we may argue, is an expression of resignation and despair at the vanity of the dreamer’s work as they tried to build a postcolonial state that would be ideal for all, a dream that is now shattered courtesy of the ruling bourgeoisie.

The sun spirit knows no prisons
Or casements of formality
But you dream of dreams
As a child builds sandcastle
To break. (p.27)

The exilic existence of Rubadiri and others in diaspora speaks to us through the harsh realities of life they encounter working (as migrants) in Europe. It is probably these harsh conditions that reminds of the dream of a liberated and progressive nation back home which, like a

sandcastle was now destroyed by the child – the politician – with whom they built this nation together. Now, they have no option but to toil in exile where the realization of the world as the same old world with lies of new truths is attained.

Conclusion

The paper has argued that the condition of the post-colony as well as its sustained parasitic engagement with the coloniser from colonial through postcolonial days in Africa is what largely influenced the work of David Rubadiri as a writer. The representation of Africa in post-independence as a dream that never fully materialized into its people's ideal state is understood through the biographical lens of the poet. As such, the analysis of the experiences in Rubadiri's poetry is not disassociated from his own personal experiences. With reference to a number of poems from his collection the paper has argued that the state of affairs in postcolonial Africa became bleak from the earliest days of independence until present. The paper makes this argument in reference to poems that can be viewed as originating from Rubadiri's biographical experiences. This can be felt in poems such as "Yet Another Song", "Thoughts After Work", "Two Epitaphs", "Kampala Beggar", "Begging Aid", "Black Child", "On Parting from First White Love" and "On Meeting a West Indian Boat Train" which we can argue are representative of Rubadiri's thoughts, beliefs and experiences informed by standards and social milieu of the period in which he lived and produced such literary works. However, even in some of the poems that appear to touch on the condition of the post-colony without a seeming direct link with his life, we can equally attribute such experiences to the fact that Rubadiri himself lived through the post-colony, and he therefore explored conditions prevalent during his own period of existence, conditions he or his contemporaries experienced. Against this context, the paper considers, in part, Rubadiri's poetry to be prophetic and pessimistic while at the same time projecting him onto the political scene as a literary activist living up to the social responsibility of a writer as is expected of him in a battered society.

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