

## **REPOSITIONING AFRICA FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING: A PHILOSOPHICAL CONTRIBUTION**

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### **Abstract**

The role of creative writing as both an agent of denigration and transformation are known facts. As an instrument of denigration it was employed in classical European literature to degrade Africa as a continent existing outside the confines of human continents, peopled by anti-human creatures. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* comes to mind here. Equally, as a catalyst for transformation it was used to reinstate Africa in the community of continents and home to *normal* people with culture and civilization. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a good example. Against this background, while it is possible to reposition Africa for social transformation through creative writing, it is not a given. There is need for critical evaluation – a philosophical supervision – of the literary works to be sure they possess transformatory possibilities and potential and enough *strength* to transform the society. For this reason, the study adopts analytical and interdisciplinary methods. Philosophical analysis is employed to extract and interrogate the ideas contained in literature. The interdisciplinary outlook of the work derives from its ability to bring together philosophy and literature. It is the contention of this paper that a writer can employ his/her craft as a tool for societal transformation or for its distortion and annihilation. As such, repositioning Africa for social transformation through creative writing must pay serious attention to both how well a creative work embodies and transforms the narrative of real life.

**Key words:** Africa, Social transformation, Creative writing, Philosophy, African literature

### **Setting the Context: The need for Philosophical Enquiry into Literature**

Setting a contextual framework helps to provide an ambit within which a discourse can be explored, analysed and criticised. As such it is important to enquire into the need for a philosophical enquiry into literature. As a discipline concerned with the interrogation of concepts – their origin, meaning (both connotative and denotative), nuances attached, ideological composition and so on, philosophy can explore and expose the *full* weight of a word which is the main tool a writer uses to express his/her self. “Philosophy,” Okolo argues “is a *restless* application of reason, rigour and reflection to get at the

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real essence of things in so far as is humanly possible.”<sup>1</sup> Philosophy, then, compels us to provide *well-articulated* reason(s) for accepting, reviewing or discarding an idea. Socrates points to this critical dimension of philosophy by stating that the unexamined life is not worth living. His untiring attitude of asking questions was not to expose people’s ignorance but to draw attention to the importance of critical reflection on existing conditions as a way of advancing man’s quest for knowledge. To this end philosophy can both raise and critically analyse issues such as: Are words innocent? Can language be tailored *deliberately* to dehumanise a people? How well can a writer capture the social ills in a society? How do we distinguish among hidden intention, stated intention and perceived intention? How do we know when a *perfect* balance occurs between motive and consequence? What does it mean to have a *perfect balance*? Such rigorous examination of issues is what philosophy is about. A philosophical inquiry then “encourages activities that probe the *essence* of things, criticize popular notions, extend the meaning of what it means to interrogate ‘settled’ meanings and question old assumptions and established worldviews.”<sup>2</sup>

The concern of philosophy in this paper is to interrogate literary works with specific attention on African literature to be sure they possess transformatory possibilities and potential and enough strength to transform the African society. To this effect, literary works that contain significant portions of African experience and offer creative answers to social problems facing the continent have been selected for study. These texts are: J.P Clark’s ‘The Casualties’<sup>3</sup>, Peter Abrahams’ *A Wreath for Udomo*<sup>4</sup> and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow*.<sup>5</sup>

The choice of Clark, Abrahams and Ngugi is based on, at least, three significant considerations. One, their works help to show what is happening in most of the regions in Africa, namely,

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<sup>1</sup> MSC Okolo, *Philosophy: Contemporary Concerns in Africa*, Owerri, Book-Konzult, 2015, p.22.

<sup>2</sup> MSC Okolo, ‘A Philosophical inquiry into the nexus between language and education in Africa’, in *Interdisciplinarity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Global Dispensation: Research in Language, Literature and Education in Africa*, Edited by Rosalyn Mutia and Eric Ekembe, New York, Nova Science Publishers, 2017, p.149.

<sup>3</sup> J.P. Clark, ‘The Casualties’, *Poems of Black Africa*, Edited by Wole Soyinka, London, Heinemann, 1975, pp. 112-113.

<sup>4</sup> P. Abrahams, *A Wreath for Udomo*, London, Faber and Faber, 1956.

<sup>5</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Wizard of the Crow*, Lagos, Farafina, 2007.

West Africa, South Africa and East Africa. This knowledge, because of its regional broad base can be applied to all regions in Africa. Two, their works, in spite of the dates of publication, continue to reflect in-depth grasp of social issues in present day Africa. Finally, their works portray African socio-dynamics within an umbrella of issues that can be examined, criticised, and remoulded. This way they provide direction in the quest for imaginative applications on how best to reposition Africa for social transformation through creative writing. In the three sections to follow, I first look at literature and societal transformation. Here a philosophical review of the selected literary works is pursued in order to show that they contain significant ideas about African experience as well as possess transformatory possibilities and potential and enough strength to re-order the society. Second, I turn to repositioning Africa for social transformation through creative writing. Here I outline some suggestions that both rely on the selected works and transcend them. Finally, I conclude by demonstrating that repositioning Africa for social transformation through creative writing can be achieved through serious commitment by all agents, especially, through promoting the dialogue between philosophy and African literature.

## **Literature and Societal Transformation**

### ***The Casualties***

Clark's 'The Casualties' highlights the unending effects of war, especially a war that is not well-handled. In this poem the casualties are not restricted to any specific form of fate but an amalgam of all the ills that can befall a nation. Long after the war, which most readers will instantly recognise as the Nigeria-Biafra war (July 6, 1967- January 15, 1970), has ended, the effects continue to dominate and define the country's political space. The poem shows that there is nothing good about war. Writing on the Nigeria-Biafra war, Achebe reports that "the cost in human lives made it one of the bloodiest civil wars in human history."<sup>6</sup> Clark's poem engages with the horrific events of this period using simple words, apt metaphors and similes to reconstruct a war and its after-effects that have left Nigeria deeply divided. Anyone who has anything to do with the war is a casualty: the dead, the wounded, those who have lost persons

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<sup>6</sup> C. Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, London, Allen Lane, 2012, p.227.

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or property, those imprisoned, among others. Titus Chukwuemeka Nwosu in 'Combat' offers an account of the harrowing experiences of the war. To portray the magnitude of the waste of human lives he writes: "For at sundown as everyone knows/the heat waves will once more rise/and leave the neighbourhood gutted with blood."<sup>7</sup> Nnamdi Azikiwe writing on war tells "of narrow graves so cold,/Of men mowed down like weeds and bats...."<sup>8</sup> The wanton destruction that attends war is familiar knowledge. Clark insists that "we are all casualties."<sup>9</sup> This common fate becomes the connection between constantly reliving the conditions that characterise war and the world controlled by warmongers, local and foreign interest with enough money to supervise the sufferings of others, their power obsession and recklessness. Their ruthlessness is to the point that "They do not see the funeral piles/ At home eating up the forests."<sup>10</sup> Those who manage to escape death are plagued by every manner of suffering: from waiting for burial by instalment, cruel cell to kwashiorkor. Starvation was employed as a weapon of war to the point that its weight pressed heavily on the casualties and ironically transformed them to "cases celebrated for kwashiorkor."<sup>11</sup> Starvation is reported as claiming more Biafran lives during the civil war than people gunned down by the federal troops.<sup>12</sup> Even when the war has ended, it was still a "desperate situation, with so many children in need, kwashiorkor rampant, and thousands perishing every week."<sup>13</sup> Clark reminds that these are not peculiar to "our war"<sup>14</sup> but a condition that attends all wars.

Writing on Rwanda's civil war, Melvern reports that at the end of the war the "country had been ransacked.... From a previous population of 300,000 there were 50,000 people left.... Everywhere there were ditches filled

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<sup>7</sup> T.C. Nwosu, 'Combat', *A Selection of African Poetry*, Edited by K.E. Senanu and T. Vincent, Great Britain, Longman, 1976, p.163.

<sup>8</sup> N. Azikiwe, *Meditations: A Collection of Poems*, Nsukka, African Book, 1977, p.55.

<sup>9</sup> Clark, 'Casualties', p.112.

<sup>10</sup> Clark, 'Casualties', p.113.

<sup>11</sup> Clark, 'Casualties', p.113.

<sup>12</sup> T. Byrne, *Airlift to Biafra: Breaching the Blockade*, Blackrock Co Dublin, Columba Press, 1997; Achebe, *There was a Country*; M. Gould, *The Biafra War: The struggle for Modern Nigeria*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2012; E. Ezeani, *In Biafra Africa Died: The Diplomatic Plot*, London, Veritas Lumen, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Achebe, *There was a Country*, p.226.

<sup>14</sup> Clark, 'Casualties', p.113.

with rotting bodies.”<sup>15</sup> In their account on the Sudanese civil war, Steidle and Wallace write that “thousands of human bones were scattered in all directions over an area about 50 meters in diameter.”<sup>16</sup> Niyi Osundare demands an end to apartheid which is another kind of war “it must end, this slave life must end/heloted squattered squalored kraaled/booted butted robbed hanged carcassed.”<sup>17</sup> The harshness of the apartheid policy was such that its cumulative effect has continued to make South Africa a deeply-divided country.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps, these ironic lines from Stephen Crane’s ‘War is Kind’ helps to sum the devastating effect of war and its unending suffering: “mother whose heart hung humble as a button/on the bright splendid shroud of your son,/Do not weep./War is kind.”<sup>19</sup>

Clark’s poem shows the interconnectedness of things. It demonstrates how cruelty, greed, corruption, looting and, even, kidnap can be subsumed under war. Under the cover of war some people inflict unimaginable pains on others to the point of drawing “the world/Into a dance with rites it does not know.”<sup>20</sup> There are looters for both “office/And wares”<sup>21</sup> and people are daily kidnapped and “led away by night.”<sup>22</sup> Achebe reports how during the war, the federal forces “rounded up and shot as many defenceless Igbo men and boys as they could find”<sup>23</sup> in Asaba.

This did not end with the war. Writing on the January 20, 2012 attacks in Kano carried out by the Islamist extremist group that has become known as Boko Haram, Mike Smith reports that “Gunshots crackled, corpses were piled on top of one another in the morgue of the city’s main hospital and dead bodies

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<sup>15</sup> L. Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The role of the West in Rwanda’s genocide*, London, Zed Books, 2009, p.247.

<sup>16</sup> B. Steidle and G.W. Steidle, *The Devil came on Horseback: Bearing witness to the genocide in Darfur*, New York, Public Affairs, 2007, p.182.

<sup>17</sup> N. Osundare, *Songs of the Marketplace*, Ibadan, New Horn Press, 1987, p.47.

<sup>18</sup> N. Gordimer, *Living in Hope and History: Notes from our Century*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999; P. Commey, ‘100 years of the ANC: but the black man cannot live by political freedom alone’, *New Africa*, 2012; MSC Okolo, ‘Justice and the Search for an African Political Philosophy: Mandela in Perspective’, *African International Journal of Contemporary Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol.2, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> S. Crane, ‘War is Kind’, *101 Great American Poems*, 1998, p. 40.

<sup>20</sup> Clark, ‘Casualties’, p.113.

<sup>21</sup> Clark, ‘Casualties’, p.113.

<sup>22</sup> Clark, ‘Casualties’, p.112.

<sup>23</sup> Achebe, *There was a Country*, pp.133-134.

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were left in the streets to be picked up the next morning.”<sup>24</sup> The April 2014 kidnap of nearly 300 girls from a school in Chibok in North-east Nigeria is common knowledge. Since then kidnapping has become an industry in Nigeria.

In her account of what happened in Rwanda, Melvern tells how one of the survivors told how the Interahamwe rounded up and killed the men and made the women to dig graves and bury them and then throw the children in the graves. According to the survivor, she “will never forget the sight of my son pleading with me not to bury him alive...he kept trying to come out and was beaten back. And we had to keep covering the pit with earth until...there was no movement left.”<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to imagine that this harrowing experience was ordered and supervised by human beings. Here the full weight of Crane’s ‘War is kind’ acquires another layer of meaning in its gruesomeness. In proposing for the need for a culture of war, Martin Van Creveld nonetheless warns that what war is in theory is completely different from what it is in reality. In theory, “war is simply a means to an end, a rational, if very brutal, activity intended to serve the interests of one group of people by killing, wounding, or otherwise incapacitating those who oppose that group.”<sup>26</sup> In practice, those “who engaged in it still took leave of the world, with all the psychological consequences that this entails, and they still found themselves in a sphere where, since ‘because of’ and ‘in order to’ do not apply, there is a kind of freedom perhaps not found anywhere else.”<sup>27</sup>

The poem points to intolerance as a major issue causing political crises in Africa. The poet decries a situation where “we cannot hear each other speak/Because eyes have ceased to see the face from the crowd.”<sup>28</sup> This could be read as the perennial intolerance that governs the relationship of different ethnicities in Nigeria. This is the bane of the socio-political crises facing the country and the major factor exploited in the events that culminated into the

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<sup>24</sup> M. Smith, *Boko Haram: Inside Nigeria’s unholy war*, London, I.B. Tauris, p.3.

<sup>25</sup> Melvern, *A People Betrayed*, p.177.

<sup>26</sup> M.V. Creveld, *The Culture of War*, UK, Spellmount, 2009, p.1.

<sup>27</sup> Creveld, *The Culture of War*, p.127.

<sup>28</sup> Clark, ‘Casualties’, p.113.

civil war.<sup>29</sup> Already the clamour for who becomes Nigeria's president in 2023 has pitted most of the Northern governors against their Southern counterparts. For Nigeria to overcome most of its challenges, there is need to effectively listen to the other side, because it is impossible to "know the extent of wrong on all sides."<sup>30</sup> Ngugi notes that the "road to political hell begins with intolerance of ideas and difference."<sup>31</sup>

As Clark's poem and realities become fused, the power of literature to act as an agent of social transformation can begin. Understanding the deep-seated effects of the war and its control on Nigeria's socio-political landscape can go a long way in finding solutions to the present crises engulfing the country. Yet for readers who are not part of the poet's universe of experience, the poem captures the horrors war can inflict on those who partake in it especially its long-term effects on the progress and development of any nation. The poem's ability to act as an agent of transformation lies in its ability to extend the meaning of war not just for Nigerians, but in Africa and elsewhere. *The Casualties*, then, is not just about war but rather a depiction of all the ills and frailties in human nature and a broader identification of how best humans can rise above their base selves and negotiate the future with hope and courage.

### ***A Wreath for Udomo***

*A Wreath* exposes the gulf (often not fully appreciated by its proponents) between dreaming about the realisation of Pan-Africanism and actually achieving it. While still in London it is easy for Udomo and his friends to dream of a Pan-African independence. Then Africa is one and everyone from Africa, a brother. Yet as soon as Udomo gets back to his country, Panafrika, and succeeds in getting independence for his people, he begins to appreciate that Africa is multiple, complex, and complicated entity. As such organising

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<sup>29</sup> W. Soyinka, *You Must Set Forth at Dawn: Memoirs*, Ibadan, Bookcraft, 2009; Achebe, *There was a Country*; M. Gould, *The Biafra War*; E. Ezeani, *In Biafra Africa Died*; G. Alabi-Isama, *The Tragedy of Victory: On-the-Spot Account of the Nigeria-Biafra War in the Atlantic Theatre*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books, 2013; MSC. Okolo, 'Colonial Legacy and Brittle Peace: A Philosophical Reading of Achebe's *There was a Country*', *Cameroon Journal of Studies in the Commonwealth*, vol.4, no.1, 2017.

<sup>30</sup> Clark, *Casualties*, p.113.

<sup>31</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Birth of a Dream Weaver: A Writer's Awakening*, London, HarvillSecker, 2016, p.225.

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Pan-Africanism as a political force has to grapple with some real difficulties. Confronted with the choice of betraying his friend, Mhendi (who is fighting to secure independence for his country, Pluraria) to the racist regime in Pluraria or forfeiting economic success for his country which he sees as the only means of safeguarding his power, he hands Mhendi over to the coloniser to be murdered. His friends and supporters who are opposed to his detribalised outlook assassinate Udomo himself.

The people of Panafrica prefer their tribal enclaves and a leader who does not seem to appreciate this is seen as an enemy of the people. *A Wreath* portrays not just the inherent difficulty in achieving Pan-Africanism but also the intricate complexity of realising a modern state. How valid are the doubts expressed in Abrahams' novel to contemporary African situation?

To begin with, the enabling environment for Pan-Africanism to succeed in Africa is not there. The leaders that emerged at independence were those "created within the cultural womb of imperialism."<sup>32</sup> To ensure that nothing happens to their fledging power, the new African leaders easily allowed themselves to pander to their erstwhile colonisers for economic succour. This situation is made possible by the way the colonisers made sure that African countries remained economically subservient after independence. African countries were (and still are) encouraged to become primary producers. Without being in control of the main springs of the economy – the means of production, distribution and exchange, African leaders cannot challenge the aggressive policies of the rich industrialised countries. The foreign exploiters fix both the price for Africa's primary product and their own manufactured products, which they sell back to Africa. Jonathan Zwingina notes that "the neo-colonial direction of the economy was a deliberate policy of the colonial regime, which prevented Africans from economic participation."<sup>33</sup> Trapped in economic servitude, African leaders reserve their first allegiance to the colonial authority from which they derive their support rather than to the will of their people or a sister African state. Osundare captures this unequal relationship thus: "The OAU craves sanctions/prays the Western Con-Tact

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<sup>32</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, London, James Currey, 1993, p.84.

<sup>33</sup> J.S. Zwingina, *Capitalist Development in an African Economy*, Ibadan, University Press, 1992, p.43.

Group/to do their job.”<sup>34</sup> Though OAU craves, it does not impose; and it cannot compel except to pray. He wonders when Africans, especially the leaders, will wake up from their four hundred years of blindness and “see/ the corroding conspiracy/of life takers?”<sup>35</sup>

*A Wreath* helps to understand, perhaps, the greatest enemy facing the Pan-African agenda. This is the enemy from within. The composition of most modern African states is such that even while they remain one nation, deep divisions persist. Nigeria, for instance, is “a crude...contraption”<sup>36</sup> made up of “Animists, Muslims, and Christians” held together by “a delicate, ...artificial, lattice” which inextricably complicated her destiny.<sup>37</sup> In Nigeria, as already noted, this is a central factor that led to the Nigeria-Biafra civil war. Ezeani quotes Abiodun as stating that Hausa/Fulani Muslims “derisively refer to Igbo people as ‘impure’ and lower-than-dogs.”<sup>38</sup> This kind of thinking cannot promote national unity as the persistent crises in Nigeria attest. Nigeria is not unique in this. The idea that Hutu and Tutsi were distinct races with the Tutsi somehow a ‘superior race’ and that Rwandans were fundamentally unequal was a major reason for the Rwandan genocide in which countless Tutsi people were brutally murdered. People who had an identity card proving them to be of the Tutsi ethnic group and anyone who looked Tutsi were gruesomely killed.<sup>39</sup> It was so bad that “bodies and body parts were dumped in piles at the side of the road. At Shigira..., some hundred Tutsi women and children committed mass suicide by drowning themselves in the river to escape attack by Hutu mobs.”<sup>40</sup> Equally, the systematic destruction that took place during the Sudanese civil war was aimed at changing the demography in Darfur by killing African Muslims because they are too black.<sup>41</sup> The Arab Muslims see themselves as both the superior race and the ones entitled to live and rule.

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<sup>34</sup> Osundare, *Songs*, p.49.

<sup>35</sup> Osundare, *Songs*, p.49.

<sup>36</sup> W. Soyinka, ‘Between Dividers-in-Chief and Dividers-in-Law’, [guardian.ng/politics/between-dividers-in-chief-and-dividers-in-law/](http://guardian.ng/politics/between-dividers-in-chief-and-dividers-in-law/)

<sup>37</sup> Achebe, *There was a Country*, p.2.

<sup>38</sup> Ezeani, *In Biafra Africa Died*, p.206.

<sup>39</sup> Melvern, *A People Betrayed*.

<sup>40</sup> Melvern, *A People Betrayed*, p.21.

<sup>41</sup> Steidle and Steidle, *The Devil came on Horseback*.

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Mazrui<sup>42</sup> made an interesting distinction between Africans of the soil and Africans of the blood. Africans of the soil are Africans that belong to the African continent (soil) but not of the black race (the blood). Africans of the blood are Africans (the African Americans) who belong to the black race but not the soil (the African continent). Africans of both the soil and the blood are Africans who belong both to the continent and the race. This divide appears to be very fundamental in the arrangement of relationship in Africa. It is behind the hardened hatred that drove the devastating killings in Rwanda and Sudan and shaped what was, perhaps, the cruellest face of apartheid in South Africa. The poet Osundare puts it bluntly “South Africa police/Murders seven hundred Blacks in Soweto.”<sup>43</sup> Importantly, it is still the silent (?) factor governing the affairs in these countries. Even Nigeria has its convoluted version with the Northern Nigerians thinking they have the sole mandate to rule the country. The point is, in most African countries, deadly rivalry among the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious groups brought together as a result of colonialism have continued. A country in disarray cannot promote the Pan-African agenda.

### ***Wizard of the Crow***

Ngugi's Ruler in *Wizard* is a composite of all African tyrants paraded by Soyinka in *A Play of Giants*.<sup>44</sup> Think of the fusion of Macias Nguema; Jean-Baptiste Bokassa, Mobutu Sese Seko and Idi Amin in one individual. Fittingly, in a novel of 768 pages, he retains his identity only as the Ruler, in a country that is free and democratic. Indeed, he is the Ruler of the Free Republic of Aburirian, where even his “cabinet ministers jumped to attention like terrified cadets” at his entrance and refer to him as “Ruler who art our father here on earth.”<sup>45</sup> This is a familiar prayer (Our Father who art in Heaven) rendered by Christians to their One and true God. How close can a mortal come in sharing the omnipotence of God? This sets out the

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<sup>42</sup> A.A. Mazrui, Pan-Africanism and the intellectuals: rise, decline and revival', *African intellectuals: Rethinking politics, language, gender and development*, Edited by Mkandawire, Dakar, CODESRIA Books, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Osundare, *Songs*, p.49.

<sup>44</sup> W. Soyinka, *A Play of Giants*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books, 1984.

<sup>45</sup> Ngugi, *Wizard*, p.237.

arrangement of power relations between the Ruler and his ministers and by extension the entire masses. So in this fictional country, the Ruler is the Alpha and Omega; the beginning and the end whose “every moment – eating, shitting, sneezing, or blowing his nose”<sup>46</sup> – is captured on camera. Even “his yawns were news because, whether triggered by boredom, fatigue, hunger, or thirst, they were often followed by some national drama.” His enemies were either “lashed in the public square with a *sjambok*, whole villages were blown to bits or people were pierced to death by a bows-and-arrows squad, their carcasses left in the open as food for hyenas and vultures.”<sup>47</sup> This is what it means to be a citizen and to live in the Free Republic of Aburirian. Here ministers assume subservient role, journalists who should champion the truth become the tools for the propagation of excesses and falsehood, and the masses are left to their fate. Here, then, is one of the major factors frustrating development and progress in most African states. It is difficult to distinguish this Free Republic from a totalitarian state or military regime, the type that exerts complete control over its people and suppress any versions of truth contrary or inimical to its understanding of events.

Events in Aburiria reminds of what the military regime in Burma in its Road Map to Democracy in 2003 referred to as a discipline-flourishing democracy. Commenting on the phrase, Emma Larkin observes that it “sounds distinctly *undemocratic*, especially when used by a military junta that has demonstrated its enduring ability to rule against the will of the people.”<sup>48</sup> But the Ruler’s vision is larger than life and Aburiria is his possession. Osundare bemoans the attitude of African leaders who do not want to leave office: “waiting/like an African despot/for the seventieth year of his rule.”<sup>49</sup> To achieve this, the Ruler sets out to do “what had never been done by any ruler before him: freeze or even abolish the future of a country.”<sup>50</sup> Of course, he has experimented with this on a micro-level with his wife and succeeded. For the macro experiment, he will send his minister of defence, Tajirika whose loyalty he is beginning to doubt, to order the army for a massacre. Then he would set

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<sup>46</sup> Ngugi, *Wizard*, p.3.

<sup>47</sup> Ngugi, *Wizard*, pp.3-4

<sup>48</sup> E. Larkin, *Everything is Broken: The untold story of disaster under Burma’s military regime*, London, Granta, 2010, p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> N. Osundare, *Waiting Laughters*, Lagos, Malthouse Press, 1990, p.55.

<sup>50</sup> Ngugi, *Wizard*, p.750.

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up a commission of inquiry supervised by a couple of observers from America and the European Union which would end up blaming his minister. After this he would have the minister executed publicly. But the Ruler forgot that unbridled power and ambition often attract its kind, and intimacy with evil ends up replicating itself. Tajirika outsmarts him and feeds him to the crocodiles of the Red River, the Ruler's own preferred method of dealing with his enemies. Tajirika is no better. He introduces a new era of Imperial democracy. Nyawira, the chairperson of Movement for the Voice of the people, an association dedicated to fighting the tyrannical rule of the Ruler and opening up democratic space for the people, puts it this way "But shit is still shit, even by another name.... The battle lines may be murky, but they have not changed."<sup>51</sup> As with the time of the Ruler the only option the people have is to organise and fight for their freedom.

The *Wizard* highlights a perennial issue which must be overcome if African societies are to be totally transformed. This problem is manifested by the Ruler and some of his ministers who suffered from white-ache. Beyond the ability to say the word 'IF', the sufferer is rendered dumb. This 'IF' is not an ordinary conjunction. It is loaded with regret, loath of black identity and disdain for self-worth. The Ruler and his ministers are not the only victims of this illness. Eugene, the tortured Christian in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*<sup>52</sup> is also a victim of white-ache. How then is white-ache acquired? Soyinka and Achebe provide useful insights. In Soyinka's 'Telephone Conversation',<sup>53</sup> the landlady makes it clear that an African who is not passably white cannot live in her facility. In such a situation black people who cannot deal with it may be pushed to alter their identity to be accepted. Achebe writes how he was initially blinded by the books he read in school that portrayed the white man as good and reasonable and smart and courageous and black people as savages, sinister and stupid, and never anything higher than cunning.<sup>54</sup> It will take maturity for Achebe to learn how to read between the lines. It was only then that he discovered that he was one of the savages and set out to recover and redeem his identity and self-worth by presenting the authentic Africa and

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<sup>51</sup> Ngugi, *Wizard*, p.756.

<sup>52</sup> C.N. Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus*, Lagos, Farafina, 2006.

<sup>53</sup> W. Soyinka, 'Telephone Conversation', *A Selection of African Poetry*, Edited by K.E. Senanu and T. Vincent, Great Britain, Longman, 1976, pp.116-119.

<sup>54</sup> C. Achebe, *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, London, Penguin Classics, 2009, p.

Africans through his writings, most notably *Things Fall Apart*.

While Achebe was able to remove the blinders and reconnect to his identity, the Ruler, his ministers and Adichie's Eugene, prototypes of Africans weighed down by inferiority complex, are too far gone to take any decisive action to undo the anomaly. Tajirika, as the minister of Finance, during an official visit to New York went to Genetica Inc., a clinic that specialises in genetic engineering, to begin the process of transforming himself to a white person, an ambition he has nursed for a long time. On this occasion he transformed his right arm to white. He soon revisited and "added a white left leg to his one-white-armed body."<sup>55</sup>

(Un)fortunately, Genetica, like its patrons, is a sham. So Tajirika's dream freezes at the point the company is declared bankrupt, under police investigation and closed down. Interestingly, his wife, Vinjinia, knows all about this and for her acceptance, cooperation and silence she bargained for a face- and breast-lift for herself which she got. This, in brief, is the resume of the new Ruler and the first lady of Aburiria as at the end of the novel. The novel jolts us into remembering that the arrangement of relationship engendered by colonialism that placed Africa and Africans, especially black Africans, in a subordinate relationship with the west has not ended. It behoves on African leaders to show positive leadership as this will ultimately determine how the continent and its people will be regarded. Here all the works – *Casualties*, *A Wreath*, *Wizard* – meet. Rulers who do not understand their roles as leaders cannot infuse Pan-Africanism with the courage and committed leadership it needs; and such leaders are most likely to incite their people to war.

### **Repositioning Africa for social transformation through creative writing**

To reposition we need to move something from point 'A' to, perhaps, point 'Z'. For such an exercise to be meaningful, significant and effective, one must aim at strategic advantage. So how do we reposition Africa for social rebirth through creative writing?

One, repositioning Africa for social transformation through creative writing is not a given. According to Desmond Tutu "Religion is like a knife:

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<sup>55</sup> Ngugi, *Wizard*, p.742.

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you can either use it to cut bread, or stick in someone's back."<sup>56</sup> The same can be said of creative writing. Whenever a writer writes, no matter how objective, s/he is projecting a certain worldview, ideology, prejudice and so forth. Many stories about Africa and her people as sub-humans were sold through literature to the point that they became *the* established truth about Africans both to Europeans and, tragically, even Africans themselves. Equally, the notion that Africa and her people have culture, civilization and very intelligent people was again accepted through literature. Achebe, recounts how *Things Fall Apart* stopped a leading constitutional Judge in Germany, Wolfgang Zeidler, from accepting the offer made to him to become a constitutional consultant to the Namibian regime after his retirement. The judge after reading the book said that "he had never seen Africa in that way and that after having read that book he was no more innocent."<sup>57</sup> It is, therefore, critical that African writers should aspire to write what I will like to tag *Redeeming Literature*. These are books that not only point but show us through the lives of fictional characters how we can be better citizens; books that tell us we can make our country better; books that exercise our minds, intellect, creativity, talents, skills and challenge us to hold the highest vision of ourselves. In sum, books that possess enough strength to transform our society. Ngugi sums this well when he observed that a "writer's quest is truth; his guide, social conscience."<sup>58</sup>

Two, we need a committed council of critics. Do readers have a right to different interpretations of a fictional work? While this question can be answered in the affirmative, a critical reader should be able to grasp what the author *implies* by his/her choice of words. A serious reader has to be able to enquire about the point of a story being told in a particular way. A reader who fails to do this has not exercised proper responsible attitude towards the work. Paul Grice, in David Davies, insists that there are *conversational implicatures*.<sup>59</sup> By this he means that in ordinary conversation contributions to the talk exchange are regulated by certain principles which are grasped by all competent conversational partners. I wish to extend this argument to reading. In reading, there must be some *potent* ideas contained in the book which can

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<sup>56</sup> D. Tutu, 'Desmond Tutu', *Greatest Speeches of Historic Black Leaders*, Edited by Ben Anagwonye and Njideka Anagwonye, Benin, Mindex, 2012, p.72.

<sup>57</sup> Achebe, *The Education*, p. 52.

<sup>58</sup> Ngugi, *Birth of a Dream Weaver*, p.212.

<sup>59</sup> D. Davies, *Aesthetics and Literature*, London, Continuum, 2007, p.51.

be distilled by all *qualified* reading members. It is these ideas that can be spread and applied in an effort to re-engineer our society.

Three, is the difficult task of getting our leaders to read. To transform any society depends in large measure on the vision of its leaders. It, then, follows that to transform our society through creative writing our leaders *must* read the creative works. One serious problem that is often labeled against African societies is the lack of reading culture. Tunji Olaopa claims that he has “never read anywhere the reading list of any Nigerian president.”<sup>60</sup> One way of interpreting this is that our leaders do not read and as such are unable to motivate their people to read. This, perhaps, helps to explain some of the leadership problems Africa is facing given that reading “is inextricably tied to intelligence and cognition, and the capacity for analytic and critical reflection and problem solving.”<sup>61</sup> Olaopa, further, submits that the probability that a reading leader would likely be a good leader can easily be established.<sup>62</sup> So how do we get our leaders to read? While this problem needs attention from all agents I will proffer one or two suggestions in the form of questions. Is it possible to have a monthly or even quarterly programmes on radio and television where our leaders talk about the book(s) they are reading? Is it possible to incorporate as a key condition during election campaigns an account of the book(s) those aspiring for public offices are reading?

## **Conclusion**

This paper sets out to demonstrate how Africa can be repositioned for social transformation through creative writing. To accomplish this purpose, it discussed literature and societal transformation. This is done through a philosophical review of J.P. Clark’s ‘The Casualties’; Peter Abrahams *A Wreath for Udomo*; and Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow* to show if they contain useful ideas that can be employed to re-order the African society. This way, the critical contribution philosophy can make in the interrogation of literary work to ascertain whether they possess transformatory ability or not is underscored. Beyond this, it showcases the content coverage of literature to

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<sup>60</sup> T. Olaopa, ‘Do Nigerian leaders read and what’s their development mindset?’, *Sunday Sun*, June 2, 2019, p.34.

<sup>61</sup> Olaopa, ‘Do Nigerian leaders read’, p.34.

<sup>62</sup> Olaopa, ‘Do Nigerian leaders read’, p.34.

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include the affinity between a reading leader and a good leader. Repositioning Africa for social rebirth through creative writing, then, can only be achieved through serious commitment by all agents: the creative writer, the reader, the leader and especially through promoting dialogue between philosophy and African literature.

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