An Appraisal of the Functions of Francophone African Literature Towards Political Development in Contemporary Nigeria

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Abstract
From the 19th century, francophone African literature has been dynamic and very rich in content and style, evolving from one stage to another. Francophone African literature has indisputably contributed to shaping the form and content of development among African States. This study aims to enhance an understanding of the technical components and functions of francophone literature and how these have contributed to national development or otherwise among African states, especially Nigeria. The purely descriptive study design employs a historical approach. Findings have revealed that despite the enormous efforts of francophone African writers in proposing possible solutions towards the political and social development of African States, Nigeria still has a long way to go. Technical components of Francophone African literature include oral tradition, folktales, slave narratives, and the African novel. However, these technical components remain deeply rooted in the concepts of new negro, ethnological and anthropological works, ideological esthestics, negritude and most recently, migritude. The Study seeks to explore the functions of Francophone African literature as a panacea to political development in present-day Nigeria. Findings from the study reveal that Francophone African literature which reflects the social and political behavior of man in the society can help to shape and direct political activities and culture of the people towards a better and positive development in Nigeria. The study concludes that since literature is a mirror of happenings in the society, the study of Francophone African literature should be intensified among political actors to enable them cope with the challenges that leadership pose.

Key words: Francophone, African Literature, Political Development, FUNCTION, Contemporary Nigeria.

Introduction and Background

African literature can be considered as literature of or from Africa, and it consists of oral and written forms. As simple as the terminology sounds, attempting to define francophone African literature in a holistic and encompassing manner, especially in the context of our study, seems not easy. In

a bid to come out with an acceptable definition of the concept, different writers have proposed philosophical, cultural, and literary definitions. According to Balogun (2005);

> La littérature africaine peut être définie come l'ensemble des cultures, de mœurs, des civilisations, des pensées et des sentiments du people noir d'Afrique.
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> African literature can be defined as all together the cultures, habits, civilisations, thoughts, and feelings of the black people of Africa.

This definition of African literature by Balogun touches on all the aspects that literature embraces in relation to the black person of African origin.

From a global perspective, Sartre (1980) makes allusion to literature in terms of the expression of a writer's opinion on his subject, as well as a manifestation of such ideas in painting and the arts. Whereas, Sanusi and Tijani (2011) on their part see African literature as an effort by African writers to make Africa known by exposing the level of dependence and huge colonial tasks especially by revealing the intimate lives of the indigenes. Onyemelukwe's (2015) definition of literature catches our attention here because it is comprehensive:

> La Littérature africaine se définit comme l'ensemble des œuvres créative (orales ou ecrites) ayant des valeurs esthétique, culturelle, morale, philosophique et psychologique, exprimées en langues africaines (autochtones ou non autochtones). Ces œuvres doivent porter sur la vie et les expériences des Africains et leurs auteurs doivent être Africains et là où ils sont non-Africains, ils doivent vécu longuement en Afrique, ces œuvres doivent cibler un public africain avant tout autre public (La littérature orale en Afrique 27-28).
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> African literature is defined as creative writing (oral or written), having aesthetic, cultural, moral, philosophical, and psychological values, expressed in African languages (autochthonous or non-autochthonous).
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> These written works must be based on the experiences of Africans, and their authors must be Africans, or where they are not Africans, they must have lived over a period of time. These works must first of all target an African public before any other public.

Going through these definitions, we deduce that literature depicts the totality of man's activities in society as captured in the areas of struggles, conflicts, suffering, creativity, culture, standards of living, and ways of life.

Francophone literature simply put, is literature written in the French language. The literature is authored by writers living in Africa or abroad. The concept of Francophone African literature developed based on the recognition of the

existence of a plurality of literatures in the French language; the others being Quebecois literature, Belgian Francophone literature, Maghrebian literature and French Caribbean literature. Although some critics have expressed their uneasiness in defining African literature along the Anglophone – Francophone linguistic divide common with colonial history, Francophone African literature is widely used as a descriptive category.

However, during the colonial era, Francophone African literature was dominated by the negritude movement; a movement which emphasized the idea of the beauty of the black African culture and roots. Although some critics trace its origin from René Maran's publication of Batouala (1921), in the 1930s, black students from the Caribbean and African French colonies rebelled against the French assimilation policies of their education and civilization, and vied to revalorize their common African cultural roots, which colonization has systematically devalued. Aimé Césaire, Léon – Gontran Damas and Léopold Sédar Senghor led this movement of negritude, which did not only galvanise black students studying in Europe, but appealed to prominent members of the French literary establishment such as Jean – Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, André Gide, Marcel Griaule, Michael Leiris and André Breton. From this group of literary scholars came about a literary revolt and thereby rose a whole body of writings (especially poetry) that celebrated the African roots of black cultures long considered manifestations of barbarism. There was then an explosion in the world of Francophone African literature. For example, Sartre's "Black Orpheus" the preface to Senghor's Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache d'expression française (1984) highlighted the main ideas of this literary movement. The review Presence Africaine, published in both French and English, was created to serve as one of the main means of transmission (1947). Nevertheless, the urgency of problems facing the new nations after independence, created to scrutinize one's specific location. Therefore, Caribbean writers and critics gradually realized the importance of focusing on their "Caribbeans" (Such as Edouard Glissant in Le Discours antillais , 1981) resulting from a sedimentation of elements drawn from Africa, European, and Asian cultures.

From the colonial era literary works of writers like Camara Laye, Mongo Beti, Ousmane Sembène and Ferdinand Oyono to the post-independent era, Francophone African literature has evolved along a trajectory similar to its English counterpart. In the 1960, many writers dealt with the clash of cultures, disillusionment with the native elites and their gross management of the gains of independence. From the 1980s through 1990s down to the 2000s saw the rise of new writers especially of women pioneered by the Senegalese novelist Mariama Bâ, followed by a legion of others like Aminata Sow-Fall, Werewere Liking, Calixthe Beyala, Véronique Tadjo, Lynn Mbuko, Lilyan Kesteloot, Victor Aire, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ifeoma Onyemelukwe, Alain Mabanekou, etc.

Therefore, Francophone literature has grown in scope with seasoned writers and refined works in drama, poetry, novels, essays and folktakes, with the development of society remaining its main focus.

Functions of Francophone Literature and National Development.
Francophone African literature has, over the years, contributed immensely to the development of the African continent in the aspects of politics, economy, culture and social integration.

This literature came about as a result of a conscientisation of blacks vis-à-vis their situation in the face of Europeans during the colonial period. Therefore, it was a protest literature: protesting against the wrongdoings of the colonialists. Examples of the writers include Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Leon Gontran Damas.

Apart from the motive of revolting against colonization, francophone African writers wrote to attack, criticize, and demystify the false claims by the whites that blacks had no culture, no civilization, no education, and therefore, no past. For example, Léopold Sédar Senghor wrote his poem "femme Noire" to glorify the beauty of the African continent. The poem paints Africa as a continent that is natural and rich, and needs to be explored. Camara Laye also wrote to promote and glorify the African culture. Even though he did this at the peak of colonization. On his part, Mongo Beti's works were a direct attack on the colonial machine and colonialism.

This literature spread across three major periods: pre-independence, independence, and post-independence. During the pre-independence era, francophone African writers wrote to contest and protest against the excesses of the colonialists, which was popularized by the Negritude movement.

Three of the founders of the Negritude, Léopold Sedar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Léon Gontran Damas, wrote to dignify the black race and especially the person of the Negro, to give value to Negro-African cultural patrimony, and to reject Western values. They made use of satire, the direct description of the wrongs and atrocities of colonialism as well as addressing social conflicts brought about by colonialism. For example, Léopold Sedar Senghor wrote his series of poems *Chants d'ombre* (1945) Aime Ce'saire wrote *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939) and Léon Gontran Damas wrote *Pigments* (1937), During this period, we could identify writers like Mongo Beti, Ferdinand Oyono, Sembene Ousmane, Camara Laye, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, to mention a few.

The independent period of the francophone African literature was mainly concerned with encouraging the African leaders to take their proper place in the scheme of things. The writers were thoroughly embarrassed by the level of inferiority complex exhibited by African leaders during independence. For example, the continued political, administrative, and economic domination of

African States by the colonial masters, inequalities and social injustice that pervaded the system as well as the economic exploitation of the West.

During the post-independent era, writers like Sembene Ousmane, Ahmadiu Kourouma, and Jean Pliya observed sadly how the problem of neo-colonialism gravely confronted the African people. During this period, the new African leaders who took over political power continued to exploit their fellow Africans.

Therefore, the abuses and exploitative tendencies that were brought about by colonization and neo-colonialism pushed African writers' intellectual fight against the inequalities in African society. This led to an increase in writers who took their turns to write and educate Africans on their rights and also to proffer solutions to these problems to bring about national development. Mongo Beti, for instance, wrote to conscientise the black people to fight against the social ills prevalent in the society at this time and also reject neo-colonialism. This was typically displayed in his last book *Branle-bas en noir et blanc* (2000). Seydou Badian, in his book *Caught in the Storm* (1998), condemns neo-colonialism completely and encourages the value of African tradition through an examination of the conflict between young and old, new and traditional, foreign and native values.

Having paved the way for proper conscientisation of the African people to rise and defend their rights and ensure good governance and development, Africans massively rose to the occasion in active participation.

The foregoing shows clearly that the post-colonial milieu of Nigeria is still a hegemonic situation in economic and social relations between the colonial nation (Master) and its colonies, where the colonized remained dominated, manipulated, and exploited. This has brought to the fore the problem of neo-colonialism, thereby stalling national economic and social development.

Ekekwe (1986) in *Class and State in Nigeria,* postulates that "Post-Colonial State, is a form of capitalist type of state… it is a state, nation founded in social formations that are now largely incorporated into the global capitalist network of imperialism. The post-colonial state therefore, is not the instrument of a single class". This implies that the state is relatively autonomous and it mediates between the competing interests of the three property classes, namely, the metropolitan bourgeoisie, which lweala et al refer to as "donor agencies", the indigenous bourgeoisie, referred to as "Non-governmental organization" or "public-private" sector known as the landed classes. Ekekwe rightly observes that in a post-colonial state like Nigeria, pre-capitalist modes still exist alongside the capitalist mode. One could therefore speak and pick out the articulation of these modes of production in the conflicts and contestations that characterized social relations in most post-colonial states.

It is pertinent to note here that obviously, there is a close link between development, literature, and education. In the Nigerian context and objectives of education, the literature remains prominent, are focused on the problems of nation-building and national development. We note that the objectives of Nigeria's national development are encapsulated in the country's development plan (1975-1980) and definitely expounded in Vision 20-20, including:

- A free and democratic society
- A just and egalitarian society
- A united, strong and self-reliant nation
- A great and dynamic economy
- A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.

The realization of these objectives, with all the theoretical literature accompanying them in Nigeria, remains a mirage. They have all been swallowed up in inherent corruption, lack of political will; religious, political and ethnic chauvinism have characterized the system and inhibited the realization of these goals since independence.

Giwa (2015) argues that to ensure an all-round development of Nigeria, through literature, attention must be given to orality, cultural identity, and social responsibility. He points out significantly that proper attention must be given to orality in the film industry, which upholds the tenets of cultural identity, social responsibility, and not forgetting the place of the supernatural.

Regrettably, the efforts of early francophone African writers as well as emerging ones in representing the African continent and the entire black race has yielded mixed results. Whereas francophone African literature aimed at attacking and condemning societal vices, corruption in the administration of African States, nepotism, ethnicism, segregation, and religious bigotry, not much has been done by the new African States to eliminate such negative tendencies that, instead of developing, have contributed to underdeveloping African nations.

Conclusion

This study, a technical appraisal of francophone African literature as a tool for national development from independence to present day Nigeria has looked at literature as a reconstruction of a people's collective experiences expressed in carefully selected words to entertain, instruct and move its readers to bring about national development as found in works of some of the following authors: Seydiu Budan in *le sang des masques* (1976), Mongo Beti in *Perpétue et I'habitude du malhiur* (1974), Sembéne ousmane in *Xala* (1973), Ferdinand Oyono in *chemi d'Europe* (1960) to mention a few.

Francophone African literature offers a reconstruction through stories with human characters, incidents, settings, and dialogue, to bring about social change. Therefore, literature offers a social function; a function embraced by many African writers who have become committed to their society.

Recommendation

Based on the foregoing, we hereby recommend as follows:

- Francophone African should de-emphasize writings that portray Africa as a dark and hopeless continent. Tales of war, child soldiers, kidnappings, rape, and genocide should be de-emphasized. We should rather write to promote heroism in social, cultural, political and economic achievements. We should write to discourage and if possible, close the generation gap that exists in the African society especially, Nigeria.
- As present-day Africans and Nigerians, we struggle to define ourselves but not depend on what others (non-Africans define us to be). As Africans, we must choose to take a common stance on our identity.

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