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BALOGUN LEO IYANDA'S REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL REALITIES IN L'ENFER AU PAYS DES BLANCS

Par

Ugwumba Akudo Ogechi
jennielopez2002@yahoo.com
Nigeria French Language Village Ajara-Badagry

Abstract

Social realities such as immigration, racial discrimination, marriage, corruption, prostitution, slavery and unemployment are thematic preoccupations of Balogun's L'Enfer au pays des blancs. Previous studies on this novel have dwelt largely on the theme of immigration with less attention paid to the other social realities mentionned and how Balogun represents them in his works. This work therefore examines these social realities as represented by Balogun, with a view to depicting his outlook on these social realities and their effects on the illegal immigrant Africans in Europe. Postcolonial theory was adopted as framework to interrogate the Us-Other mentality of the colonisers and the colonised. Otherness, subalternityand stereotypes are concepts adopted to examine Balogun's representations of social realities in L'Enfer au pay des blancs.
The novel depicts the sufferings of African immigrants in Europe, especially those without proper documentation, who, he refers to as "des sans papier' (those without paper). These African immigrants are stereotyped as those perpetrating all the evils in Europe. They live like slaves and must always hide from the police to avoid repatriation. Balogun insists that one is better off living in one's country than living in another man's country. He also appeals to African leaders to help find an adequate solution to the problem of illegal migration.

Introduction

African literature means different things to different people. Some consider it a new world, a new genre with new messages while others regard it as a political document characterised by protest against colonialism's downgrading of the blacks. For some, it is simply an appendage to English and French literatures. However, African literature is didactic and instructive and it is also a documentary literature. George Joseph in his chapter on African literature in April Gordon (2012) insists that whereas European views of literature often stressed a separation of art and content, African awareness is inclusive. He goes ahead to state that literature can also simply mean an artistic use of words for the sake of art alone. According to him, traditionally, Africans do not radically separate art from teaching. Rather than write or sing for beauty in itself, African writers, taking their cue from

oral literature, use beauty to help communicate important truths and information to society. African writers are committed writers. They do not write just for the beauty of the work or for entertainment alone. They try to teach with their writings and also they use their works to denounce the bad things happening in the society.

Major themes in African literature include African culture, conflict of culture, religion, colonialism, modernism, slavery, injustice and the like. African literature can be divided into three distinct categories or eras namely; pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. Pre-colonial literature often takes the form of oral narratives that are sometimes accompanied by music. Colonial literature examines the horrors of slavery, revolt against colonisation and also draws inspiration from Africa's past. Post-colonial literature focuses on the clash between indigenous and colonial cultures and also expresses hope for Africa's future.

Most African literature is an expression of its country's social change. The writers are concerned about the past and present history of their country and this concern is reflected in their works. Chinua Achebe was an African writer whose works show the tragic consequences of Africa's encounter with Europe. Having examined the strains and stresses in Igbo society in the wake of colonialist's advance in *Things fall apart*and *Arrow of God*, he illustrated the problems facing the educated class in modern Nigeria in *No longer at ease*. In *A man of the people*, Achebe shows what Nigerians made of their country after the departure of the colonisers. The impact of colonisation was more severe in African countries than the other commonwealth countries. Most of the African writers such as SembeneOusmane, Wole Soyinka, Nadine Gardiner, Ferdinand Oyono, CamaraLaye, AyiKweiArmah and CyprienEkwensi all have powerfully presented the impact of colonialism and neo-colonialism to the downtrodden masses of their country in their works.

This study explores the social realities faced by African immigrants in Europe as recorded by Balogun Leo Iyanda in *L'Enfer aux pays des Blancs*. Balogun is a Nigerian francophone writer who tells stories relating to the day to day realities faced by Nigerians and Africans in general. *L'Enfer aux pays des Blancs*looks at the life of African immigrants living in Europe. These immigrants, especially the undocumented ones, go through a lot in order to survive. They do menial jobs and they are always on the run to avoid being captured by immigration officials. Some of them go to the extent of contracting fake marriages so that they can have their citizenship.

Some social realities such as immigration, racial discrimination, marriage, corruption, prostitution, slavery and unemployment are examined in this study. Other works on *L'Enfer aux pays des Blancs* have dwelt largely on the theme of immigration but less attention has been paid to the other social realities and Balogun's view on them. The aim of this study is therefore to look into these social realities as represented by Balogun with a view to depicting his thoughts on them and their effect on the illegal immigrants. The postcolonial theory is adopted as framework bearing in mind that the study centres on immigrants moving from a once colonised territory to the land of their former colonisers. This movement is also done during the post-colonial era.

Postcolonial theory

Postcolonialism is an academic tendency, which is also known as an era (post-colonial) or the postcolonial theory. This theory/era has existed since the mid of the 20th century. The postcolonial trend was invented as countries that were colonised gained their independence. Dobbie (2009) maintains that since post colonialism started, there is no total conformity about its tenets and objectives. In this instance, even the way it is written (post-colonialism versus postcolonialism) is debated. Some critics see post-colonialism as the era/period, whilepostcolonialism is the theory. Postcolonialism as a theorytakes care of a great array of topics;for instance, the configuration of the postcolonial debate, cultural amalgamation, racial discrimination and portrayal of the subaltern. They all are in one way or the other tied to the impact of colonisationon cultures and societies. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989) are the ones that employthe word"postcolonial", for the first time in their renowned study,*The Empire Writes Back.* The study deals generally with the cultural relationships in colonial societies. They posit that:

> *The term 'postcolonial' can be used to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonisation to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupation throughout the historical process initiated by European Western aggression. We also suggest that it ismost appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1989:2).*

This definition, which seems to be widely accepted by the West, has been criticised by many non-Western scholars such as NayantaraSaghal (2003) who decries a situation where the West defines concepts and ideas from other cultures in relation to Western concepts as if these societies, which

had all existed before the incursion of the Europeans into their cultural space, owed their existence to the Europeans. In a later work by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, theystate that:

> *Postcolonialism is now used in wide and diverse ways to include the study and analysis of European territorial conquest, the various institutions ofEuropean colonialisms, the discursive operations of the empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities. (1998: 187)*

Looking at their position on postcolonialism above, it could be inferred that postcolonialism does not cover just the post colonial era. According to them, it covers from the colonial era to post colonial era.

Postcolonialism also addresses clashes of identity and cultural assimilation. The colonial masters came into their colonies and wiped out major fractions of indigenous practice and culture.In addition, they incessantlysubstituted those indigenous cultures with theirs. This act of replacement of cultures frequently leadsto clashes, especially when countries gain independence and all of a sudden have to confront the challenge of having to build up a new national identity and poise. Most generations had relatively taken up the Western way of life just because they had lived under their power.These countries' challenge was to discover a distinctive method of proceeding to call their own. They were not able todo away with the Western culture instantly, neither were they able toproduce an entirelybrand new one.Alternatively, previous colonial authorities had to transform their self-appraisal. Decolonisation appears to be all about this inconsistent classification procedure, whereas postcolonialismis the scholarlypart that deals with it and upholds a stable analysis from both positions.

Goals of postcolonialism

Challenging the consequences of colonialism on cultures is the definitiveaim of postcolonialism. Making sure several voices are heard is a major goal of the postcolonial theorists. This is particularlyfactual of those voices that have been formerly put to silence by domineeringdogmas. It could be said thatpostcolonialism is a clear discussion about what went down

with the colonial thinking at the end of the colonial era. As John Mcleod (2000) asserts, the word "postcolonialism"does not mean the same thing as after colonialism. To him, after colonialism could imply that colonial worth is no longer to be considered. He states thatpostcolonialismacknowledges both historical continuity and change. Mcleod may be right because postcolonialism also has to do with the inheritance that came out of this period and the cultural, social and economic effects seen and which are also still presently visible.One in these circumstances scrutinisesirregular experiences of gender, dominance, resistance, migration and so on. The colonised together with the colonising sides are considered and related to one another.

Furthermore, postcolonialismaims to reconsider and to pull downweary and biased ways of thinking in a vivaciousdialogueof colonisation.These mind-sets could be characterised into three majorareas:

(i) The World with the *us-other* mentality (otherness), dehumanisation of colonised peoples (subalternity) and distorted world view (stereotyping).

(ii) Nation with value shifts, loss of identity and challenges to faith, language and politics.

(iii) Self with dehumanisation of self, inability to support/protect self/family and self-doubt.

The main focus of this study is to use postcolonialism as a theory with concepts such as otherness, subalternity and stereotypes to analyse a narrative by bringing out some representations of social realities faced by African immigrants in Europe.

Representations of social realities in *L'Enfer aux pays des blancs*

Social realities that were identified in the narrative include immigration, racial discrimination, corruption, marriage, prostitution, slavery and unemployment. These social realities are furthermore treated in details one after the other.

Immigration

Migration to Europe has been a social reality faced by Africansduring and after colonisation. After colonisation, migration to Europe became necessary due to the poor economic situation faced by Africans. Leaving one's home to go live in another country is usually a product of so many factors such as economic, political, personal, security and family. People from countries with poor economic situation tend to migrate to more economically stable countries in search of greener pastures. Balogun confirmsthis assertion: "L'Europe pour la plupart des citoyens des pays du tiers monde, c'est

le paradis: Il y a la belle vie, on mange toujours à sa faim, on travaille peu et on gagne beaucoup."(27).There are also people who migrate for personal and family reasons. Those who have their family members living in a foreign country may want to join them. People from war torn areas also migrate to safer countries to avoid being killed. There is also the involuntary migration: for this category, there are children who are born in a foreign country. These children do not choose to migrate to these foreign countries but involuntarily find themselves there because of their immigrant parents.

Balogun, in his work,portrays those Africanswho migrate legally and those who migrate illegally to Europe. Furthermore, he also presents those legal immigrants who, at the end of the day, turn themselves to illegal immigrants. In *L'Enfer aux pays des Blancs*,Balogun presents John who travels to Europe on scholarship to further his education but ends up abandoning his studies just to stay doing menial jobs. Balogun opines: "Celui-ci ayant renoncé aux études, a finalement choisi de mener une vie de clandestinité afin d'assurer sa survie dans un milieu qu'il maitrise peu."(p.7) (This one here, having renounced his studies, finally chose to live a hideous life in order to survive in a place he knows little about). John represents Africans who go to Europe legally, and for good reasons too, but end up following the footsteps of their illegal immigrant brothers just to make fast money. Balogun also presents those who, from the start, travel illegally to these European countries. He confirms: "Il prend la route de l'Afrique du Nord, plus précisément la Libye. Là, il trouve un passeur avec qui il négocie pour la traversée de la Méditerranée en direction de l'Italie" (28).These types of immigrants mentioned above do not care about what happens to them during the journey. All they have in mind is the "good"life that they are supposedly going to live in Europe. Nevertheless, on getting to Europe, what they have in mind will be the opposite of what they get, starting from racial discrimination.

Racial discrimination

According to the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*, racial discrimination refers to discrimination against individuals on the basis of their race. It occurs when a person is treated less favourably or not given the same opportunities as others in a similar situation because of their race, the country where they were born, their ethnic origin or their skin colour. The Europeans came to Africa for colonisation during which they saw themselves as superior beings, while the Africans, to them, are

the inferior ones. Even after colonisation, they still see Africans as inferior beings. Balogun, in his novel,tells the story of Cornélius, a white man who does not discriminate against the Blacks like his fellow Whites. He writes: "Cornélius est un homme exceptionnel. Le mot discrimination n'existe point dans son dictionnaire ... " (15). Contrary to Cornélius, his family discriminates a lot against the Blacks, they do not understand why Cornélius should be friends with them:

> *Par curiosité la famille voulait savoir les raisons pour lesquelles Cornélius tient toujours de relations étroites avec les Noirs ... Ils sont entourés de plusieurs maux, ces gens-là. La majorité est porteuse du virus SIDA. Ils sont des voleurs et des trafiquants de drogue, ces Noirs(16-17).*

From the foregoing, Cornélius' family had already stereotyped Blacks. To them, every Black is a thief, a drug pusher and also has the AIDS virus. They believe that nothing good can come out of the Blacks. This idea of stereotyping the Blacks as "evil" is not only applicable to Cornélius' family but to the Europeans in general. Balogun opines:

> *Pour nous ici, tous les vices de ce monde sont attachés aux immigrés noirs: le cambriolage, la vente et l'utilisation de la drogue, la fraude, le transfert illicite de l'argent, la prostitution, l'infidélité, ... Beaucoup de mes compatriotes ont peur de s'approcher de vous et croient qu'en vous acceptant, leur intérêt est mis en jeux. C'est pour cette raison donc qu'ils essayent de vous éviter par tous les moyens (25-26).*

Cornélius here tries to explain to Vicky and John, two of the illegal immigrants, why his people discriminate against the Blacks. To his people, the Europeans, every evil is being perpetrated by the Blacks and because of that, they, the Europeans find it difficult to trust any Black.

Balogun also insists in his novel that the Whites had refused to chase after the real culprits, those perpetuating evil but instead, they are concerned with making life miserable for the Blacks, especially the illegal immigrants who they see as subalterns. He opines:

> *C'est pire; la discrimination totale. On lit des fois la haine sur le visage des gens. Regardez un peu chez les frères De Gaules, on parle toujours des "sans papiers" pour molester des centaines d'immigrants. La police ne chasse plus ceux qui sèment la terreur dans la société mais au contraire il suffit d'être immigrant pour que ce sort que nous considérons comme étant barbare et criminel retombe sur vous ... On note également les frères de Hitler qui son en tête de liste ... La xénophobie règne à tout instant dans leur tête (22).*

"Les frères De Gaules"aboverefers to the French, Charles De Gaules being the first president of the 5th Republic in France while"Les frères Hitler" are the Germans. Balogun uses two European countries to represent racial discrimination as the order of the day for our colonial masters even after colonisation. Once one is Black, the person is automatically taken for a criminal, especially when the person is an illegal immigrant. They even go to the extent of killing Blacks without any just reason. This racial discrimination by the Whites leads to loss of freedom for the illegal immigrants and even for legal black immigrants. They tend to live like slaves in these foreign countries.

Slavery/Loss of freedom

> La majorité des Africains en situation irrégulière en Europe ont tous perdu leur liberté: la liberté au travail, à la résidence temporaire ou permanente, même à faire les cent pas dans la ville, à recevoir les soins médicaux dans les hôpitaux, etc ... (24).

Balogunin the above citation expresses concern on how majority of Africans who are illegal immigrants in Europe lose their freedom. They lose the freedom to work, freedom to receive medical care and also freedom to move freely around the city. These illegal African immigrants enslave themselves by deciding to live in a foreign country illegally.

Furthermore, these illegal immigrants are always on the run and even when they are at home, they are afraid that immigration officers will capture and deport them. This iswhat Balogun has to say:

> *Il est de coutume chez les frères africains que pour se visiter, il faut toujours sonner trois fois à la porte. Ceci tout juste pour éviter de recevoir des "visiteurs non désirés" ... Lorsque la sonnerie ne résonne qu'une seule fois, on pense immédiatement à la police ou bien à un autochtone qui n'est pas accoutumé à notre façon de vivre ... Il faut aussi faire attention,; soit ne pas ouvrir la porte ou bien ouvrir et s'attendre aux conséquences éventuelles ... Il est fort probable qu'on reçoive un jour votre message que vous êtes déjà rapatriés.(41-42)*

Balogun explains that the illegal African immigrants in Europe have a way of identifying a visitor when he/she knocks. If the person knocks three times, they will know that it is one of them but if the visitor knocks once, it means that it is either the police or an African who is new in Europe and has not mastered the technique of knocking three times on the door. In the case of someone knocking once on the door, the illegal African immigrants do not open the door for fear of being deported by the authorities. This is a good example of loss of freedom.

Moreover, these illegal immigrants go to the extent of renting other peoples passport so that they can work, Balogun writes:

> *Il est fort probable de louer un kpali ... Dès que vous commencez à l'utiliser au travail, vous devez complètement oublier votre vrai nom ... La rémunération de votre travail est faite directement dans le compte du propriétaire du document falsifié. Mon frère c'est ce que nous vivons ici au quotidien, un esclavage de type moderne; un vrai enfer au pays des Blancs.(37)*

When they rent documents and use them to work, their salaries are paid into the account of the real owners of the documents, who in turn, give them whatever they agreed upon. This means that they have in one way or the other enslaved themselves as whatever they take home will be determined by the true owners of the documents they are using to work. The lack of freedom experienced by the illegal Blacks in Europe leads them to unemployment, and that is why they need to rent other people's documents in order to work.

Unemployment

Unemployment is one of the social realities explored by Balogun in his narrative. It is one of the major reasons why people migrate to other countries. Kola in the narrative could not get a job in his country after his studies, that was why he decided to travel abroad but was lucky enough to be discouraged by the story told to him by one of the elders about John. What these young Africans who insist on traveling abroad do not know is that unemployment is also over there, especially when one is an illegal immigrant. Balogun opines:

> *Il était préoccupé depuis quelques jours à rechercher une situation favorable pour son frère. Mais, ce n'était toujours pas facile. John n'avait jamais cru que trouver du travail dans les pays occidentaux serait aussi problématique que cela lui paraissait. (35)*

This is Vicky, who has been living abroad for more than ten years trying to see if he can help his brother, John, who just arrived get a job. John, on the other side, cannot imagine that getting a job abroad will be so difficult since he always thought that Europe is the land of milk and honey, a place where one can easily make money and live like a king. He never knew that unemployment also exists in Europe.

In addition, this lack of job leads most of the illegal immigrants into prostitution. Those that do not want to end up as prostitutes go to the extent of contracting fake marriages, so that they can regularise their stay and become citizens by marriage.

Prostitution/Counterfeitmarriage

> *Elles sont déjà fanées, ces fleurs. Pourtant ce sont nos sœurs, ces filles-là qui ont quitté père et mère, l'Afrique dans le souci d'arriver en Europe travailler pour se faire de l'argent mais qui sont finalement contraintes à vendre leurs corps pour des besoins financiers.(50)*

Balogunpresents those ladies who leave their parents and their country and travel to Europe for greener pastures. These ladies believe that on getting to Europe, they will get good jobs and make a lot of money. Unfortunately for them, things do not turn out the way they envisaged and they end up prostituting themselves.

However, there are also some ladies who were deceived into prostitution in Europe:

> *Laisse-moi te dire qu'il y a un réseau pour ce fléau dans certains des pays africains dont les gens sont spécialisés à ramener de l'Afrique des jeunes filles rien que pour la prostitution ... ils promettent aux jeunes filles des travaux lucratifs et de bonnes situations de vie dans des pays européens. (50-51)*

Balogun denotes those people who traffic ladies to Europe in order to use them as prostitutes. They promise the ladies good jobs and good living conditions but when they get to Europe, they turn them into prostitutes. The worst part is that the money made by these ladies goes to the sponsors who brought them to Europe. They only give the ladies accommodation and food while they use them to enrich themselves.

What's more, men who decide to contract a fake marriage just to legalize their stay are also represented: "Pour lui, seul le mariage avec une native (quelquesoit son âge) pourrasauver la situation" (46). When the going gets tougher, the only way out is to marry a native, no matter her age. These men, looking for a native to marry, have their legal wives left in Africa. They do not marry for love but for papers that is why the marriage is counterfeit. Most of them pay the ladies heavily in order to marry them, while some deceive the ladies into marrying them. They make them believe that they love them and that they do not have another woman apart from them. This is the

case of John who already has a wife in Africa but decide to lie to the European lady. He told her that he was not married but she later found out the truth and the whole fake marriage collapsed.

Conclusion

BalogunLéonIyanda is a Nigerian francophone writer. His novel,*L'Enfer au pays des Blancs*, showcases some social realities faced by African immigrants in Europe. These social realities such as loss of freedom/slavery, unemployment, prostitution/counterfeit marriage and racial discrimination only show the *Us-Other* mentality of the colonisers and the colonised. They also demonstrate how Africans have been stereotyped and seen as subalterns by the colonisers. Apart from Ethiopia that was never colonised and Liberia that was colonised by America, all African countries were colonised by European countries such as France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Yet, after independence, these Europeans still believe that they are superior to Africans. Balogun lays a lot of emphasis on the illegal immigrants in Europe. He presents their condition in Europe, the way they are being maltreated and seen as the ones who perpetrate all the evils in Europe. Balogun is one of the post colonial writers who condemn the *Us-Other* mentality of the Whites. He stresses the fact that the way these illegal African immigrants in Europe are treated is not good but he also accepts the fact that going to another country illegally or staying there without proper documentation is equally not good. He finally advises Africans to stay and develop their countries instead of going to a place where they will be treated like slaves, just like during the colonial era.

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