

Mapping Models of Mutual Coexistence in African Literature

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Abstract— *Moving from the premise that African literature can introduce the reader to and inform him or her about the changing world of coexistence on the continent and elsewhere, this paper employs sample texts from contemporary African literature to explore the varying perspectives from which African writers represent changing historical phases of mutual coexistence on the continent in their works. It aims at showing how the literature reveals more about the "customs, conflicts, stresses, changes and transformations" (Ngugi 1997, p. 4) that accompany social movements and evolution over time. My paper argues that the African continent's historical encounter with the western world has primarily, at least in the literature I examine here, informed and transformed the ways in which people perceive and relate with each other in society. I use Ato Quayson's reading practice dubbed "Calibrations" in my analysis.*

Keywords— *Subsistence, Coexistence, Transformations, Relationships, Unison.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, questions of mutual coexistence have increasingly been brought to the world stage by globalisation and a complex international political system that have accentuated the realities of conflict, violence, and combat. Such questions, germane to the social science disciplines, have caught the attention of literature which has debated the subject from a variety of interesting perspectives. Primarily, literature deals with humans in society, exploring how they live and relate with one another in their daily subsistence and conduct of affairs. These interactive processes lay the groundwork for the formation of social collectives organically linked on the basis of defined shared relations. As x-rayed in Pozo (2004), Ngugi wa Thiong'o notes that the literary artist is chiefly interested in human relationships and their quality, which do not "occur in a vacuum [but] develop in the context of ecology, economics, politics, culture and psyche" (p. 5). Ngugi (1997)'s comments on the rapport between art and human society positions literature as the conscious acts of men and women in society. Literature is thus carved out as a product of human intellect and imagination fixed towards social relations as can be visualised from his words: "the very act of writing even at the level of the individual implies social relationship: one is writing about somebody for somebody" (p. 4).

From another perspective, literature's social character endows mutual coexistence with the capacity to "reflect deeply on the nature of being" (Diamond, 1989, p. 435). For Ojaide & Obi (2002), social issues and the way people relate are the subject of literature, whether in drama, fiction or poetry. "How individuals react; man and woman in love; friendship; the individual and the larger society; human relationships, in short, are the sine qua non of literature" (p. 5). The views of these writers and critics establish literature's groundedness in society, while also underscoring its capacity to reflect that society and also to reflect on it. This resonates with my premise, in this paper, that African literature, in its various iterations, can serve as an effective tool in interrogating paradigms of mutual coexistence on the continent and beyond. As it were, the literature has, over the years, represented, commented on, and even proposed models of living together in society at the familial, tribal, national and transnational levels.

Moving then from the understanding that African literature can introduce the reader to and inform him or her about the changing world of coexistence on the continent and elsewhere, this paper employs sample texts from contemporary African literature to explore the varying perspectives from which African writers represent and debate varying historical phases of mutual

coexistence on the continent in their oeuvre. It aims at showing how the literature reveals more about the "customs, conflicts, stresses, changes and transformations" (Ngugi 1997, p. 4) that accompany social movements and evolution over time. This resonates with Saudi Arabian novelist Mohamed Hasan Alwan's views that "only fiction can pick up what history has ignored" (in Koeble 2017). My paper argues that the African continent's historical encounter with the western world has primarily, at least in the literature I examine here, informed and transformed the ways in which people perceive and relate with each other in society. I use Ato Quayson's reading practice dubbed "Calibrations" in my analysis.

"Calibrations" is a flexible interpretive practice that operates at the confluence between art, aesthetics and the social. It reads literature and what lies beyond "as a way of understanding structures of transformation, process and contradiction that inform both literature and society" (Quayson 2003, p. xi). This simply implies exploring the literary/aesthetic domain in a bid to shed light on larger social processes. As underscored above, the ways in which African peoples have lived and continued to live together, both on the continent and elsewhere, have undergone palpable and life-changing transformations that have been registered in literature. This offers the literary critic an interesting and effective paradigm through which to come to terms with such larger social processes. As a dialectical mode of inquiry that marries such disciplines as psychoanalysis, Marxism and politics, "Calibrations" brings to the fore "the two poles [literary and social] as containing within themselves interrelating segments that are themselves in a dialectical relationship to various other sub segments in the other pole(s)" (Quayson 2003, p. xxxii). From this, one can deduce that Quayson's analytical premise serves as an appropriate tool in investigating the varying, but interesting ways in which African literature intersects and comments on the models of living together that have characterised the continent in its historical evolution; the theory's shortcomings notwithstanding (Bahri 2005 & Adéèko 2005).

Durosimi (1980) observes that "oral epics, folk stories and folk songs have led researchers into the truth of the African continent's past" (p. 1), revealing how people have mutually co-existed for more than two million years, "wrestling with [the] environment to make it yield the means of life, food, clothes, shelter" (Ngugi 1997, p. 4). While these observations continue to buttress my view that literature can be useful in mirroring social life on the continent, I hasten to add that in this paper, I will be examining issues of coexistence informed by the history of Africa's encounter with Europe which, for expository purposes, have been sectioned into the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial phases. The reasons informing my choice are not far-fetched: firstly, I am exploring written literature which is an offshoot of this encounter. (I am aware of the fact that African peoples interacted with one another on the continent before having contact with the outside world. I am equally abreast with the continent's sustained contact with the Arab world before the period I refer to. This invariably informed and affected the way African peoples lived together). Secondly, the magnitude of the outcome of this encounter and its ensuing historical implications has informed and continues to inform creative writing from the continent. For purposes of critical exegesis, I would also like to indicate that the models of living together will be examined invariably from the point of view of the family, tribe and nation. The intersection between these forms of coexistence, from a literary perspective, is obvious when one considers how, from a metaphorical perspective, the literal family of blood relations can validly represent the tribe and/or the nation. I begin my analysis with the traditional model often associated with the African continent before the advent of colonialism.

II. MAPPING TRADITIONAL MODELS OF COEXISTENCE: LITERATURE AS RECOVERY

Written African literature began as a project of reconstructing the past in a response to a colonial discourse that sought to undermine the African way of life. While such a project, with regard to questions of coexistence, could be highly ambiguous given the dynamic nature of culture, suffice it to say it was a necessary phase in the counter-discursive framework of African writing. Seminal works such as Achebe (1958), Amadi (1966), Nwapa (1966), Rotimi (1971), Laye (1966) and Diop (1996) represent how African communities coexisted in a traditional setting before contact with the west.

Living together in the traditional African community was informed by the awareness that an individual in the community was not "an isolated ego, but... an entity whose being and survival is consequent upon its union with other human beings within an identified locality" (Ogbujah 2014, p. 209). G.D. Killam notes that in this space "the general accord about the politics and prescriptions of life and living are agreed upon" by all and sundry (1977, p. 83). This is the picture one has when reading works like Achebe (1958), Laye (1966) and Diop (1996). In Achebe (1958) for instance, the author presents a prototype of this kind of society built on traditional values and an ethics of community. Set in an imagined traditional Ibo community, namely, Umuofia, before the advent of the colonial powers, the novel presents a society with its own manifest way of life largely defined by a communal ethos. In this space, the clan acts as one. Specific laws and customs guide the behaviour of members while integrating a traditional religion which undergirds the governance ethic of the community. All members of the community are expected to learn and understand the ramifications of the societal set up given that their lives, as individuals and as part of the

community, are conducted by this ethic. Interestingly, it is a social system that is equally tested and stabilised by what Carroll (1980) calls "the questioning, modification, and adaptation which are part of the Igbo way of life" (p. 39). All this is for the good of the clan which takes precedence over the individual. For instance, when Okonkwo, a representative figure of this society, inadvertently kills a clansman, he is banished from the land and his property is destroyed in a bid to spare the clan the wrath of Ani, the earth goddess. The novelist's use of the proverb "if one finger brought oil it soiled the others" (Carroll 1980, p. 80) appropriately underlines this perspective of things in the novel. Furthermore, when situations of conflict arise, a capable traditional justice system exists not only to address such deviant behaviour but also to intervene in matters of conflict resolution, veritable challenges to mutual coexistence in society. The novelist presents this system in action through episodes where the justice system swings into action and restores peace between feuding parties at the domestic and inter-tribal levels. The conflict with the neighbouring village of Mbaino, the resolution of the matrimonial conflict between Mgbagfo and her husband Uzowulu by the Egwugwu (the spirits of the ancestors), all underline the workings of the communal model in the novel.

At another level, communal sharing, otherwise known as solidarity, is presented as one of the major characteristics of the traditional model of living together. This quality, in the highly developed sense of community, is a necessity and not a social virtue. It is indispensable for the individual's and the community's survival. That may be why the South African Steve Biko (1987) acknowledges that while growing up it was never considered repugnant to ask one's neighbours for help if one were struggling. In *The African Child* (1954), Camara Laye emphasizes this perspective through his depiction of the rice harvesting episode. In the narrative, the novelist's autobiographical strains, in their realistic ethos, become the weapon with which to make forays into a coherent traditional and communal context where varying aspects of sharing at all levels are described. Through vivid description reinforced by lyricism and apt diction, the reader is given a succinct picture of a community at work:

Our husbandmen were singing in chorus and reaping in unison; their voices and their gestures were all harmonious and in harmony; they were one! - united by the same task, united by the same song. They were bound to one another, united by the same soul: each and every one was tasting the delight, savouring the common pleasure of accomplishing a common task (Laye 1954, p. 51).

The use of words and phrases as well as parallelisms that denote collectiveness and oneness such as "unison," "harmony," "they were one," "united by the same task" and "united by the same song," dramatizes the communal ethos of the traditional model of living together, which, in the words of Palmer (1968), reinforces "the impression of a society which is stable and orderly because it clings to tradition, the wisdom of the ancients and the worship of the gods" (p. 57).

It is the stability and order captured in the preceding lines by Palmer that David Diop's poem "Loser of Everything" draws attention to. Through the technique of contrast, the poet focuses on how African families lived together before the coming of the white man. This two-stanza poem juxtaposes two models of living together for the African, before and after the advent of colonialism. The poetic vision is aimed at highlighting the destructive ethos of colonialism and to do this, the poet presents traditional African society in romantic overtones in stanza one as counterpoint:

The sun used to laugh in my hut
And my women were lovely and lissome
Like palms in the evening breeze
My children would glide over the mighty river
And my canoes would battle with crocodiles
The motherly moon accompanied our dances
The heavy frantic rhythm of the tomtom,
Tomtom of joy, tomtom of carefree life
Amid the fires of liberty (Diop 1996, p. 40)

Through techniques of personification, metaphor, alliteration, and the adoption of the continent as the speaking voice in the lines above, the poet succeeds in conveying the image of a community where people are one with their natural environment; a community, to borrow the words of G.D. Killam (1977), with "its own humane needs and values and dignity" (p. 84). These examples, by no means exhaustive, give one glimpses of the traditional model of co-existence in pre-colonial Africa. While some writers like Laye and Diop seem to romanticize such a model while glossing over its barbarities, others like Achebe give realistic accounts, bringing out some of the aspects that were the bane of the model, and which ironically made it vulnerable to external influence. Yet what stands out in these fictional representations is the society's capacity to seek answers within the

parameters of its own model to conflicts within and without the clan (witness the resolution of the conflict between Umuofia and Mbaino in Achebe (1958)).

One can safely conclude that the project of re-imagining the traditional model of coexistence in these texts, as in most of the literature set in the pre-colonial period, is not only crucial in rehabilitating the cultural past especially as it still forms a part of the present (Obiechina 1968, p. 33), but also in eliciting a renewed dialogue about its significance in today's contemporary scene, bedeviled by inter-communal conflicts, wars, religious, and ethnic bigotry.

III. "OF TWO WORLDS": REPRESENTING COLONIAL SPACES

The extent to which colonialism forever altered the social, cultural, political, and religious way of life of the African has been documented by historians, sociologists, and anthropologists alike. Edem Kodjo, for one, notes that as a result of colonialism, the African was "torn away from his past, propelled into a universe fashioned from outside that suppresses his values [leaving] him dumbfounded by a cultural invasion that marginalize[d] him" (as cited in Motseko 2012, p. xx). This was simply so because colonial ideology, as Ngugi (1969) explicates, was hinged on a consideration of the "native" as "a clean slate on which anything could be scribbled. He was subjected to a constant barrage of hints that western culture [was] all in all" (pp. 56-57). Such a perspective was bound to engender the kinds of upheavals and conflicts that came to dominate African communities upon the wake of colonialism.

Seminal texts of the colonial period such as Achebe (1958), Achebe (1960), Achebe (1964) and Ngugi (1965) explore the extent to which the colonial contact affected the relationships among Africans themselves and then with the white man. As a mode of being, colonialism, as already noted in the preceding paragraph, brought about a marked alteration in the ways in which pre-colonial communities co-existed. It called more or less for a replacement of traditional forms. Baker et al. (1995) note, in this regard, that "colonialism breaks things.... The self of the colonizer explodes a native cultural solidarity, producing the spiritual confusion, psychic wounding, and economic exploitation of a new and dominated other" (p. 1047). The outcome, as some of my texts emphasize, was nothing but inevitable conflict. Generally, cast in the protest mode, the texts set within this period decry the destruction of the traditional modes of existence while delineating how characters seek to resist the inexorable transformation and subjugation of their way of life by the colonial Eurocentric perspective. In the first place, the works present hitherto united and harmonious communities trying to come to terms with the colonial model of coexistence determined by what Mudimbe (1988) calls the "domination of physical space, the reformation of natives' minds and the integration of local economies and histories into the Western perspective" (p. 2). The initial response to such efforts at forceful transformation and subjugation is usually resistance on the part of those whose way of life is threatened by external forces. The presence of a marauding culture, as I have noted earlier, is an invitation to conflict. One finds this in the second and third parts of Achebe (1958). These portions of the novel chronicle the changes that occur in Umuofia during Okonkwo's exile to Mbanta, his maternal clan, as well as his reactions to them upon his return. The protagonist's absence has witnessed the advent of the missionaries, their establishment of a church and a government with courts, judges, and court messengers. As the conflict between the colonial and traditional forces in Umuofia heightens upon Okonkwo's return, the latter seeks to rouse his people to resist the encroachment of the white man. Unfortunately, his resistance call is not heeded by the people who fail to stand together as one with him. This leads to his suicide. The hero's demise at the end of the novel has been read both as a contrast between the European and Igbo ways of life as well as Achebe's indictment of colonialism's destruction of the traditional way of life. A close reading of his next two novels, Achebe (1960) and Achebe (1964), reveals that his preoccupation with colonialism's complex impact on indigenous modes of life is equally underscored.

In Achebe (1960), the story of Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of Achebe (1958)'s protagonist Okonkwo, serves to highlight the conflict of cultures between Europe and Africa, as well as the outcome, for the hero, in the traditional-cum-modern society that is colonial Nigeria. In the novel, Obi's dilemma arises from the fact that being a child of two worlds (an Igbo man who has studied in England and is expected in the colonial context to adhere to tradition) engenders in him what Catherine L. Innes calls the lack of "any deeply felt moral convictions" (1986, p. 701). The result is that Obi, an agent working with the colonial government, runs into debts, takes bribes and is caught and condemned by the colonial legal system. What strikes one in the novel are the varying perspectives from which the hero's tragedy is perceived by both cultures in which he moves and operates. For the colonial powers, this is simply a confirmation of the corrupt nature of Africans, while for his Igbo kinsmen, it is their son's failure to appropriate the white man's skills that leads to his unmasking. In such diverse response is a message with regard to questions of coexistence, namely that conflicting cultural spaces extract the fundamental aspects of each culture in the ferment, leaving the individual (caught in its wake) in a dilemma with no moral bearings; bearings necessary for a holistic perspective of life in society. If traditional communities succeeded more or less to inculcate this ethic among the people, it is

not the case in the cacophony of the colonial space, characterized by contrasting and conflicting cultures. Narrative voice and tone aptly delineate such outcomes. Catherine Innes says, in this regard, that "the tone and narrative voice of the novel is correspondingly flat and uncommitted, a detached voice which owes allegiance to no community" (1986, p. 703).

Achebe (1964), like Ngugi (1965), both interrogates and proposes ways in which the African can begin to broach the issue of living together with one another and with the colonialist in society. In Achebe's novel, *Ezeulu*, the chief priest of the clan god Ulu, seems to embody Achebe's vision of how to coexist in the new dispensation. This vision is informed by the urgency to assess the new culture, learn to live with it and probably find something worthwhile in it that will enhance mutual coexistence. Confronted with the reality of a new way of life brought about by colonialism, therefore, *Ezeulu*, even if from an egocentric perspective, sees the need to recognize European culture, dialogue with it and get what can be of benefit in it. He therefore sends his son, Oduche, to the white man's school, on the strength of the argument that "the world is like a mask dancing, if you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying had we known tomorrow" (Achebe 1964, p. 46). The proverb is apt in underlining the dynamic nature of culture; a dynamism informed by the understanding that change is in the very nature of things, and it is in the interest of anyone involved to adapt to it in order to co-exist with the other. It is important to stress that in as much as *Ezeulu* has this perspective, it can be read from his later reactions in the novel (note his refusal to become a warrant chief) that, while it is important to accept to mutually coexist with others, this ought to be informed by considerations of equality and human dignity.

Ngugi (1965), in line with Achebe (1964), underlines the hassles of living in the colonial space where the different aspects that held traditional society are challenged by colonial culture especially in the sphere of religion. In the novel, the reader is not lost to the unity in division symbolism that is the river Honia flowing between the Christian Makuyu and the traditional Kameno:

The two ridges lay side by side. One was Kameno and the other was Makuyu. Between them was a valley. It was called the valley of life.... A river flowed through the valley of life.... The river was called Honia, which meant cure, or bring-back-to-life.... Honia was the soul of Kameno and Makuyu. It joined them. And men, cattle, wild beasts and trees, were all united by this life-stream (Ngugi 1965, p. 1).

However, as a result of the Christianization of Makuyu, tribal antagonism holds sway between the two ridges as both struggle to gain control over the other. In this context, Chege, upholder of the tribal law of Kameno, perceives the need to have knowledge of the ways of the white man. He sends his son, Waiyaki, to the colonial school with the advice that the latter should "learn all the wisdom and all the secrets of the white man. But do not follow his vices" (Ngugi 1965, p. 137). Waiyaki, the hero of the novel, on his part, believes that by virtue of his grasp of both the traditional and colonial cultures, he can re-unite the feuding Gikuyu tribes of Makuyu and Kameno; feuding brought about by the encroachment of colonial culture into a hitherto united people, but this is without counting on the tribal allegiances and jealousies exacerbated by the colonial contact.

The conclusion here is that faced with new modes of existence that challenge existing ones, holding unto one's position and refusing to examine the new mode may prove fatal, given the culture's dynamic quality. While Achebe (1958) x-rays the above behaviour through *Okonkwo*, Ngugi (1965) does the same through some of the inhabitants of Kameno in them saying, "we are not going to change. We are not going to listen to anything. This is what we believe, and you must take your religion wherever you want to. Take your philosophies wherever you want. We have our own philosophies" (Ngugi 1965, p. 75). Interestingly, those like *Ezeulu* and Waiyaki who seek to come to grips with, access, and incorporate the new models into traditional ones in order to build viable communities, also come to a tragic end. Does this presuppose that this model too is problematic? Far from it! Rather, it simply underscores the complexities fraught with the dialogue between cultures; complexities that need to be addressed for harmonious coexistence. Some of the issues at stake, as one has observed in the case of *Ezeulu*, are the vital subjects of equality and dignity of the person. The writers seem to be suggesting that for people to coexist mutually there is the need to look at the other culture from a position of parity and respect. But what happens after the colonial powers have officially handed over power to Africans themselves? How do the people live together with each other in the matrix of the legacies of colonialism? The next portion of my essay maps postcolonial Africa and the different ways in which people coexist in this context.

IV. REPRESENTING POSTCOLONIAL MODELS OF COEXISTENCE

In the study of African nationalism, it has been observed that state formation was basically a fraught exercise as the colonial powers brought together groups of people who never had a history of living together while, in some cases, divided people who had hitherto lived together. This posed a huge problem for nation building as leaders had to look for the appropriate model to

bring together often disparate groups of persons, who now found themselves obliged, by the force of history, to mutually coexist. This situation was further complicated by the rising streak of individual acquisitiveness and materialism which were hallmarks of the colonial legacy. These have so defined the African postcolonial space that Ake (2003) calls the period an "age of militant materialism" (p. 13). This explains why after independence, the expectations of the masses were hardly met by the new elite who saw the state as a conglomeration of offices and resources to be exploited for personal gain. It was no surprise then that the basic promise of freedom, a better standard of living, and the endless possibilities of progress never materialized for the citizenry. Instead, the post-independent leadership, as I have noted, gravitated towards the state to achieve personal, economic, and social power often to the detriment of the masses. This situation challenged the vestiges of communal life on the continent. African writers decry this situation where co-existence is defined by class, gender, and other factors. Ngugi says to this effect that "wherever there are classes of people in society, there will always be conflicts in the world outlooks of the various social groups" (in Pozo 2004). The coups and counter coups, inter-ethnic rivalries and all kinds of conflict that challenge co-existence among people in the postcolonial space is informed by this state of things. The literary works Armah (1968), Butake (2005a) and (2005b), Ngome (1992), and Mpe (2001), for example, map how politics, issues of class and neo-colonial legacies intersect coexistence in the postcolony.

In Armah's novel *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), the hero, the Man, who refuses to join the rest of the elite in the frenetic search for wealth, for example, reminisces on how his erstwhile classmate, Minister Koomson, has grown rich through corruption and now lives in the residential areas of Accra while he lives in the suburbs. Koomson no longer feels comfortable in the Man's presence and only comes to him if he (Koomson) wants to use the former for his selfish purposes. The suffering of the masses is at the basis of the coup at the end of the novel (even if the soldiers who take over power are as corrupt as the regime that has been overthrown). It is important to note how Minister Koomson returns to the Man's home upon escaping from the coup plotters. Thanks to the man's efforts, he is able to escape by sea to a neighboring country. This once more accentuates the exploitation of the lower classes in society by those in positions of power in the post-independence space; an issue handled by Henry Barlow in his poem "Building the Nation," which I quote at length:

Today I did my share
In building the nation.
I drove a Permanent Secretary
To an important, urgent function
In fact, to a luncheon at the Vic.

The menu reflected its importance
Cold bell beer with small talk,
Then fried chicken with niceties
Wine to fill the hollowness of the laughs
Ice-cream to cover the stereotype jokes
Coffee to keep the PS awake on the return journey.

I drove the Permanent Secretary back.
He yawned many times in back of the car
Then to keep awake, he suddenly asked,
Did you have any lunch friend?
I replied looking straight ahead
And secretly smiling at his belated concern
That I had not, but was slimming!
Upon which he said with a seriousness
That amused more than annoyed me,
Mwananchi, I too had none!
I attended to matters of state.
Highly delicate diplomatic duties you know,
And friend, it goes against my grain,
Causes me stomach ulcers and wind.
Ah, he continued, yawning again,

The pains we suffer in building the nation!

So the PS had ulcers too!
My ulcers I think are equally painful
Only they are caused by hunger,
Not sumptuous lunches!

So two nation builders
Arrived home this evening
With terrible stomach pains
The result of building the nation –
Different ways (Barlow 2000, p. 11)

This poem of five stanzas of unequal length draws on the binaries characteristic of the postcolonial space to make comments on how classicism defines and informs the ethics of mutual coexistence. As its title suggests, one is in the realm of nation-building; a realm that demands the full and genuine co-operation of all members of the nation. It stands to reason that such co-operation will ensure a shared livelihood anchored in the equitable distribution of tasks and profits. This, however, is not the case in the poem. Here, we have someone from the ruling class, namely, the Permanent Secretary, and someone from the lower classes, his driver, who both engage in the task of building the nation, each at his own level. Through irony, metaphor and humour, the poet aptly underlines how, in feeding fat on the nation's wealth while his driver goes hungry, the PS is the one of the two who has reneged on his duties as far as these issues are concerned. What is important to note is that the downtrodden are not unaware of the situation as the poetic persona subtly indicates that at the appropriate time, they will revolt against their oppressors. The poet's vision is social, informed by the ethics of traditional society, based on the need to ensure that all classes of society mutually benefit from the national wealth. The reader may, from this poem written in the 1970s, better understand the turbulent history of Uganda and other countries on the continent; turbulence that has largely been anchored in discourses of resource distribution, crucial in the dynamics of mutual coexistence.

As Achille Mbembe describes in Hoeller (2005), contexts where tribalism and ethnicity hold sway and determine how people live together in a multicultural context are "timespace characterized by proliferation and multiplicity...an era of dispersed entanglements, the unity of which is produced out of diversity" (p. 35). Butake (2005a) too highlights the shortcomings of a strict tribal model in a modern context by showing how Bobe Ngong, father of the hero of the play *Fointam Ngong*, has to review his position on his son marrying outside the tribe because he has come to realize that "marriage is not a question of tribe but rather character and love [and] that we cannot build this nation on tribalism and partisanship" (Butake 2005a, p. 76). This position, grounded in cognitive activity, draws from increased understanding of each other and of the cultural environment which makes for humanisation. Sama, Fointam's friend, corroborates this when he says, "...man is basically the same whether he be Bikom or Metta or I don't know what tribe" (Butake 2005a, p. 29). Fointam, on his part, after living side by side with other cultural groups in the major towns where he has studied and worked, comes to understand that genuine cohesion, in a multi-ethnic Cameroon, can only be achieved through a true acceptance of difference and diversity. For him, tribal sentiments are a bane to the construction of a national identity. "With this type of tribal sentiments do you think we will ever succeed in building a strong and united nation? If every tribe were to fence itself in, the concept of the nation will flounder in no time. I think it is our duty to prove these diehard traditionalists mistaken in their judgement" (Butake 2005a, p. 29).

In a post-colonial context where the ironies of history have brought together peoples of different cultures into one nation, the question raised and answered by the Cameroonian playwrights Victor Epie Ngome in *What God Has Put Asunder* (1992) and Bole Butake in *Family Saga* (2005b) is crucial in the debate of how living together today can be framed and imagined. For Ngome, where the relationship has irretrievably broken down because of irreconcilable differences, the way out is for both parties in the marriage union to go their separate ways if their coexistence is not "constructed on the basis of mutual respect and the provision of opportunities for all to express their identities and partake equally in building a viable nation devoid of neo-colonial manipulation" (Takem 2008). From the perspective of Butake (2005b), in a family situation where a brother subjugates and exploits the other brother and his children on a false premise sustained by the situation where the "Deed of Brotherhood" has been falsified and transformed into a "Deed of Bondagehood," there is the need for the suppressed brother to call attention to his plight through the processes of re-memory and history. Such an exercise begins with questioning the status quo in order to identify the root causes of the predicament. In this play, Butake employs strategies of applied theatre, drama, and traditional oral narration as appropriate weapons in providing Kamala and the audience (who are invited to be a

part of the drama of existence of the family) with the opportunity to practically engage in looking for solutions to issues that affect them. Engaging everyone in finding solutions highlights the importance of transformative dialogue; a dialogue that equally engages Kamalo, the troublemaker. It is only through such genuine dialogue that defining the parameters of living together in that context can be achieved.

The situation in post-Apartheid South Africa merits some attention even so because the concept of the "rainbow nation" offers an excellent opportunity to interrogate living together in this post-colonial space. The metaphor of the rainbow nation, according to Niq Mhlongo, means that post-apartheid South Africa "is supposed to accommodate everyone, hence its attractive colours" (in Diez 2010) but this is not so, as Mpe's (2001) *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* suggests. Constructed within the discourses of the rainbow nation, this paradigmatic novel deals with life in post-Apartheid South Africa. It employs the space that is Hillbrow, a suburb of Johannesburg, to investigate inter-African migration in South Africa. Through an aesthetic informed by oral traditional story telling techniques reinforced by the communal first person narrative point of view, Mpe tells a story of mutual coexistence in "one of the most crowded, disadvantaged, violent inner-city neighbourhoods of post-Apartheid Johannesburg...exploring the intersection of complex issues—linguistic and literary marginalization, xenophobia, suicide, AIDS, and rural superstition" (Schreiber 2017). The novel aims at showing how relationships, informed and constructed by prejudice, fear, and suspicion, are not only the staple of post-Apartheid South Africa, but are becoming a worldwide phenomenon increasingly on the rise in a global age. In the mix of people in this space, namely, the special ones (the locals) who have a high sense of moral ground and the immigrants, known in derogatory terms as the *Makwerekwere*, who are considered the most dangerous criminals on earth, the novel shows how increased migration of other Africans to South Africa has fuelled xenophobia often leading to violence and deaths. The immigrants try to steer clear of trouble but are blamed by the locals for all the problems in the neighbourhood. In all, the novel aptly summarizes my premise in this paper, namely that the current global dispensation has ironically exacerbated the notion of mutual coexistence of people in society.

V. CONCLUSION

This analysis of sample texts from written African literature of the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods reveals the rich dialogue around the subject of mutual coexistence in African societies. While the communal ideal remains the defining model of living together in African contexts, the works nevertheless explore other paradigmatic situations that are already fraught with conflicts. In such contexts, the writers suggest either outright separation between inimical groups or constructive dialogue, based, as we find in the case of Ezeulu in Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964) and Kamala and Kamalo in Butake's *Family Saga* (2005b), on dignity and equality of the human being. This draws from the understanding that, as people live on planet earth, they will be bound to meet others or live together with them. Those who withdraw into themselves will implode, for, as Ngugi again notes, "culture contact is the oxygen of any civilization" (Ngugi 1997, p. 23). But while this might be so, I argue that there is the need for the following to obtain for this oxygen to be comfortably breathed by all. I am here alluding to the importance of referring constantly to the essential unity and interdependence of humanity, public participation to strengthen living together as well as the value of acknowledging guilt and remorse and the granting of forgiveness. The writers I have studied here have employed different aesthetic premises to map these in their works while equally insisting that, where social cohesion is fragmented, the need to identify mechanisms and institutions for conflict resolution becomes ultimately crucial.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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