

INTERROGATING MENTAL STASIS: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF TWO FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN NOVELS

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Abstract

After 1960, there is a shift from the Negritude idea which celebrates African culture to a more committed literary activity that matches the contemporary realities of the post-independent experiences. Most African creative writers are troubled by the kind of politics and political ideologies Africans are subjected to. This study, therefore, interrogates the social realities in postcolonial African society. The purpose of this study is to call the attention of those in positions of authority to the fact that social injustice and unemployment are the root causes of insecurity, crimes, and other vices in human societies. Based on *French explication de texte*, that is, textual content analysis as its methodology, two novels are examined. The two selected novelists are militant in nature and they have an inclination toward protest writing with a view to correcting the ugly practices in their societies. The paper adopts Marxism as its theoretical framework. The findings reveal that the required liberation of the downtrodden from oppressive authorities is possible if the masses unite. The research finding also suggests that social transformation can be achieved through sociopolitical consciousness. The paper, therefore, submits that for a country to develop, the masses should make the governments, at various levels, do the needful by making them accountable for their actions and in-actions.

Keywords: Francophone, mental stasis, novel, society, post-independent experiences.

1. Introduction

Mental stasis can be translated as *Mùmú*. *Mùmú* is an urban slang that is commonly used by city dwellers. It connotes the state of keeping quiet unnecessarily for too long over important matters which adversely affect one's life socioeconomically, politically, and otherwise. As a concept, it describes a poor state of mindset or mental capacity when people accept whatever is thrown at them without any question. The state of being in mental stasis demonstrates a lack of awareness, ignorance, or a show of nonchalant attitude. However, the rejection of mental stasis

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marks the beginning of the emancipation of the mind. That is, to be mentally freed from the shackles of sociopolitical bondage, to say the least. The rejection of mental stasis shows that citizens, especially the poor masses are ready to take their destiny into their hands and fight for their rights, without minding the consequences. In other words, the people are saying *ótógé* (it is enough). Hence, they are ready to *sòròsókè* (to speak out loud and clear). The terms *ótógé* (it is enough) and *sòròsókè* are markers of the rejection of mental stasis. These two terms denote a state of self-consciousness when people decide to revolt against certain forms of social injustice individually and/or collectively. The end #SARS saga in Nigeria in October 2020 is a good example of the rejection of stupidity which is conceptualized in this article as the rejection of mental stasis. It simply means a state of saying a big “NO” to oppression, corruption, cheating, and other forms of social injustice which are often perpetrated by government agencies, security apparatus, or people at the corridors of power.

Good governance has to do with the ability to draw up government policy, coordinate the policy, and supervise or monitor human actions to achieve the desired goals, within a stipulated frame of time through serious acts of discipline. Attempting to define governance, (Omoleke, 2009, p. 14) opines that “to govern implies harnessing human and material resources, compliance with the law that is the constitution, listening to and accepting advice, allowing freedom of expression, accepting guilt and ready to make corrections.” According to World Bank (1989), good governance means “sound management.” In other words, good governance is “the manner in which (political) power is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for development.” One thing is clear, good governance demonstrates administrators’ capacity to organize and coordinate effectively both human and material resources with a view to providing adequate social amenities which are required for development socioeconomically.

However, in African states, underdevelopment is the hallmark of the human condition occasioned by bad governance and docile followership. Some committed literary writers, therefore, center their creative works on the prevailing situations. They make their narratives people and society oriented. This study is guided by the assertion that “some questions can indeed be answered in the laboratory, while others cannot. One cannot (for instance), measure happiness in the laboratory” (Schofield, 1972, p. 31). Aside from that, many problems remain unsolved in Africa because the people have failed to develop their own philosophy. According to Oladipo (1999, p. 71), there is actually a difference between the “culture of belief” and the “culture of inquiry.” And, for that reason, Oladipo says:

The culture of inquiry involves systematic investigations of phenomena-natural or social—with a view to enhancing our understanding of their nature. These investigations demand not only systematic observation of things and processes in nature and society, but they also involve the use of reason to conceive of possible explanations for what we observe. Thus, the culture of inquiry is usually propelled by the pursuit of meaning. It “involves seeking and purposeful effort” aimed at creating a better world.

Fundamentally, to fulfill the quest for a meaningful culture of inquiry, committed writers adopt satire to expose the follies and the vices in their communities for people to ponder about the situations around them and adjust their ways of life for the purpose of ensuring positive social change. As a matter of fact, Africans should drop the idea of just believing things without making an inquiry. The development of an inquisitive mind leads some creative writers into interrogating the social order of their time in their community in their search for good governance. By good governance, Ode (2013, p. 131) has argued:

A good government would ensure that social amenities are provided, that policies which are formulated are achievable, sustainable, and consistent, and that the three arms of government remain independent of each other to enable them to act as checks and balances for each other.

Relating the description of a good government painted by Ode to the African situation, one will say the journey has not started. Inadequate social infrastructure, unemployment, prostitution, poverty, and a high rate of crime are the order of the day. (Falola, 2015, p. 79) asserts:

The monopoly of the state to sell its own ideology has to be confronted. Knowledge must empower women, the grassroots, and civil societies to solve age-old problems of economic underdevelopment and political instability. We cannot expect to take advantage of new possibilities and opportunities if we cannot comprehend and correct the mistakes of the past.

From the foregoing, the truth is that Africans have to constructively confront the existing social order which does not allow sustainable development if they are interested in overcoming the prevailing challenges. This is the motif of some African novelists, playwrights, and poets. Patrick Ilboudo and Fatou Keïta whose novels are selected for this study belong to the category of writers seeking social transformation in Africa.

1. Brief Insight into the Concept of Marxism

Marxism, as a theory in literary studies, can be connected to the philosophical beliefs and principles postulated by Karl Heinrich Marx, a German philosopher in the 19th century, and Friedrich Engels, a French political economist of the same century. Marxism is an economic and political ideology. It is revolutionary in nature because it seeks to put an end to capitalism which is believed to be the root cause of socioeconomic imbalances in every society.

Marxism advocates for equality, fairness, and a balanced society in terms of the production and distribution of resources (wealth) of a given society. The rejection of religion and spiritualism is pertinent to the Marxists because it is believed that religion has been misused to brainwash mankind and to control his mind to his disadvantage. The issue of woman emancipation is equally taken seriously by the Marxists because it is hoped that too will contribute meaningfully to the development of society if they are liberated and empowered socioeconomically as well as politically.

Applying Marxist theory to arts, in this case, literature; there is an established dialectical connection between the content and the context of literary expressions. The content is the message of a text while the context implies the style, the form, or the technique applied in putting the text together. The content is often drawn from the social life of the people and the society presented in the arts. The style is informed by the social life itself which may sometimes be conditioned by the existing forces of nature and humans in a particular society.

Marxists see the issues of economic power, class conflict, materialism, and spirituality as the bone of contention in human societies. To them, literature, as a form of art, is a means of expressing a class struggle. Literary production is, therefore, a matter of personal and social expression. It is sufficient to say that each class in a society produces its own literature and art. In other words, there is evidence of class consciousness in Marxist texts.

2. Synopses of the Selected Novels

Patrick Ilboudo's *Les vertiges du trône* (1990) is about Bogya, an imaginary Franco-African State, whose capital city is Titao. The country is under a dictator after the much-awaited independence. President Benoît Wédraogo displays all the characteristics of "*l'État, c'est moi*" (I am the state). He is a wicked dictator per excellence, a corrupt leader of the highest order,

and an unrepentant blood-sucker. President Benoît Wédraogo administers his country without empathy. His government does not wear a human face.

Ting Boutoum and Alain Bousé among other cohorts are the tools in the hands of the said President of Bogya to manipulate the populace and subject them to perpetual suffering. However, the novelist uses Gom Naba as a watchdog in the story. Gom Naba is indeed born sound-minded but his environment later makes him miserable. Hence, he is considered a madman. He is a character of multiple faces, who keeps his eagle's eyes on the activities of the government officials, the military, the police, and the perceived opposition of the dictatorial government of President Benoît Wédraogo. In the end, we see the fall of President Benoît Wédraogo and his associates as well as the destruction of the systemic structure they have injected into the polity of their nation. The ruler, President Benoît Wédraogo, falls from grace to grass and becomes an object of ridicule. He is paid back in his own coin by the people he has humiliated and exercised his megalomania upon. As a price for his wrong dealings, Ting Boutoum's lifeless body is found by the roadside, and on the second day, his master is overpowered. It is hoped that Bogya will be permanently liberated from its political shackles and socially transformed after the disgraceful exit of President Benoît Wédraogo and his cohorts.

Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle* (1998) in a journalistic style, presents the story of Malimouna, a 14-year-old young African girl who refuses to be circumcised as demanded by the custom of her land. She is forced into a marriage that makes her a murderer and a wanted criminal. Malimouna has to flee from home, and later, goes abroad. She courageously braces herself for challenges that confront her. She is able to educate herself formally, get a job, and get married. She however returns home after some time and settles with Karim, a young African man, who has experienced a failed relationship with Philippe Blain, a French national. Malimouna eventually succeeds; she forms a Non-Governmental Organization to fight social injustice particularly in Africa as regards gender imbalances occasioned by socio-cultural pretenses.

3. Discussion on Critical Interrogation of Mental Stasis in Two Francophone African Novels

Narration is a verbal or written description of events and actions. It is a process of storytelling in continuous writing form or in a play. The narrative form adopted by different authors or even the same author can change from time to time. For example, what an author treats (subject matter), why he treats it when he treats it, and where and how he treats the subject can determine an author's narrative strategy.

Amadou Touré, Patrick Ilboudo's protagonist in *Les vertiges du trône* demonstrates a practical use of force to demand the legitimate rights of the poor, the deprived, and the oppressed in African societies. In a collective struggle, the downtrodden, encouraged by the action of Amadou Touré, a student leader, are able to bring President Benoit Wédraogo and his government to a tragic end by carrying out a mass action against the dictatorial regime. Obviously, Ilboudo makes his audience(s) understand that even in the post-independence African socio-political space, violent revolt stands a chance of bringing the desired social change.

Interestingly, in Fatou Keïta's narrative entitled *Rebelle*, there is a mixture of violent and non-violent protests. Malimouna begins by refusing to be circumcised and moves on to radically and violently reject forced marriage by killing old Sando, his father's friend whom she is compelled to marry only because the man is rich. After she escapes from many challenges, she is educated overseas and forms a non-governmental organization to assist women who have difficulties in one way or the other. Through her NGO, Malimouna fights social injustice in Africa, using non-violent means.

Another element of narrative used by the selected Francophone African writers is satire. The two selected Francophone African novels are satirical as they expose the seeming vices and follies in African communities. The attempts to ridicule such unacceptable behavior, attitudes, and practices are for the purpose of correcting them so that society can develop. In their attack on religion, culture, and politics, the selected Francophone African writers use satire which is laced with sarcasm, irony, simile, metaphor, humor, symbolism, and allusion.

The mental pictures created through the scenes where President Wédraogo, the maximum ruler in Patrick Ilboudo's *Les vertiges du trône* is tortured are sarcastic. They teach the lesson of life that no condition is permanent. A great deal of humor is again found in Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle*, with the picture of old Sando as he struggles with Malimouna at the night of their marriage and the image of Dimikela who engages in a love affair with Seynou under a tree in the forest. These actions betray the so-called elders who are supposed to be the custodians of good culture and moral uprightness in African societies. Keïta designs a major character, Malimouna with adequate potential and knowledge which makes her successful. An individualized struggle that begins with Malimouna ends in a collective struggle against unacceptable traditions. Through her NGO, "l'Association d'Aide à la Femme en Difficulté" (AAFD), the protagonist and other women are able to break some sociocultural ethos that is used to oppress women. (Sanusi, 2015, p. 113) remarks:

Gramsci's idea of "permanent victory" can only be attained in a dual process involving the re-creation of the oppressed subject and the transformation of the socio-cultural context in which the oppressed (in this context, the oppressed woman) finds herself.

In terms of narrative technique, the omniscient narrative method which is an eyewitness account of an event where the narrator seems to be all-knowing, all-present, and has direct access to explore the mind and vision of each character in a story is used in the two selected novels.

In his narration, Patrick Ilboudo injects the character of a mentally challenged man, Gom Naba, to serve as a watchdog over events and actions in the novel. This proves that everybody in any society counts and that everybody is somehow conscious of the decay often caused by myopic governments.

As part of their narrative strategy, the selected Francophone African writers use dialogues in their prose-fictions to particularly make their works dramatic and more entertaining. Through detailed descriptions, the writers create a deep sense of realism and solidity. Gestures, actions, scenes, and characters are minutely captured. They are adept in the use of imagery and figures of speech.

In fact, the narrative style adopted by the selected writers matches the three major stages of the revolution. They x-ray the unconsciousness stage when the oppressed are ignorant of their rights and privileges; that is, the period before the self-awareness and self-identity; then the rebellion stage when the downtrodden become informed about their rights and privileges and decide to ask for them from their oppressors whether violently or non-violently. For instance, the time when African railway workers, who are later joined by their women, get the full knowledge of the economic exploitation they suffer at the hands of their colonial employers marks the rebellion stage. The time Amadou Touré declares protest against the dictatorial government of President Benoit Wédraogo whose agents attack *Le Républicain*, the only private media in the land at that time, represents the stage of rebellion. The time Salla Niang and her fellow beggars organize themselves out of the roads, repackage and earn their living in a more decent manner indicate the rebellion stage.

Moreover, Malimouna's rejection of cultural excesses on the feminine gender in Africa is rebellion. "Permanent victory" which is the third stage of any positive revolution can be translated as the evidential turnaround in the displacement of the old social orders and the social transformation which follows it. Revolutionary consciousness and rebellion will continue to be an object of discourse not only in academic debates but also in our daily socio-political discussions. Baje (2016, p. 22) has noted:

The dark days are here for real. The screaming newspaper headlines attest to this: "79.9 million Nigerians are jobless." "272 manufacturing companies close shop." "Industrial production dips by 9.53 percent." "Banks and insurance companies cut workers' salaries." "Inflation hits an all-time high of 17.1 percent; the worst in three decades!" "1,200 workers lose jobs as Aero Contractors halts operations." "600 pilots roam our streets." "Many Nigerians are relocating to their villages..."

Currently, 22 states have yet to pay pensioners their entitlements and 27 states cannot pay staff salaries, as and when due. That is curious, even as some of the state governors concerned fly over the long-suffering masses in private jets, while others riddle our days with convoys of siren-blaring, exotic wonders on wheels.

What the quotation expresses is the contemporary realities of African states and it confirms that consciousness and rebellion shall always be a continuous issue of debate in human nations. The expressions of bottled anger mark that somebody must ask questions about why policies and programs are not working. The high-handedness of the upper-class characters is the root cause of rebellion as one can practically see in the purposively selected Francophone African novels. The downtrodden, the deprived, the poor, or the oppressed become aggressive in an attempt to change their situation for a better life experience.

Unfortunately, more than fifty years of self-rule in most African states have only resulted in corrupt leaders, politicians, soldiers, and other security agencies that are as dangerous as criminals. They are supposed to be apprehended and made to pay for their atrocities against the state. (Sanusi, 2015, p. 203 -4) reiterates:

The majority of francophone African writers, very conscious of their commitment, have, as soon as they appeared on the African literary stage, launched a caustic attack on various forms of injustice reigning within their society or state. After the ambivalent years of colonialism and independence in Africa, the continent and, most especially, Africans have continued to witness another imperial era, this time, controlled by the new lords of the lands, clothed in either Khaki or Agbada. This set of new lords or rulers constitutes a greater menace, if not a terror, to the continent, than the colonial lords they replaced.

Sanusi's submission shows that the struggle of the Africans, particularly the innocent masses, continues as their plight appears unending. This sharp gap between the oppressor and the oppressed has informed the revolutionary tendencies of the poor masses. The hostility in the socio-cultural, political, economic, and religious spheres of Africa has allowed the successful adoption of Marxist cum communist ideologies as demonstrated in Patrick Ilboudo's *Les vertiges du trône*.

It can be recalled that Africans have a mindset for setting up an egalitarian society. And, this informs the anti-colonial or anti-apartheid movement in Africa. They expected that independence would mean self-actualization, good governance, and adequate social well-being. They expected employment opportunities and a sufficient food supply for everybody. Disappointedly, the reality is the failed system. For instance, President Benoît Wédraogo, in

Ilboudo's *Les vertiges du trône* orders the military to fire the protesting students, who are constitutionally exercising their fundamental human rights of expression (freedom of speech), movement, and that associations.

Le ministre de la Défense, sur instruction expresse du Président, chef des armées a donné carte blanche au capitaine Zizien Traboulga de tirer sur la foule en cas de nécessité (Ilboudo, 1990, p. 53).

The Ministry of defense, on the President's order, the Chief of Army Staff authorized Captain Zizien Traboulga, with immediate effect, to fire at the crowd when necessary [The authors' translation].

The same President Wédraogo orders that the revolutionary agitators be arrested and tortured. “. . . avait donné l'ordre de les appréhender et de les torturer . . . les troupes des révolutionnaires . . . (p64) . . .”. had given the order to apprehend and torture them. . . the troops of the revolutionaries.) [The authors' translation]. President Wédraogo openly declares: “Il faut, à partir de maintenant, les exterminer tous (les révolutionnaires)” (p. 120). It is necessary from now on, to exterminate all of them (the revolutionaries). This is not the type of independence the Africans fought for. They do not deserve to be treated like wild animals. This instance actually reminds us of a dialogue between Bohi Di and another character in Alioum Fantouré's *Le cercle des Tropiques* (1972) which is reproduced below:

Tu sais, dans nos villages, nous nous demandons ce qu'est l'indépendance. Notre vie n'a pas changé, nos récoltes sont toujours mauvaises, nous travaillions toujours durement comme avant. Les impôts ont augmenté, ce qui est pire qu'avant, et puis les délégués du Paris nous dépouillent lors de leurs tournées et ils en font plusieurs par mois ; si ce n'est pas l'un c'est l'autre. Si c'est ça l'indépendance, mieux valait supporter les toubabs, car maintenant nous supportons et les toubabs et les chefs indigènes (Fantouré, 1972, p. 168).

Do you know that in our villages, we ask ourselves what independence stands for? Our life has remained unchanged, our farm yields remain poor and we still labor hard as we did in the past. Taxes have increased, even worse than before, and more so, party delegates exploit us during their several monthly unsolicited visits; it is either one fellow or the other. If that is what independence implies, it would have been better if we supported the Whites, because now we are supporting both the Whites and the native chiefs [The authors' translation].

From the excerpt, the character laments an ugly situation of serving two exploitative masters at the same time, when the so-called masters do not care about the plight of the populace. There is practically endemic poverty in African states, and this is one of the causes of the open confrontation between the rulers and the ruled. Embarrassingly, the inferno that guts *Le Républicain*, the only privately owned media, is masterminded by the agents of President Wédraogo. This can be authenticated by the show of ignorance in the president's speech:

La radio, la télévision et la presse écrite, dans ma République, doivent dicter aux gens ce que je voudrais qu'ils pensent des événements (Ilboudo, 1990, p. 12).

The radio, the television, and the print media, in my Republic, must tell the people what I would like them to think about events [The authors' translation].

Obviously, it is understood why President Wédraogo “*Président pourri, fasciste*” (*Les vertiges* . . . p. 64), as described by the novelist, bottled the press as it were. The Press is a powerful agent of social mobilization, which can be used to influence the populace by setting agenda for them and gate-keeping their public opinions. But, what President Wédraogo displays here is a serious abuse of his political power. He is power drunk and has committed a crime against humanity. Strongly connected with this demonstration of political corruption is the socio-political alienation, which can be found in the segmentation of the society in Bogy, especially in Titao. There is a sharp difference between the two parts into which Titao city is divided: *Le contraste entre les deux quartiers de Titao est frappant à l’œil nu comme le jour et la nuit*” (Ilboudo, 1990, p. 25). The disparity between the two parts of Titao is glaring [The authors’ translation].

The people in government and their White collaborators live in affluence while the masses wallow in abject poverty. “*Le Président à l’imagination fertile et extravagante. Quand une idée le séduit, il la chiffre et fait payer la facture à la caisse de l’État*” (Ilboudo, 1990, p. 28). The President has a high and extravagant taste. When an idea seduces him, he costs it and pays the bill from the state’s treasury [The authors’ translation]. The dictator, President Wédraogo describes the ideology of the revolutionaries as primitive, “*projet primitifs*”. He, therefore, wants this vision or system of belief, which according to him, dates back about three centuries, crushed. He wants the agitators exterminated so that their activities can be neutralized. With that, he would have his way and perhaps his peace of mind and continue to stay on in power, unchallenged, for a long period.

Similarly, the opening pages of Keïta’s *Rebelle* present awareness of the poverty which ravages African communities and the cultural consciousness on the part of the Diamas. Sanita’s parents wished she could be connected to African cultural values, particularly the ability to speak their native language. Hence, they took their daughter to their hometown during holidays so that they could achieve their objective.

Sanita habitait Salouma, la capitale, et ne parlait que le français, c’est pourquoi ses parents l’emmenaient régulièrement passer ses vacances au village, afin qu’elle s’imprègne de sa culture et de sa langue d’origine (Keïta, 1998, p. 6).

Sanita lived in Salouma, the capital and she could only speak French which was why her parents took her to the village regularly to spend her holidays in order to imbibe her culture and learn her native language [The authors’ translation].

Mr. and Mrs. Diama’s effort to make their daughter learn their native language and imbibe their customs is commendable. It is the beginning of wisdom. The decision to “*défranciser*” (*Rebelle* 17) their children who are born in France can also be seen as a form of rebellion.

In Fatou Keïta’s *Rebelle*, Malimouna violently rejects marrying old Sando, a rich man who happens to be her father’s friend. Similarly, female African writers are conscious that infidelity among men is a blow to women. It is a serious cause of female annoyance. It can be described as a social, cultural, and moral mess. While men promote this practice, women frown at it because it often breaks marriages or leads to polygamy. Polygamy, to the Marxist feminists, is injurious to the progress of the couple and the home. It does not permit a true sense of belonging on the part of women. Infidelity is the cause of Jacqueline’s psychological disorder in Mariama Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre*. Mojola (2000, p. 249) has observed:

Pour les femmes-écrivains, la polygamie nuit à l'épanouissement du couple... Et même si elles sont conscientes que le mariage monogame n'est pas une garantie de bonheur, il reste à leurs yeux une marque de respect pour la femme, partenaire à part entière dans le mariage.

For female writers, polygamy is injurious to the development of the couple... And even if they are aware that the monogamous marriage is not a guarantee of happiness, it still remains for them a mark of respect for the woman, a full-fledged partner in the marriage [The authors' translation]

La nouvelle de l'incendie du Journal a surchauffé l'esprit des élèves et des étudiants, au point qu'ils ont décidé d'organiser une marche de protestation à la fois contre la suppression de la liberté d'opinion et contre le non-paiement des bourses d'études (Ilboudo, 1990, p. 42)

The news about the setting ablaze of the Newspaper house (Le Républicain) punched the spirits of the pupils and students, to the point that they decided to organize a protest march against the suppression of the freedom of speech and at the same time, to fight against the non-payment of their bursary allowances [The authors' translation].

Amadou Touré, the leader of the students' body further adds:

L'instant est grave. Le gouvernement vient d'incendier le seul journal indépendant du pays. Il ne paie pas nos bourses. Il met en chômage technique nos parents. L'instant est grave et nous devons agir (Ilboudo, 1990, p. 43).

The case is serious. The government has just burnt down the only independent newspaper in the country. It does not pay our bursary allowances. It subjects our parents to unemployment technically. The case is serious and we must act [The authors' translation].

The minor, as it were, call for the removal of a dictator, an unfriendly and shameless regime that has succeeded in reducing them to nothing. During the protest march, some of the inscriptions on the students' banner read: "Nous voulons du pain et de la liberté". "Benoît Wédraogo, démission". "Non à la dictature", (*Les vertiges* . . . p. 51). We want food and freedom. Benoît Wédraogo, must go. No to dictatorship [The authors' translation]. The students frown at the charlatans, who have nothing to offer society. It can also be understood that the conflict between the government and the students symbolizes a divorce between the government (the state) and the masses. The students' body is to readers and to the novelist, the Marxists, or the Communists, who demand the replacement of the old social order that closes its eyes against the progress of the suffering tax-payers. The restructuring of unfavorable social order and the re-establishment of trust, which will bring *permanent victory*, are the major concerns of the revolutionaries. True democracy should permit constructive criticism and objective opposition. The revolutionaries also see the idea of freedom and responsibility as crucial to social transformation and human development.

As a matter of fact, *Rebelle*, as Keïta's novel is entitled, is indeed a revolutionary piece. The writer criticizes a lot of social injustices, especially those vices which incapacitate women in African societies. Malimouna, Keïta's protagonist, protests against the tradition of circumcising young African girls (*Rebelle*, pp. 14, 15, 21, 26, and 27). "Je ne veux pas passer cette épreuve, déclara Malimouna brusquement" (*Rebelle* p. 15). I do not want to go through this test, Malimouna declared bluntly [The authors' translation]. (Sanusi, 2015, p. 121) notes:

Keïta in her novel (*Rebelle*) strongly condemns the practice of female circumcision and advocates for its end because, to her, this rite causes harm to women and has no reasonable justification to be carried out on them any longer.

The heroine also condemns forced marriage (*Rebelle*, pp. 29 & 39) and the abandonment of women. According to the narrator;

Louma, le père de Malimouna, les avait abandonnées depuis longtemps, sous prétexte que Matou ne faisait plus d'enfant, et qu'il lui fallait des fils qui porteraient son nom et seraient sa fierté (Keïta, 1998, p. 24).

Louma, Malimouna's father had abandoned them for a long time on the pretense that Matou could no longer have any child, and that he would like to have sons that would bear his name and make him proud [The authors' translation].

In *Rebelle*, Keïta again frowns at rape (*Rebelle*, p. 6) and arranged marriages between young couples even though they are not forced (*Rebelle*, p. 86). For instance, the writer rejects abnormal behavior which most men display towards their female counterparts, especially in an arranged marriage as readers can see in the case of Barou and Fanta. Such a marriage must be discouraged if Africa must develop. Sanusi (2015, p. 113) has remarked:

The subaltern person, generally speaking, when fighting to overthrow the system that oppresses him or her, functions within a group with which he/she is affiliated. It is generally assumed that it is after the subaltern becomes conscious of his or her condition that he or she seeks a change of situation by attacking the oppressors.

From the foregoing, seeking compromise does not often work in the settlement of issues, hence, the oppressed result to the use of force in destroying religious, cultural, and other forms of shackles that imprisoned them. And, this is exactly what Malimouna has done.

There is also a non-violent protest against racism (*Rebelle*, p. 137). Malimouna's relationship with Philippe Blain, a French man hits the rock because of color difference. Keïta tries to correct the idea of treating women as doormats by removing the established double standard of sexual morality and equality in African society. For example, Frascetti (2001, p. 2) has affirmed:

Every woman's life was surrounded by a thick silence imposed upon her by the outer world and by the woman herself. It was considered unseemly for outsiders to praise a woman's virtues, for talents and abilities could find expression only within her home. No one but her closest relatives could know anything of her merits, and the members of her family were the only persons permitted to speak of her to others.

Society is divided along the line of gender; the male and the female. The male which comprises the men is adjudged to be the powerful, the oppressor, and the predator while the female connotes the weak, the oppressed, and the prey. The novelist seeks, among other things, a redress of the patriarchal power, which has crippled women from contributing to the progress of human society and the social well-being of men. Patrick Ilboudo's *Les vertiges du trône* has two social classes, namely, those in the corridors of power, and then, the masses, who are recklessly oppressed. Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle* like Mariama Bâ's *Une si longue lettre* has two social classes which are divided along gender lines. The male folk, who take the advantage of culture and religion to unduly oppress the womenfolk, stand for the powerful class, whereas the second social class is made up of the deprived, particularly the women.

From what one can observe, historic material possession is the baseline of these class demarcations and social stratifications, which eventually lead to frustration and social conflicts. “The conflicts, contradictions, and misfortunes of characters in the novel grow from and flourish in the manure of poverty, moral decadence, and greed” (Ekundayo and Ikediugwu, 2015, p. 136). Falola (2015, p. 81) has postulated:

A ‘cultural Africana’ is a cultural coup to reclaim Africa, a nationalization project, to have a platform to withstand devastating capitalist forces, and to end the commodification of Africa. Representation offers the affirmation of our citizenship and our position in the global network. Representation allows the humanities to distance itself from inefficient states and corrupt leadership, positioning us to create the crucial difference between scholars and governments. I have to demonstrate that the scholarship we generate connects with the aspirations of the majority of Africans, and are not subcultural ghettos aimed merely at climbing the ladder of privileges.

By and large, by documenting cultural practices, their norms, and values (where applicable) in literary compositions, it becomes easy and possible to transmit or reshape such customs and beliefs from one generation to another without distorting them. Information kept in black and white remains intact longer than the oral traditions and this has contributed to social transformation which any human society requires. Lamphere (2005, p. viii) has stressed the importance of culture by proposing that the knowledge of how culture works gives human beings greater control over their own future. She condemns the view that Western culture is the best; more evolved, and asserts that each culture must be seen as it sees itself. Abayomi (2000, p. 7) has suggested:

that the right leader should be chosen and not the rich leader. A leader that will lift us up, not the one that will eat us up. The ideal government demands us to raise men and women of courage to guide and guard us, for it is the human that makes a difference in the affairs of mankind.

Yes, every nation of the world needs a leader that will ensure development through human capacity building. However, the problematic aspect of Abayomi’s point of view is that good morals, which are a required factor of good governance, are a thing of the mind. It is evident in Africa that both leaders who were rich and those who were poor before they found themselves in elective positions could be power-drunk at very slight chances and become dictators. There are often reports of leaders who had no shoes while growing up but when they had the opportunity to rebuild their country, there were allegations of indiscipline and financial recklessness against their personalities. So, all that is needed is developing the right core value system.

African people must be influenced positively in their cultural terms to help them design and develop the kind of government they want. Besides employment creation, some aspects of African culture can bring the desired attitudinal change. Hence, the government needs to finance the development of culture, which can contribute meaningfully to socioeconomic development. Cultural enterprises must be patronized for social mobilization of the citizenry and other activities. Cultural industries, apart from economic values, will uplift people aesthetically and psychologically. Jain (2010, p. 89) is of the view that “in influencing people, some important aspects deal with attitude and attitude change, as well as with communication, alternatives, and outcomes...” It is imperative; therefore, that Africans must understand fully what has negatively happened to them culturally and sincerely provide solutions. If they must progress, there is a need to correctly manage their culture. Culture is about the people from one

generation to another. This view is what the two selected novelists intended by presenting cultural issues in their literary works to form a part of their narratives.

Undoubtedly, readership is sustained by the selected Francophone African writers through spectacular handling of their themes, motifs, plots, imagery, myths, characterization, and the use of dialogues in their artistic works. Issues of class society and social injustice such as cruel cultural practices as well as religious hypocrisy there-in motivated the selected Francophone African novelists to embark on their artistic creation. The socioeconomic struggle for survival is a serious issue that hunts human societies from one generation to another, and this is often reflected in literary works. As has been pointed out before, the narrative form adopted by different authors or even the same author can change from time to time. For example, what an author treats (subject matter), why he treats it when he treats it, and where and how he treats the subject can determine an author's narrative strategy.

5. Conclusion

In this study, Fatou Keïta's *Rebelle* and Patrick Ilboudo's *Les vertiges du trône* are investigated. Fatou Keïta is a female Francophone African writer while Patrick Ilboudo is a male. They are both contemporary writers of the postcolonial phase of African political history.

In sum, this study has argued that creative writers; novelists, poets, playwrights, and even essayists can use their narratives to capture the sociopolitical realities of their countries. Seeking good governance in Africa, the selected novelists, Keïta and Ilboudo, build their narratives around prevailing contemporary issues in the postcolonial African space. They agitate for fundamental human rights which will pave the way for sociopolitical consciousness and economic development. They raise the issue of culture and suggest cultural re-design and re-orientation for Africans to have a sense of direction. The two authors also advocate for women's liberation and empowerment, in a male-dominated Africa. To the writers, all these issues raised are the determinants for all forms of development and a tenet to reject any form of manipulation from oppressive governments.

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Note: The translations in this work are done by the authors.