

The Masses in Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* and Frederick B. Philander's *King of the Dump*

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Abstract

Many African states obtained independence from the early 1960s to 1970s. However, that independence ushered in malpractices such as corruption, tribalism, bribery, nepotism and a host of others, mainly the work of the ruling class. Playwrights such as Wole Soyinka foresaw the impact of these malpractices on the growth of the independent African states and rebuked them in his play *A Dance of the Forests* (1963). Furthermore, the ruling class lived in opulence while the masses lived in ghettos, and the former regarded the latter with disdain. One would have expected the ruling class in Zimbabwe and Namibia which obtained independence in 1980 and 1990 respectively to refrain from the shortcomings of the ruling class in African countries which attained independence earlier. This has not happened as the ruling class in the newly independent African states is not only emulating their peers in other African countries but is grossly exaggerating the malpractices. Therefore, many years after independence, African states have not progressed politically, economically, socially and culturally. The victims of this stagnation are the African masses who live by begging. Creative writers such as Cont Mhlanga of Zimbabwe and Frederick B. Philander of Namibia, like their predecessor Wole Soyinka, frown at these malpractices. This paper sets out to analyze the condition of the masses in Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* (2004) and Frederick B. Philander *King of the Dump* (2005). Postcolonial critical theory is used in the study.

Keywords: masses, stagnation, condition, colonialism, independence.

Introduction

This paper examines the condition of the masses in Cont Mhlanga’s *Workshop Negative* (2004) and Frederick B. Philander’s *King of the Dump* (2005). During colonialism, Africans of all walks of life such as historians, sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, politicians and creative writers opposed colonialism and fiercely fought the colonizers. Africa yearned for independence. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s and Micere Githae Mugo’s, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1977) portrays a vivid picture of how the Kenyans, irrespective of age, gender or class fought the colonizers with the sole intention of liberating Kenya from the grasp of the colonizers. Again, Soyinka’s *The Lion and The Jewel* (1963) ridicules semi-educated Africans who consider themselves white colonialists. The play also upholds African traditional beliefs and values. The intention of the dramatist was to inform the colonizers that Africans were mature, had their own beliefs and values, and were not empty calabashes to be filled with knowledge and civilization by colonizers.

These dramatists and a host of others believed strongly that after the attainment of independence all Africans, irrespective of age, gender or class, would share in the national wealth, each according to his output. This dream was hopelessly shattered as the new ruling class that replaced the colonizers treated African masses with just as much disdain and contempt as the colonialists. Playwrights, once again, wrote plays condemning the new ruling class. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Ngugi Wa Mirii’s *I will Marry When I Want* (1982) exposes the plight of the Kenyan masses. In Cameroon, plays such as Victor Elame Musinga’s *The Tragedy of Mr. No-Balance* (1976) and Guillaume Oyono-Mbia’s *His Excellency’s Special Train* (1979) criticized the shortcomings of the new leaders who practiced and encouraged bribery and corruption in

their respective countries. Considering that the pioneer African leaders mismanaged the resources in their individual countries, it was expected that leaders who led their countries to independence in the late 1980s and 1990s would refrain from the shortcomings of the ruling class in other countries. This has not happened. Instead, the leaders of the newly independent states emulated the leaders of the 1960s and 1970s. Cont Mhlanga’s *Workshop Negative* (2004) and Frederick B. Philander’s *King of the Dump* (2005) portray the plight of African masses in the twenty first century as will be seen in the analysis that follows. The paper is divided into three sections. Section one briefly discusses postcolonial theory which is used in the paper. Section two analyses the plays and section three is the conclusion.

Section one. A Brief Discussion of Postcolonial Theory

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffins, and Helen Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989) is an invaluable book in postcolonial theory. The imperialists’ perception of blacks was abhorrent and unrealistic. Thus, natives had to react at some point in time. J.A. Cuddon and M.A. R. Habib (2014) writes:

‘Postcolonialism’(covering the terms ‘postcolonial studies’, ‘postcolonial theory’ and ‘postcolonial literature’) is an interdisciplinary academic field devoted to the study of European colonialism and its impact on the society, culture, history and politics of the formally colonized regions, such as the African continent, the Caribbean, the Middle East, South Asia and the pacific. The term ‘postcolonialism’ was first used by historians after the Second World War to refer to chronologically to the post-independence period. Since the 1990s it has been used by literary critics as an oppositional reading practice to study the effects of colonial representation in literary texts. The field has its roots in anti-colonial writings, such as the Negritude movement and related works by Aime Cesaire, Leopold Senghor and Frantz Fanon. (pp. 510-511)

The above quotation reveals that historians noticed postcolonialism immediately after the Second World War. Later, politicians and creative writers of the former colonies discerned the unrealistic pictures of the

colonized in the writings of the colonialists. The colonized people were portrayed as savage, primitive, unknowledgeable, unscholarly and so on. African creative writers such as Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi Wa Thiong’o reacted in their writings. For example Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Fanon’s *The Wretched of The Earth*, Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* and Thiong’o and Mugo’s *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* were written with the intention of dismantling the stereotype images of the black race.

Furthermore, Cuddon and Habib (2014) asserts that postcolonial theory is about the colonized people endeavouring to present realistic pictures of their identities and to denounce the false identities that were attributed to them by the imperialists. See below:

Postcolonial literatures seek to reclaim self-representation from stereotypical portrayals in colonial literatures and colonial discourses, and to do so they often use “writing back” paradigm, or rewriting of Western ‘master’ texts. They reimagine silenced and suppressed histories – of slavery and colonialism and endeavour to come to terms with the trauma of the Middle Passage. They are often engaged with the problems of identity (individual or national) that have resulted from cultural disruptions initiated by colonialism (disempowerment, dislocation, diaspora, migration). (p. 551).

Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) states that:

... post-colonialism is both a textual effect and a reading strategy. Its theoretical practice often operates on two levels, attempting at once to elucidate the post-coloniality which inheres in certain texts, and to unveil and to deconstruct any continuing colonial power structures and institutions. (Introduction)

From the above quotation, postcolonial theory centres on dismantling the images that imperialists presented to the world about the colonized.

Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1979) emphasizes on the binary division of the world into the Orient and the Occident – East/West. It

emphasizes on the ‘other’. The Orient is primitive, inferior, backward, irrational and wild. On the other hand, the Occident is civilized, advanced, superior, progressive, rational and civil. This creation of binary opposition structures was inculcated into the minds of the Orient. The Orient found themselves in the margin of societies. They were the voiceless and the have-not in the society.

According to Alan Lawson, postcolonialism is a “politically motivated historical-analytical movement [which] engages with resists, and seeks to dismantle the effects of colonialism in the material, historical, cultural-political, pedagogical, discursive and textual domains” (Qtd. in Gilbert & Tompkins, 1996, p.2). Postcolonial theories’ tenets include nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, white/black, colonizer/colonized, civilized/savage, Western/Eastern, European/African, Western/non-Western, superior/inferior, centre/margin, us/them, hybridity, subalternism, suppression/resistance, knowledgeable/unknowledgeable, representation, power/ powerless, cultural disruptions, disempowerment, dislocation, diaspora, and migration. Postcolonial theory is therefore suitable for the analysis of this paper since the plays under study portray the tenets of postcolonialism.

Section two: An analysis of the state of the masses in *Workshop Negative* and *King of the Dump*.

Cont Mhlanga’s *Workshop Negative* (2004) describes the working conditions of Zulu and Ray in Mkhize’s workshop. The workers are discontented because they are forced to work from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., from Monday to Sunday, and are not allowed to complain (122). Since there is acute unemployment in the country, these workers have no alternative than to accept the appalling working conditions imposed on them by Mkhize. Mkhize does not believe that rest is obligatory for all human beings. Zuluboy and Ray have become robots in his factory. But they do not take their condition lying down. They put up a strong resistance as seen in the following dialogue:

Ray Working conditions in this workshop are ...
Mkhize Bad you say?

- Zulu We work long hours and many government regulations are not observed...
- Mkhize You shut up! Who do you think you are under the sun to come and tell me about conditions in my workshop?... A nyanoro of how things are run... If you feel conditions in this workshop are not good, you can just sign a resignation form and get out of my workshop ... (Mhlanga, 2004, p. 122).

In this play, Mkhize is the ‘us’ and the workers are the ‘other’ in terms of Said’s (1979) binary oppositions. Mkhize who owns the shop is authoritative and powerful. He has disempowered and subordinated the workers to the extent that the latter has become voiceless. Mkhize is fully aware of the unspeakable rate of unemployment; thus he takes advantage of the situation by paying the workers the minimal wages and refusing to improve on the working conditions in his workshop. Mkhize also controls everything in Zimbabwe as it is reiterated in the dialogue below:

- Mkhize A member of the National Defense Council. And the Chair ...
- Ray Drought Relief Aid...
- All Chairman!
- Zulu National Cooperatives Society.
- All Chairman!
- Mkhize And the shares ... Chrome Industries...
- All Chairman!
- Ray Grow money Mountain. H & H Auctioneers ...
- All Chairman!
- Zulu National Finance Group ...
- All Chairman!... (Mhlanga, 2004, pp. 118-9).

From his numerous functions, it is clear that Mkhize controls everything. Why must a single person hold many posts when there are many unemployed qualified people in need of jobs? Is Mkhize the only specialist in each of the fields? Is he the only knowledgeable man in the community? It is absolutely clear that he alone cannot be effective in all the capacities. It is in this light that the country faces retrogression

while the masses suffer in abject poverty. Mkhize is similar to Mr. Ngangso, the protagonist in Sabze’s *Le Carapace* (2000) who holds several positions despite the fact that ninety percent of the population is unemployed. These playwrights – Sabze and Mhlanga call on the ruling class to share positions so that more talented people can contribute to the development of their various nations.

Mkhize exploits Zuluboy and when the latter threatens to take him to the Ministry of Labor where justice can be melted out, he mocks:

Zulu Do you really understand yourself? Do you know that if I push this matter you could end up in serious trouble?

Mkhize To hell, son of a poor stock. Do you have enough money to push a man of my weight into trouble? ...

Zulu I better take this matter to the Ministry of Labor and the Union.

Mkhize (*Laughs*) ... Who controls the Labor and the Union? If not me, it’s my connection. Now, go out and report... (Mhlanga, 2004, p. 123)

From the above dialogue, it is clear that the poor are helpless in their own land. That is why Mkhize says, “to hell, son of a poor stock.” In Mkhize’s opinion, the marginalized people are inconsequential. Their role is to produce goods silently. They are the voiceless of the society and are totally dominated by the powerful ruling class. Therefore, Zuluboy has no alternative. He has to continue working like a robot in Mkhize’s workshop as his great grandfather who served the imperialists during the pre-colonial period, and his father who also served the colonialists during the period of colonialism. Lastly, Zuluboy is not different from the poor who served the ruling class in the independent African countries of early 1960s. It could be asserted that from the moment imperialists discovered Africa to the present, the African continent and Africans had, and are only experiencing trauma and misery. Postcolonialism has a comfortable seat and unshakable roots in

African. It is in this sense that Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) maintains that:

The term [postcolonialism] – according to a too-rigid etymology – is frequently misunderstood as a temporal concept meaning the time after colonialism has ceased, or the time following the politically determined Independence Day on which a country breaks away from its governance by another state. Not a naive teleological sequence which supersedes colonialism ... postcolonialism is, rather, an engagement with and contestation of colonialism’s discourses, power structures, and social hierarchies. Colonialism is insidious: it invades far more than political chambers and extends well beyond independence celebrations. Its effects shape language, education, religion, artistic sensibilities and, increasingly, popular culture. A theory of postcolonialism must, then, respond to more than the merely chronological construction of post- independence, and to more than just the discursive experience of imperialism. (p. 2)

Zuluboy has been expecting a better lifestyle after independence. But post-independence realities are shocking. He realizes that his lifestyle has worsened. Therefore, fighting for independence was merely preparing for the worst. Zuluboy is the representative of the masses.

The masses do not have rights in their own country. Justice has been hijacked by the ruling class. This brings us to Said’s *Orientalism* which emphasizes on the binary division of the world into the Orient and the Occident – East /West. It emphasizes on the ‘other’, us/them, power/impotence, centre/margin binary opposition. These oppositions are very prominent in this play. Mkhize represents the us/power/colonizer component while Zuluboy and Ray stand for the them/impotence/colonized component. According to this structure, the ruling class represented by Mkhize is in the centre while the working class, Zuluboy is in the margin even though it is Zulyboy and Ray who produce the goods which Mkhize sells to enrich himself. Ray and Zuluboy are not different from Tess Osonye’s Hungarians in *then SHE said It* (2002) who are reduced to sub-human beings.

Mkhize does not only control everything and everyone in Zimbabwe, he lives in affluence:

- Zulu [Mkhize] Owns three farms and a mansion.
Ray One wife and one child.
Mkhize Two jaguars and two Mercedes.
Ray Employs 12 domestic servants... (Mhlanga, 2004, p. 119)

While Mkhize is living in opulence, the masses are languishing in poverty. Mkhize claims to be a socialist but practices intense capitalism. Zulu complains, “Mkhize! The fox...he is for socialism, yet in this workshop he is just the opposite...Dangerous day-time socialist and night-time capitalist. I wonder why some people can’t do as they say...” (Mhlanga, 2004, p. 123). Very few politicians fulfill their promises. They make many promises when they want the voters to give them their votes; but as soon as they get the votes, they ignore the voters.

Zuluboy is astonished at Mkhize’s attitude and so reminds him that they fought side by side during the war of liberation:

- Zulu Let me remind you of something. Mkhize. We fought a bloody war to remove such attitudes towards workers. We deserve to be listened to, both in the workshop and in the running of the country.
- Mkhize I’m sorry for you sonny. You played your part by staying in the bush... with bombs and guns. Now why not let others, clever ones like me, do their part, that of running this country? (Mhlanga, 2004, p. 122)

The war that was fought by all Zimbabweans has not produced the expected results as workers are still maltreated. Mkhize does not believe in retrospection. He is like the main characters in Junction Avenue Theatre Company’s *Love, Crime and Johannesburg* (2000) wherein the two main characters fight against the apartheid regime but during the post-apartheid period, one character becomes a successful businessman and owns a bank whereas the other is accused of breaking into his friend’s bank. Mhlanga and the Junction Avenue Theatre Company inform freedom fighters that fighting for freedom is not enough. What

is important is what people do after liberating themselves from white colonizers. Freedom fighters should maximize their productive skills and by so doing improve their lifestyle. Any contrary attitude only produces negative results. Furthermore, freedom fighters who have goals achieve them only if they engage in profitable activities once the war is over. The dramatists are emphatically drawing our attention to the fact that after the wars, the rulers do not distribute basic necessities such as shelter, clothing and food, but only consider their individual interests. The new leaders are just like their colonial masters who believe in the ‘us’ and ‘them’. Mkhize merely justifies the assertion of Chrisman Laura who cautions that criticism of a nation’s contemporary literature cannot be isolated from the imperial history which produced the contemporary version of the nation (Qtd. in Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, pp. 3-4). Zuluboy is born in a country where patriotism is not rewarded.

One would have expected that African countries which attained independence in the 1980s and 1990s would learn from the experience of those African countries which became independent in the 1960s. To all intents and purposes, they have not. The mistakes of the 1960s are still repeated in the 1980s and 1990s as it is evident in *Workshop Negative*. It is in this light that one wonders whether the African continent is cursed. When will African leaders learn to protect their own people? These are some of the questions that preoccupy Mhlanga. No doubt Africans are at each other’s throats as Zulu asserts:

- Ray ... You come from the same area, you grew up together. He is black and you are black. You speak the same language and you fight one another like animals? How do you think I could respect your kind in this workshop?
- Zulu If black can exploit black, I see no reason why black cannot fight black... (Mhlanga, 2004, p. 126)

Africans are at war with each other as it is serene in the relationship between Mkhize and Zuluboy. Looking at Mkhize’s attitude and practices, the reader is tempted to agree with W.F. Deedes that “there is a vast amount only Africa can put right” (Qtd. in Meredith 2006).

Many African leaders have not learnt to protect and love their people and their countries. This is one of the reasons why misery abounds in the continent. Gilbert and Tompkins (1996) states that “Postcolonialism has to do with political oppressiveness or political correctness.” Political oppressiveness in this context refers to the ills perpetuated by the state on its citizens. Some of these ills thwart the progress of a nation. Mkhize is a bad leader who only retards the development of his workers and the citizens. Frantz Fanon (2002) said, “Each generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfil it, or betray it” (p. 415). Mkhize’s generation is failing to recognize its mission. His generation lacks the foresightedness of building a national culture which ensures the wellbeing of all its citizens. Mkhize is among African leaders who are betraying the African continent. Mhlanga is a dramatist who understands the heartthrob of his society. He uses drama to guide his society to achieve noble ambitions. He writes with the ultimate goal of pricking the conscience of the leaders in his country who must aspire for a better lifestyle for all the citizens.

Turning to Frederic B. Philander, he is also concerned with the plight of the masses in Namibia after independence. In *King of the Dump* (2005), he portrays a bleak picture of the masses in independent Namibia. Eva, one of the two characters in the play, talks about her lifestyle:

Eva ... I’m sick and tired of it. (*She angrily throws away the can into the heap*). I have known better. Chicken and pork, even though it was always on Sundays. I’ve never known hard times like this. Pa and Willie saw to everything. And now? Now I live from the rubbish dump into the mouth ... “He would have left me in that hotel yard where he found me in the first place. There I was better off - meals, straight from the kitchen into the bins and the mouth.” (Philander, 2005, p. 14)

Eva describes her dog’s lifestyle. During the period she lived with her father and when she married Willie (a white man), she had good meals. Immediately her father dies and she abandons Willie who

persuades her to have intimate relations with his friend, she becomes a tramp. She has identical experience with Koko in Tess Osonye’s *Then She said It* (2002). Koko says, “They’ll get a dog to...to...Oh no, don’t you see?” (32). African masses are treated like animals by the white race and by African leaders who still allow the white race to control their countries’ natural and human resources. Marshall Sahlins (1972) notes that during the Paleolithic era, man lived in affluence. He says, “An affluent society is one in which all the people’s material wants are easily satisfied” (p. 1). It should also be noted that during the pre-colonial period, Africans had enough land to cultivate crops, enough forest to hunt, and there were streams, rivers and seas which provided enough fish for the people. The people were well nourished. The arrival of the colonialists signaled a drastic deterioration in the people’s lifestyle. Meredith (2006) writes, “In German East Africa (Tanganyika) and South West Africa (Namibia), German administrations inflicted fearful repression to stamp out rebellions, annihilating more than three quarters of the Herero people and half of the Nama people between 1904 and 1908” (p. 3).

Eva’s assertion that she has seen better days describes the lifestyle of the indigenous African. Having fought fearlessly to defeat the colonialists, the Namibians expect a better lifestyle after independence. Their hearts’ desire has been hopelessly shattered as they now have their meals directly from bins and dumps. As they come to discover, independence only brought sorrow, lamentation, tears and misery. Gilbert and Tompkins’ (1996) assertion that “The depth to which imperial rhetoric has been established in ... colonies complicates attempts to remove the constraints of subordination, inferiority, and insignificance that the colonized subject inevitably experiences” (7) is genuine in Cont Mhlanga’s *Workshop Negative* (2004) and Frederick B. Philander’s *King of the Dump* (2005). The masses in the two plays have lost human dignity.

Eva and Pompie do not only eat food in bins and dumps, they also live in a ditch:

Pompie ... I’m warning you. If you leave now, I won’t allow you back in my ditch nor in this dump.

- Eva I'm done with that and you.
- Pompie That's what you think, but I know and we all know that your place is here, nowhere else ... Look at you. You have picked up weight since you came here, eating the same rubbish you detest so much ... My Eva. She is back where she belongs. (Philander, 2005, pp. 44-45)

The excerpt clearly states that the ditch and dump have become inescapable habitations for Eva and Pompie. They are tied to the ditch and dump like a goat tethered to a tree. The African masses have descended below the animal level since the attainment of independence by African countries. The situation of Eva and Pompie fits Epale Joseph's (1985) apt description:

Mankind has suddenly awakened to the realization that poverty destroys the self-confidence of man, that it humiliates him, that it vitiates his dignity as the supreme creature of nature's handiwork, that it exacerbates rancor, bitterness, and jealousy among individuals and nations alike, that it destroys man's moral fiber, that it is wasteful of human resources, since it does destroy man's creative genius, and that it is, as it were, a cankerworm which gnaws slowly but surely through the vitals of the human society, creating social instability and setting up whirlpools of discontent, widely spreading these throughout the human society. (p. xiv)

Eva and Pompie are not different from Ray and Zuluboy in Cont Mhlanga's *Workshop Negative* (2004) who are forced to work like robots by Mkhize. Naipaul (1971) maintains that "no literature is free-floating. Its vitality springs, initially, from its rootedness in a specific type of world" (p. 122). Eva and Pompie are living in a world where the remnants of postcolonialism are still very apparent even in the twenty first century.

Even organizations that claim to assist the poor are fake. They give the false impression that they love the poor but they do not as the following dialogue makes clear:

Pompie (Reads from paper). “Factory owners have been asked to contribute all their spoilt products to the food bank as a token of neighbourly love. The Red Cross will see to it that the food is equally distributed among the poor”... Equal distribution, my ass. This is just another way of getting at us here in the dump.

Eva What are you trying to say Pompie?

Pompie That in the past we’ve had all sorts of charity organisations: Operation Hunger, Meals On-Wheels, Care and Hunger. They were all started ostensibly to help us, the poor. And what really did we get from them? ... Now this new one, a food bank. It’s a scam. I tell you, a new name for yet another typical rotten and corrupt organization ... Then they have the audacity to tell us ... we are always on your side ... Whose bloody side are they on, but their own? ... Five years ago I was staying in a drought-stricken Karo settlement. There I saw it; people dying like flies of hunger, whilst they lived like kings and queens on the food that was sent to us from overseas. Some people had to buy the same food at black market prices from the same people who claim they were there for us, the poor ... Then they have the nerve to tell us: It’s the duty of the church to help the poor and the destitute. We are all brothers in spirit. All Lies ... (Philander, 2005, pp. 21 -22)

Pompie does not believe in the hypocrisy of these selfish organizations. The main aim of the operators of these organizations is to further enrich themselves. This explains why Pompie is disgusted with their hypocrisy. In Bole Butake’s “The Survivors” (1998), food and other items sent by national and international organizations to the survivors of Lake Nyos disaster are monopolized by the police officers who are charged with the responsibility of distributing the food to the victims. While the police officers have enough food, the victims starve. Hence, the plight of the survivors is exacerbated as they are exploited by police officers.

Even the Church which is expected to assist the poor does the reverse. Therefore, the poor are doomed. In Suzan-Lori Parks’ *In the Blood* (1999), Reverend deceives the congregation to donate money for Hester, the poor single mother. Instead of giving the money to Hester, Reverend uses it to enrich himself. Frederick B. Philander, in *King of the Dump* (2005) draws attention to the fact that the Church and the ruling class have never been friends to the poor from the period of colonialism to the present. Therefore, the assertion of postcolonial theorists that colonialism has not ended in the former colonies cannot be challenged.

The poor who are voiceless and helpless remain at the margin while the organizations which are supposed to help the poor occupy the centre. The poor therefore live in perpetual suffering, particularly as they are unemployed. Unemployment steals away man’s dignity and reduces him to a state of nothingness. Since African masses are unemployed, they have become worse off than beggars. The conversation between Eva and Pompie portrays a vivid picture of the level of unemployment among African masses:

Pompie ... but there’s no job.

Eva Stop lying ... You prefer living like this.

Pompie ... Do you know how many times I tried to find a job, but without success? I walked the street for miles, every day for months and you know how I suffered. Look at my shoes, battered from walking. (*Gets up and demonstrates*). My eyes hurt from looking at and reading all those signs at potential workplace, everywhere: No, Work.

Eva What about the labour bureau?

Pompie Oh, no. There it is worse. Long queues of blacks every day. They go on as if they own the place, because they sit and lay around on mass like a swarm of black bees ... When a truck stops to pick up workers, they are on it, all over: On top, inside, underneath, everywhere. And what’s worse, they know all the begging tricks... they are experts (*imitation*). Please, my boss. Take me. I’m a good boy, and sheep boy. Try me, please, boss...

I’ve got a wife and children to support. Look, I’m strong. I can run with the wheelbarrow full of cement ... I’ve got a head to think good things. I’m clever and speak English well because I have passed standard one through private studies... (Philander, 2005, pp. 40-41)

The lifestyle of the masses has worsened due to unemployment. African masses are at the lowest strata of the society. Pompie says, “they sit and lay around ... like a swarm of black bees.” The simile “like a swarm of black bees” portrays an ugly picture of unemployed Africans. The manner in which the unemployed Africans approach employers strips blacks of any dignity. This is an abhorrent picture of unemployed blacks. These unemployed blacks are not doles. Blacks are very eager to work and restore their lost self-esteem after independence. Yet, they are not given the chance as white imperialists and the African ruling class have occupied the centre positions and pushed the unemployed blacks to the periphery. Chazan et al. (1999) notices the plight of blacks and writes:

The excitement of the struggle for independence that permeated the African in the second half of the twentieth century gained new momentum in the 1990s as African countries undertook political reform measures and instituted multiparty governments. Nevertheless, at the close of the century, ongoing traumas regarding economic survival, effective political rule and civil war continued to take a heavy toll and a series of devastating political and human disasters rocked the continent ... (p. 1).

The unemployed blacks portrayed by Philander are similar to the description of unemployed blacks in Tess Osonye’s *Then She said It* (2002). In this play, Atlantic, the white director, says “Just one vacancy for a guard. And they’er all here. The whole nation? One hundred and twenty million of them ... These people make me sick” (p. 58). This is a clear indication that the level of unemployment in Africa is unspeakable. No doubt foreign embassies are full of Africans seeking greener pastures in the West. Tony Blair (former Prime Minister of Great Britain) examines why Africa which is endowed with enormous

natural and human resources has become the most wretched continent in the world. He concluded by asserting that the plight of Africa is a scar to human conscience (Qtd. in Meredith, 2005, Cover-page). Tony Blair’s assertion is indisputable considering the fact that African leaders and the west need the continent’s abundant natural resources while overlooking the plight of African masses. This implies that the attainment of independence is not the end of misery for Africans. Keller Bill (2008) became aware of this reality and wrote:

Whenever I stopped a resident of Soweto ... to ask if life was better, however, the instinctive first reaction was almost always the same: No, not really. What about jobs? What about real houses instead of shacks? “We struggle before the election,” said Lucy Maquma, who was peddling shoes from rickety wooden stand at a bus stop. “We are still struggling even now”. (p. 82)

Joseph Mazzini wants the world to be divided into nations and sees no obstacle for cooperation among nations. He writes:

God ... divided humanity into distinct groups upon the surface of the globe, and thus planted the seeds of nations. Bad governments have disfigured the design of God, which you may see clearly marked out ... by the courses of the great rivers, by the lines of the lofty mountains and by other geographical conditions. (Qtd. by Beales, 1982)

Mazzini is right in his analysis. Europeans settle in Africa and live on sumptuous parties while African masses live on food from the dump. Rich Africans too pretend to be ignorant of the plight of the masses. They make long empty speeches which hold nothing for the masses. Pompie is exasperated with these speeches. He remarks:

Pompie They can only talk, morning till night. We want our fair share of the cake. And it’s our birth right to rule our own country. That’s what they are good at, talk like little white old ladies at a tea party. Their best song is this one: Peace, Freedom, Reconciliation and

good race relations. Yes, I’ve heard them talk like that many times at those political meetings where they so much confuse the people. But they should listen to our sad song for a change. Food, Food, Food, Food. That’s what we need, not their endless and empty political talk. (Philander, 2005, p. 42)

The people need food, shelter and clothing – the basic needs of ordinary people. Yet, the ruling class cannot provide these basic needs. African masses are in dire need of food, shelter and clothing. Having studied the songs of Lapiro de Mbanga (Cameroon musician), Kelvin Toh Ngong remarks “The “us” wanting to be remembered in the sharing of national cake is the masses and the “you” enjoying it alone is the ruling class. Lapiro de Mbanga begins to remind the ruling class of their obligations which they seem to have long abandoned” (Ngong, 2013, p. 257). The stagnation of African masses is decried by the dramatist.

Section Three. Conclusion

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that African nations which attained independence in the late 1980s and early 1990s, have not learnt from the mistakes of those that attained independence in the 1960s and 1970s. The upper class in African countries treats African masses with disdain and contempt. Cont Mhlanga’s *Workshop Negative* (2004) and Frederick B. Philander *King of the Dump* (2005) illuminate the plight of African masses. Far from decreasing, the plight of African masses is increasing. African masses are forced to work for long hours by the ruling class. Their wages are just enough to keep them alive. Again, due to unemployment, African masses feed from dumps. The plight of African masses is a consequence of the existence of postcolonialism. Thus, the plight of African masses and postcolonialism are Siamese twins – they either live together or cease together. Since one of the roles of playwrights is to draw man’s attention to the vices of the society, playwrights such as Cont Mhlanga and Frederick B. Philander continue to write with the hope that the ruling class and the imperialists will eventually rethink and consider African masses as citizens and not as the pariah of the African continent.

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