"Politics, Culture And African Poetry: An Examination Of The Poetry ofAgostinho Neto Okot :p'Bitek And Sipho Sepamla-"

By

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this Thesis has been written by me and that it is a record of my own Research work. It has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information are specifically acknowledged by means of references.



I. U. GARBAI
12/9/89.

D E D I C A T I O N

Dedicated To My Mother

CERTIFICATION

This Thesis entitled: "Politics, Culture and African Poetry: An Examination of the Poetry of Agostinho Neto, Okot p'Bitek and Sipho Sepamla" by Hashim Umar Garbai meets the regulations governing the award of the degree of M.A. African Literature of Ahmadu Bello University, and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

Chairman, Supervisory Committee — Date 11/1/90

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the relationship in politics, poetry and culture, thus establishing the criteria for an appreciation of African poetry. The general cultural and political trends are considered and treated as themes and motifs. The study further illuminates the African condition and the achievements of poetry as a vehicle for cultural and political emancipation. The thesis also judges the commitment of the three poets from the perspective of the large theories apparent in their regions in relation to Africa in general. The extent to which the poets identify with cultural and political movements is sometimes left to the judgement of the reader. From the analyses of literary scholarship, the concepts of poetry, politics and culture are shown as merging in African poetry. in this way, a fairly 'acceptable' definition of African poetry is premised.

This is achieved through applying the method of critical realism which is considered more independent but not without relying on some of the methodologies applied by established scholars. in this way, the researcher hazards accepting some of the views achieved through such methodologies. The research, however, tries to use African scholars for the interpretations and care is taken not to use European tools for the analysis; i.e. viewing the poetry from European poetic conceptions and classifications.

The first chapter is a review of critical literature relating to the thesis. it examines the trends in the interpretation of the three poets and establishes the researcher's views over such trends. The general- view is often subjected to further scrutiny in order to concretize the appeal it may have. The trends in Neto's criticism are shown mostly as glossy, in p'Bitek's poetry as cyclical, because the earlier trend has re-emerged, and in sepamla as consistent on the thematic level but there is variance in the style of the poetry.

Chapter two is on the early poetry of Neto with a background information which captures the dominant Negritudinal mood and the darkness of colonial oppression with strained hope.

Chapter three analyses the audacious and revolutionary Neto who has experienced jail life and tasted the insensitivity of the Portuguese which disillusions him to join the struggle.

Chapter four is an examination of okot p'Bitek's poetry from the context of Africa's new political and cultural dilemma, with the freshness of the song genre he introduces and its achievements.

Chapter five considers the poetry of sipho sepemla within the context of the New Generation poets after the bans in south Africa who comes with a new form, influenced by the ideals of the Black consciousness Movement.

Chapter six is the conclusion which establishes the achievement of the thesis in examining African poetry through these poets and the common grounds on which they have been subjected to censorship and banning.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Politics in Africa incorporates the rulers and the ruled. This is examined with the attendant physical coercion and fascism in Lusophone Africa. The definition captures the bureaucratic repression and incompetence exhibited by politicians after independence in Uganda. The separation introduced in South Africa for apartheid to thrive for the forceful submission of individuals through the colour bar is also examined. The notion of politics also extends to colonial and neo-colonial status of Africa and the conditions of the majority of the people which are treated differently by the three poets. Literature, however, was not and cannot be the only way towards freedom fighting in Africa. As Wole Soyinka observed in 1967, the

> artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores, and experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time. It is time for him to respond to this essence of himself.[1]

He is alluding to guerilla fighting. Due to the apparent chaos caused by the imperialists in Africa, the pathos of most Africans over their conditions has been evoked spontaneously. The politically subversive

and contentious stand of the African poets is the extension of the pent-up emotions for the achievement of freedom from colonial bondage and neo-colonial exploitation and social acculturation. It is rightly observed that "African poetry . . . is a verse that consciously challenges political authority, which in turn differs from territory to territory, from culture to culture"[2].

But when an African poet is observed as politicizing, it means he is leaning more towards ideological commitment to the detriment of the art of poetry. Ideological commitment, however, is a term sometimes used loosely. This has been given some light by Mbulelo Mzamane in his assessment of FRELIMO poetry from Mozambique. Poetry is used for a purpose and is observed as a matter of fact "the same stuff as life. It is used to fulfil didactic functions, in the simplest sense, for 'classroom' purposes"[3]. Within the revolution, the distinction between art and life is observed as wholly bougeois so the distinction "was eroded as writers involved in the struggle". The Angolan situation, however, gives a different picture in terms of the revolution and poetry, at least from looking at the collection of twenty-two poets in <u>Poems from Angola</u> edited by Micheal Wolfers. Although some of Neto's poems like 'The Bush Path' have been subjected to political jingoism as sang by the guerillas, on the

overall, the commitment to art is intact.

In a paper, 'Why African Literature?'[4], David Rubadiri had spelt out the themes that would excite African literature for a long time as: politics, race and the self-consciousness that comes with a search for identity. Poetry coming from Neto and Sepamla exhibit the quality of having matured out of the concept of asserting the colour identity. They represent, to a large extent, their feelings about the conditions of their people, as human beings, through the orientation of the protest culture which has gone to the extent of revolution in Neto. The complexity of the world today tends to challenge poets more than ever before to produce materials consistent with the issues. It is true that "we write a poetry we hope will communicate emotion, move our readers in some direction, or sharpen their awareness"[5]. The role of poetry suits conscientization which serves to bring awareness for social or political changes, sometimes with the change of polity for the positive. So levels in poetry serve their political ends which may not be for propaganda purposes.

It is true to some extent as James Coleman[6] has asserted that most African nationalism was activated by the Western concept of democracy. But some historians have disputed this, saying it started with the threat

of seizing the sovereignty of African states. "Self definition" within "the Anglo-Saxon version of the liberal ethic" became a valuable acquisition for Africans to demand for the emancipation of their societies. The portuguese traditions do not exhibit such characteristics. Therefore, the emergence of nationalism in Africa could be traced to so many factors. The establishment of 'African' churches as in the Congo and other parts of Africa were apparent stimulants to African nationalism. Although most African religions do not as a point consider an attack on Christianity, "the struggle against the colonial invasions was of spontaneous nature for a long time, taking the form of religious movements"[7]. The emergence of anti-colonial ideology could also be attributed to religious movements, which is addressed to in p'Bitek's poetry. These, therefore, could be the aspects that saw the manifestation of a nation's self-consciousness in the poets.

Another angle from which we can better understand the political nature of poetry in Africa is in Ali Mazrui's view that the establishment by the colonial state's right to use force made resistance movements to carry to facades; counter force and defiance through passive resistance. Both are reflected in African literature. So there were African nationalists who, in spite of the type of colonialism in their regions, were Ghandian philosophers. Kenneth Kaunda and

Albert Lithuli are examples as the former had once said "I reject absolutely violence in any of its forms as a solution to our problems"[8]. This, for instance, has been shown as quite contrary to the political culture of Africa because "Historically, dignity has been more often served by the bearing of arms than by their renunciation. For many societies, there was something rather effeminate or infantile in being 'Defenceless'"[9].

Nationalist Movements in Africa after 1945 began to address themselves to standards and criteria drawn by the Europeans for their own emancipation. This was to lend credence to their legitimate demands through international diplomacy. So full scale military operations resulted from the stultification of these international conventions as rightly observed by Mazrui. Even reformism and liberalism became new garments worn by apartheid and neo-colonialism in Southern Africa.

So art can be politicized to create awareness as stressed by Richard Priebe and Thomas Hale[10]; "Let him stand on the hilltops and shout the message of our suffering, if he argues that his first loyalty is to his art, we will agree with him . . . can he turn blind eye on Soweto and Sharpville, or on Angola?". But in Syl Cheney-Coker, this notion is carried further.

Cheney-Coker, in 'A Poet in Exile', states that the very existence of the African writer is itself a

political statement and asserts that poets should live the content of what they write otherwise it would be used against them by the very people who constitute their readership.

In 'The People's Mood: The Voice Of a Guerilla Poet', M. Mzamane examines how poetry can come close to the political aspirations of revolutionaries. He does not only examine the role of a poet in criticising political authorities but also recommends literature to politicians as "a kind of political barometer to gauge popular feeling"[11]. He then rightly observes that the revolutionary poet is one that concretizes the aspirations of his people for a better life and liberation movements see to the possibilities of realizing these goals. We then proceed to consider the next key concept - culture.

The working definition of culture is based on the idea that political domination in itself is an act of culture which incorporates Amilcar Cabral's thesis:

> If imperialist domination has the vital need to practise cultural oppression, national liberation is necessarily an act of culture[12]

and that poetry is a part of a cultural act or practice since the days of cultural nationalism. The way of looking at reality and how the reality conditions the medium of communication which defines the African identity would be the points of concern.

Art, therefore, is culture-based and culture-specific. Culture, as it is purported here, has to do with self-definition as observed by Mzamane in a review of Vernie February's Mind your Colour: The Coloured Stereotype in South African Literature (1981):

> Scholarship by Black South Africans is aimed at self-definition, at ensuring that the tools of interpretation and analysis on matters affecting them as Blacks do not remain the monopoly of aliens or outsiders, no matter how friendly disposed or benevolent such spokesmen may be[13].

Cultural nationalism has been the centripetal point through which most African poetry appeals to those concerned. So it is true that one "cannot wage the struggle I'm talking about out of ignorance or innocence"[14] as Achebe has declared. The understanding of culture is also based on the relationship between words and their meanings and how the poets manipulate the connotations of the words through their cultural implications to produce allegories.

To understand any society in terms of their songs, music or poetry or any other available genres, one has to comprehend and appreciate the culture. The aesthetics in a given society may not be identical with those of other societies:

> But there is a definite line of continuity in African cultures which acts on individuals and groups like the string by which a kite is held to the ground; it tacks and weaves and noses up, a toy of the wind while it remains up there; and yet it responds to the continual tug the boy gives it toward the ground[15].

The Western form of expression has been considered inadequate in expressing African culture. This assertion is not unconnected with the idea that it too is a form that conveys western mannerism. It is difficult for the form, according to some critics, to leap out of its idiomatic cocoon to consider the idiosyncracies of the African culture although a lot of contrivance is going on for such manipulations. Kofi Awoonor, in 'Prison and poetry'[16], however, feels Africans have found a voice in the European languages which is "a recognition of 500 years of history" and that the positive aspects of African cultures should be the guiding spirit. Nwoga's view on domesticating the European forms and Awoonor's preservation of tradition in Exile and Tradition help to shed light onto this controversy.

The relationship between culture and poetry is determined by the concatenation of all the existing factors that form the environment; hence culture incorporates the traditional aspects through dynamic

representation for newer values. But Nwoga, in African Literature Today No. 10, assesses African poetry as that which includes the transcendental elements which provides the poet with an opportunity to retain his audience by being relevant to his tradition. This is further elaborated by Ngugi WaThing'o.

In his essay, 'Freedom Of The Artist: People's Artist Versus People's Rulers'[17], Ngugi shows how the "angle of vision" of the artist is affected by natural, social and spiritual freedom within which he is operating. He also describes poets as those who hold up a mirror to the society and in this way raise significant questions over the operations of the artist, whether he has chosen angle which liberates him. Ngugi's dialectics calls for self-liberation in the artist from the clutches of the dominating classes for a spiritual freedom in the vision of the dispossessed. He shows how poets can use their pens to create anxiety and tension for a collective liberation. Ngugi's deep concern and optimism for African poetry of resistance can be seen when he says:

> New cultures are emerging out of that struggle for total liberation from imperialism. This can be clearly seen in the poetry and songs and theatre among workers in the urban areas of the developing world[18].

The poets have been influenced by the cultural spillovers in Black cultures. Although concepts like

Negritude and Black Consciousness have been identified as influencing the poets under discussion, their relevance cannot be over-estimated. Although Negritude and the African personality "share the same utopian fervour"[19], as observed by Ezekiel Mphahlele in The African Image, it is agreed that they are separate developments. Negritude is concerned with the past and the art of the black world while the African personality is concerned with the sociological presence of the need for political liberation in Africa. So viewing the manner in which Negritude is a cultural influence on most black literature in South Africa around this period and as apparent in the poetry of Neto and p'Bitek, Mphahlele concludes: "I have a kind of Negritude axe to grind"[20], thus accepting the social thought it informs. We can now proceed to examine the third variable - poetry.

African poetry defined properly cannot be divested from politics and cultural hegemony in Africa. As a vehicle for political emancipation, poetry has for long been used by people, but not all poets can achieve this valour as found in African poetry, where art and endurance coalesce to face violence and oppression. This is so because in poetry we countenance levels as in the continuum of the mediocre or futile to the refined and ethereal or from the sobre and subtle to the extremist and propagandist. Levels are determined

by the natural or unnatural social circumstances. It is then true to observe that there are times when it may not be necessary to be euphemistic. Mphahlele draws his standards of poetic language in this respect when he registers his surprise over the "muted" instrument through which Mazisi Kunene speaks, one who is based outside South Africa and in full time resistance politics.

When we classify African poetry alongside European conceptions of poetry, i.e., ballad, sonnet or the free-verse, we can get a lot of examples but it is not worthy to hazard such criticism. Rather there is emphasis on poems affected by the local cultures and have developed to certain levels unachieved anywhere before. Okot p'Bitek's poetry shows the free verse type written along African composition of the song in Luo. However,

> There are those artists who talk themselves into the mood for talking something from tradition but are technically incapable of it; there are those who never even bothered about it and are quite happy for their work to be judged in relation to the long line of continuity we have been pushed or dragged into - that of Western tradition[21].

African poetry today owes much to oral poetry and it is a form of catharsis, to use Freud's term, for the communication of one's feelings over a given situation.

Although it has already been premised that the outflow of one's emotions may not always have any direct relation to politics or even culture; of course there has been the literature of the absurd and Marlame's art for art's sake. But even here, there is a looming appeal that relates to the larger society because cultural ties are not easily broken especially in the lenses of perception they provide.

Poetry, for instance, developed in Egypt as part of a trend of reawakening for the revival of classical Arabic and Khouri shows how patriotism developed alongside in Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt. It is, therefore, difficult to find patriotism or loyalty to a nation and her values in abstract poetry. Even with abstraction, there is that murky allusion to tradition because African abstract poetry as discussed by Mazrui in 'Abstract Verse and Tradition'[22] is a verse that records a puzzle with always one correct solution or answer and it is hard to establish this in the Western form of abstraction.

Writing poetry may not quite be an achievement, but a poet's attitude to the political problem in the society would determine his relevance. It is in this realization that Pascal Gwala, a Black Consciousness poet, observes[23] Soweto 1976 as a call for reassessment and that the literary field cannot stay out of it.

It is in this way that poetry in Africa can be

understood as an art which is channelled to propagate ideas to influence the community. This does not mean that poetry is outright propaganda. Social realism both as a technique in poetry and a practical social reality occupies an important place in African literature. Each committed African writer, therefore, experiences a mental and physical premonition of violence of his society's established authority. This is the reason why many poets are considered iconoclasts. The poets capture squarely the challenges in the society where others have had consternation and apprehension; thus the merging of poetry, politics and culture in Africa. Some of the definitions given about these concepts do not seem adequate.

In Towards The Decolonization of African Literature, by Chinweizu et al, African poetry is classified into three areas: Euro-modernist, traditionalists and "miscellany of individual voices of the middle ground". Although they have a thorough discussion of art vis-a-vis culture and politics and its relevance in Nigerian literature, their classification looks simplistic and without adequate explanation of their generalization. It is in this realization that we continue to examine the critical trends.

This chapter essentially is an examination of the trends in the criticism of the poetry of Agostinho Neto, Okot p'Bitek and Sipho Sepamla in relation to the

theme of culture, politics and poetry.

Critical discussions in English on the poetry of Agostinho Neto is relatively scanty partly because it falls within the Lusophone literature zone in Africa which had not received much attention. However, J.A. Ramsaram's New Approaches To African Literature (1965) contains an examination of poetry coming from Portuguese Africa. The poetry of the 1960s is generally classified as assertive verse; a mark of Negritude literature. Most of the literature available on Lusophone Africa are historical and are, therefore, relevant as they also help to establish trends. The nature of portuguese colonialism has for instance been highlighted in Aspects of Central African History (1968). Walter Rodney's paper on 'European Activity and African Reaction in Angola' examines the economic and political strength of this region from pre-capitalist formations to the struggle launched by the revolutionaries in 1961. The problem of unity suffered by the various tribes and its resolution have been shown in Pepetela's Mayombe.

It is, however, in African Writing Today (1967) edited by Ezekiel Mphahlele that we have one of Agostinho Neto's poems: 'Friend Mussunda'. This poem is a self-apprehensive exercise, which Soyinka, for instance, condemns as Negritudinal in Myth Literature and the African World[24]. The editor suggests that the anthology is intended as "a map of themes and

styles of African writing in the metropolitan languages" (p.11).

Also Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, in their introduction to an edition of Modern Poetry From Africa, establish the Negritudinal aspect of the poetry but classify the poetry coming from portuguese Africa as a sheer cry of loss and despair which does not establish a strong attachment to the cultural background of their people.

Whereas in The African Assertion (1968) edited by Austin J. Shelton, Agostinho Neto's 'Aspiration' features as an assertive Negritudinal poetry under the classification of Reaction Literature. Neto's poetry is expressed within the light of cultural nationalism.

Historical evidence shows that there is a culture of resistance that had established itself, from the 15th century when the portuguese began the process of annexing Africa in earnest. The relevance of this era of resistance to oppression is captured in Douglas L. Wheeler's 'An Early Angolan Protest: The Radical Journalism of Jose de Fontes Pereira (1823 - 1891)' which is an historical essay that traces the "stirrings of modern Angolan nationalism"[25]. The essay shows the early protest culture in Angolan nationalists who set the pace for Neto and others.

Clearer critical insights on Neto's poetry inform O.R. Dathorne's African Literature in the 20th Century

(1974) which is a guide that traverses the literary world in Africa. His approach to Lusophone Africa is with an acknowledgement of the little attention paid to the literature inspite of its "appealing originality". The influence on modern poetry is traced to Costa Alegre of Sao Tome, whose work, Versos, had been published in 1916 although he had died in 1890. Neto appears as a Negritude poet but with a strong tendency towards self-identification. Most of his early poetry is shown as coming with "reasoned efforts" but there is also "out-spoken hostility" which is mark of his later poetry. The editor commends Neto's simplicity and accessibility:

> But always Neto's reasoning bolsters the attitudes and transmutes the grandiloquent public statements into mummerings of a refined sensibility (p.261).

This establishes his political activities as a poet.

Inspite of O.R. Dathorne's grandiose task in African Literature in the 20th Century, he slightly captures Neto's peculiar style and development. The treatment of the darkness of colonial oppression as a theme is typical of Neto's early poetry although there are exceptions where Neto goes to the extreme with the theme of freedom. Neto, therefore, syncopates in his poems after prison. Dathorne, however, has a foresight in examining the nature of Neto's poetry as he

establishes the early perseverance and the tendency toward audacity. The unfolding revolutionary nationalism within the context of Negritudinal protest is not clearly established. The acknowledgement of soldier-poets would have provided him with the necessary point of departure. Gerald Moser's article on Luis Bernardo Honwana[26] sheds more light on the aspects of portuguese literature in Lusophone Africa.

Moser is careful to show the example of African writers who have lost contact with folklore as a result of living in the cities. The political nature of the poetry coming from this region in the 1950s and '60s is shown to have been influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement originating from the Americas through the living experiences of a black African writer, Joao Dias, who died in portugal in 1949. Moser qualifies Neto's poetry from the perspective of self-assertion influenced by the spill-over of Black cultures. But Ezekiel Mphahlele does not seem to think so.

In <u>The African Image</u> (1974), Ezekiel Mphahlele sees the poetry of Neto as revolutionary. Mphahlele, however, feels Neto is hesitating when he writes "I wait no more / it is I who am awaited". Mphahlele, therefore, questions: "awaited? Neto must go and lead the movement for the liberation of Angola" (p.36). Furthermore, Mphahlele assumes a symbolism of the African personality through which his brainstorming exercises show images of the

African continent, registering his disgust over the idea of being colonized especially when "a sniveling, backward, poor, catholic nation like portugal colonizes you - humiliating!" (p.36). This humiliation is seen through Neto's poetry where he reports on the sub-human standard of living and slave work. The poetry in this region[27] is observed as sad in tone and "too thin" for any serious poetic analysis of any poet "beyond the sketchy portrait of an artist as a revolutionary" (p.246).

Ezekiel Mphahlele might be right about the thin volumes of poetry from Lusophone Africa around 1974, but only in terms of accessibility and translation. Inspite of his "sketchy" portrayal of poets in Lusophone Africa, Mphahlele has a great perceptive power to say in The African Image that "the conditions that define their heroism are more revolutionary for Africa than ever before since Algeria" (p.25). In Poems from Angola (1974), the editor, Micheal Wolfers, features ten of Neto's poems.

The introduction captures the grim lives of the poets, acknowledging their contributions to journals in Europe and Africa. Neto's poetry, explained as being largely responsible for an awareness in Lusophone Africa's poetry, is shown as one of the factors responsible for the establishment of the cultural force together with Antonio Jacinto, Viratio da Cruz and

Mario Antonio that materialised into a political force. Lewis Nkosi, in Tasks And Masks (1981), treats the themes and styles of African literature.

Nkosi shows how the African struggle for political emancipation has a direct impact on "literature in general and poetry in particular" (p.163). The poetry coming from French and Lusophone Africa is shown to be closer to "public platform" than as found elsewhere in Africa. In this way Neto's poetry is shown as a voice of the people visualising the aspirations and exasperations of his society. This view confirms Neto as a cultural nationalist. But Ngugi WaThiong'o's Writers in politics (1981) is a collection of essays written in the fashion of a search for the relevance of literature.

Ngugi carries further his earlier conviction that literature cannot escape the role of reflecting the society although it depends on "what" and "whose politics". Literature and writers, he feels, cannot be exempted in engaging in combat reflecting the rate at which Africa is embracing Western culture. He, therefore, shows the identity of the poet as that of a politician in Africa and qualifies that "Agostinho Neto is an outstanding poet and politician. For him, the gun, the pen and the platform have served the same ends: the total liberation of Angola" (p.73). Thus Ngugi puts Neto's African revolutionary credentials in clearer perspective.

Ngugi's observation of what an African poetry is as found in Writers in politics, from the perspective of politics and culture manifested in Neto, is a relevant course in the comprehension of the poetry. In this way the cultural nationalism with which Austin Shelton classifies Neto's 'Aspiration' is also part of the Negritudinal assertion which the poetry takes at an early stage. Neto's major collection of poems, Sacred Hope, is, however, included in a guide published in 1983.

A New Reader's Guide to African Literature presents Sacred Hope as the winner of the Poetry of Combat Prize of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 1975. The assertive nature of the poetry is acknowledged and Sao Tome is described as Lusophone Africa's Sharpville. Neto is yet linked to Negritude but his political success is acknowledged as that of "A poet who wrote himself into the history of Africa". The Angolan concern is further buttressed by Abdalla Abdilatif.

Abdilatif, a Kenyan poet (jailed 1969 - 1972), in 'The Visionary Neto'[28], shows how Neto as a result of his poetic vision and political training analysed in a realistic way the problems of Africa, more

> than many other leaders of his time who viewed the struggle within the context of anti-colonialism . . . who soon after colonialism . . . joined hands with their erstwhile enemy to continue the exploitation of their own people.

He, therefore, sees Neto from the perspective of socialist realism to register him as an actualised poet in the mainfold of African patriotism.

From the analyses so far, it can be seen that Agostinho Neto's poetry has not been subjected to a close enough analysis that would bring out his creative vision. Except for Basil Davidson's historical view of Neto's mission and Morga Holness's critical assessment which both have relied on a bigger collection of the poems included in the introduction to Sacred Hope. In most instances, the themes or visions expressed could only be seen "through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways", mostly confined to setencial comments in introductory chapters of anthologies where only few of Neto's poems are published.

The analysis of Neto's poetry, therefore, is mostly done without observing the trends of circumstances in Lusophone politics in Africa although critics may have a vague idea of the emotive pulse in the poetry. This could be the reason why the two types of poetry - Negritudinal and Revolutionary nationalism - are confused by many critics.

Although there are elements of aberration in the views so far examined, there seems to be a consistent observation of Neto's poetry as protest literature which incorporates activism for political and cultural emancipation of Angola. It is in this respect that

D.I. Nwoga's assessment of modern African poetry in African Literature Today No.10, and how it has been tamed to suit tradition becomes a scholarly work. But his dating of African poetry of the "modern" type as having began in 1957 is, however, inadequate. Although the first issue of Black Orpheus heralds such serious poets as Gabriel Okara around that period, Neto had for instance already matured out of his Negritudinal romanticism into revolutionary assertion at the same period. We now proceed to the consideration of the East African Okot p'Bitek.

The early trend in the criticism of p'Bitek is that the poet is an Anthropologist, with a social and political criticism of Africa's condition. One of the earliest critical essays on p'Bitek is Ali Mazrui's 'The Patriot As An Artist'[29] which examines the political and cultural nature of the poetry establishing a sense of martyrdom in Song Of Lawino; the martyrdom of defending the old religion. The essay shows the influence of the poet as emanating from his patriotism. Whereas in The African Image (1974), Song Of Lawino and Song of Ocol are presented in a glimpse of what appears to be Mphahlele's process of establishing African poetry as a dialogue of two selves.

From the anthropological conception to martyrdom and patriotism, the trend shifts to being Negritudinal. Adrian Roscoe's Uhuru's Fire: African Literature East

to West (1977) contains a critical assessment of East African verse with an indepth study of Okot p'Bitek's poetry. Roscoe shows how modern poetry is a recluse in most parts of the world with a premonition over its looming hazard in Africa. In p'Bitek, Roscoe sees a panecea because he "might be drawing up the blueprint of one possible solution" (p.30). In this way, he also sees an active Negritude mind in the poetry. The African assertion is examined with an explanation of p'Bitek's ability to integrate other moods successfully into the predominant lament tone of the poetry. The political undertone in the 'Song of the Prisoner' as a dedication to Patrice Lumumba which is also influenced by the shooting of Tom Mboya in Kenya is acknowledged, with the poet's tighter control of his form which portrays the political tension. Roscoe, however, treats 'Song of Malaya' with indignation and recommends it to be dismissed "as a Rabelaissan jeu d'esprit, a holiday from commitment and wasted opportunity" (p.30). Okot p'Bitek as a poet has stunned the imagination of poets and critics. Roscoe, in Uhuru's Fire, sees him as a panecea because of the accessible nature of his oral traditional poetry, his fears over poetry as having a tendency toward the recluse in Africa can also be discarded in considering Neto and Sepamla. His indignation for 'Song of Malaya' cannot be accepted. The song cannot be dismissed so easily as a canard for the annoyance

of Sunday School teachers. It is rather an assessment of the cultural and political implications of the introduction of a money economy to Uganda with a need to expose the hypocritical behaviours of the champions of morality. On another level, it is the depiction of the decay in the society with an apt metaphor for its qualification.

Modern Poetry and the African Predicament (1978) by R.N. Egudu also treats p'Bitek's poetry from the Negritudinal approach of David Diop's 'The Renegade' and the theme of the 'White Washed'. These come under Egudu's idea of the images of colonialism. The political and cultural nature of the poetry is shown in the metaphors p'Bitek uses, as in the male organ, which is a cultural symbolism portraying "man's nationality and the bedrock of nationalism". The suggestive political aspects are further buttressed in what the politicians have made of independence in Uganda. The inter-party rivalries apparent in the poetry are shown to be a clear depiction of the Ugandan reality. p'Bitek then is shown throughout the study as a poet whose writings constitute "an effective study of the paradox of the political independence of Africa" alongside many of his contemporaries. The gap between the rich and the poor exposed in the poetry and the dehumanization shown in 'Song of the Prisoner' are explained by Egudu as vicious atrocities committed by soldiers and politicians in Uganda.

One of the other critical trends in the analyses of Okot p'Bitek's poetry is the recognition of his talents as an oral traditionalist. In A Celebration of Black and African Writing (1975), Micheal R. Ward's article assesses the question of an African form where p'Bitek is shown to have broken away from the seemingly absolute European poetic forms and thus scores a political point to influence his fellow poets to follow suit.

We arrive at a milestone in the study of East African poetry in H.G. Heron's The Poetry of Okot p'Bitek (1976). The book also hinges upon p'Bitek's oral traditionalism. Heron gives striking insights in his theoretical analysis of the satirical nature of the poetry. The 'Menippean Satire' derived from Northrop Frye that portrays the polemics of ideas governing social behaviour is an interesting anology. He goes on to show that Okot p'Bitek has under-rated the economic factor in his poetry. He uses Ngugi's terms to show the danger in p'Bitek to divorce culture from the political and economic basis of the society. Heron, therefore, registers the religious and cultural primacy in Okot p'Bitek over the economic factor. He also shows how 'Song Of The Prisoner' is influenced by p'Bitek's earlier work; African Religions in Western Scholarship.

Heron's observation that p'Bitek has under-rated the economic aspect in his poetry may be agreeable to some extent but it is not to suggest its absence.

In a poem, 'Return the Bride Wealth' that appears in Cook and Rubadiri's edition of Poems from East Africa, the economic aspect is quite pronounced as in the issues underlying the 'Song Of Malaya'. Heron is also influenced by Ngugi to assert the danger in Okot p'Bitek to divorce culture from the political and economic basis. This warning may be heeded, but the warning in itself is part of the African dilemma. In his book, Africa's Cultural Revolution, p'Bitek traces the genesis of the cultural problem experienced by Africa to Africans, which Roscoe acknowledges, rather than any alien force. This view had been a consistent phenomenon in p'Bitek as even in his Religion of the Central Luo, he is of the view that religions or cultural ideas influence oral literature.

Another view on oral tradition but with a bizarre approach is found in African Literature in the 20th Century. C.R. Dathorne registers Song of Lawino as a dramatic failure because the poet would not change from being a group spokesman, because of the oral style.

Dathorne's remark that Lawino is a failure in not being able to discard the voice of a group spokesperson becomes the strength of p'Bitek's poetry. The strength lies in the presentation of the dramatic monologue of an African's feelings in the powerful sensibility exhibited to Africa's new predicament which individualizes Africans who have lived collectively and spoken

as a group. The style portrays the collective voice that shows the nature of the African culture which is being undermined. But in African Literature a Critical Review (1977), David Cook has a different view with Dathorne.

David Cook pays homage to poets who use their tradition as "Okot has dived even deeper by leaping more vigorously from his own spring board" (p.38). Whereas D.I. Nwoga's 'Modern African Poetry: The Domestication of A Tradition'[30] assesses African poetry as that which includes the transcendental elements which allow the poet to be relevant to his tradition and thus retain his audience.

Nwoga shows how poets in Africa have domesticated a tradition and Okot p'Bitek's strong cultural nationalism is brought into focus. He concludes by giving guidelines of how a domesticated African poetry in English should reflect the cultural and political reality of Africa. Lewis Nkosi, on the other hand, treats p'Bitek in a similar trend with Dathorne.

In Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature (1981), Nkosi acknowledges p'Bitek as a leading oral traditionalist alongside Mazisi Kunene and Kofi Awoonor, but on the question of translating African language into English, Lawino appears unconvincing to him. He feels Lawino is too knowledgeable being covered behind the shield of naivety, which more or less shows the author is lurking.

But Nkosi's poetic dissatisfaction would be to miss the point. Lawino is neither a fabular nor a hyperbolic "naive" African. Culture provides the individual with a lense of perception. The narration of Lawino's practical experiences in her society with the contact with alien tradition may not seem contrived. It is rather interesting to see p'Bitek's success in setting a new approach in African poetry through the song genre which partly is a blend of the traditional praise poem in orature. African oral songs have been shown as intelligent compositions by Okot p'Bitek himself in The Horn Of My Love which features such traditional poets as Adoktoo: a blind poet with a political insight in the schemes of the colonialists.

In a similar trend, African Language and Literatures: An Introduction to the Literary History of Sub-Saharan Africa by Albert Gerard explains how The Eagle Press of the East Africa Language Bureau (EALB) rejected p'Bitek's War Pa Lawino having earlier published Laktar Miyo Kinyero Wi Lobo in 1953. Gerard shows Swahili creative writing as not having even come close to the creativity of Okot p'Bitek in Luo. The heavy indebtedness to the language traditions is the point Gerard uses in establishing the poetry as oral traditionalist.

p'Bitek's poetry yet features as a successful trial of the African song genre in New Reader's Guide to African Literature (1983). Two Songs is described as

the winner of the inaugural Kenyatta Prize for Literature 1972. The editors show 'Song Of The Prisoner' as an important literary landmark where prison is shown as a symbol for Africa.

Within the oral traditional approach, there emerged an application of Marxian dialectics on the poetry. Home-Coming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature by Ngugi WaThiong'o contains an essay on Okot p'Bitek and writing in East Africa. Ngugi sets the writing of p'Bitek against the earlier literary barrenness of East Africa in the Western medium. The examination of Song Of Lawino is as critical as it relies on purely social class perspectives. He commends the "critical realism" of the song as a major literary contribution and an avenue that has created new literary frontiers in East Africa, showing the influence of the poet as very profound. Ngugi argues that it is addressed to the self (self examination) which is a new mood and concludes by stressing that East Africa is not an arid literary zone as premised by Taban Loliyong in the Writers' Conference in Nairobi in the early '60s.

But in reality, the new trend in self examination has been reported by Paulo Freire[31] in his book, Cultural Action For Freedom (1977), when he explains -

> Something has happened since Frantz Fanon wrote The Wretched of the Earth; when that book appeared in the early sixties, Jean Paul Sartre noted with some alarm: he is not talking to us, in Fanon, said Sartre, the Third World had found itself and was speaking to itself; it was not concerned with the master world (p.7).

Similarly, R.C. Ntiru's review of Two Songs in East Africa Journal discusses the contradictions in society that lead not to its progress, unlike the theory of Karl Marx, but its disintegration apparently evidenced in the legislation passed over prostitution when the legislators patronise them. The examination is through critical realism of the paradox in African leadership.

Similarly, John Haynes, in his article 'Simplicity, Accessibility and Discourse in African Poetry'[32], applies structuralist linguistic method of analysis to Song Of Lawino to discover the poetry as having no socialist appeal. He explains that the translation exercise has further confounded the poetry to lose touch with originality.

Although translation of poetic works are known to lose a great deal of meaning, the non-socialist appeal may not be the criteria to judge the relevance of the poetry. Okello Oculi, however, treats the poetry from an entirely different perspective.

Oculi, who is an admirer of Okot p'Bitek, in a paper 'Liberation Social Anthropology And Song Of Lawino'

(1986), classifies the poetry under the disillusionment literature of the late 1960s, identifying racist undertones in the discipline of Social Anthropology. Oculi, however, holds the view that the discipline had already been an established field of knowledge when p'Bitek encountered it in the 1950s having been introduced as a field of study in Oxford in 1884. Since p'Bitek was of the view that by the late '60s (when colonialism was retreating) Sociology should have been more relevant to African scholars, Oculi argues that p'Bitek falls prey to the political insight derived by Evans-Prichards in his study of the classless Nuer. Through the polemics of casuistry, Oculi defines the poetry as "liberation" social anthropology that has gone rancid because Okot p'Bitek was still "faithful to the Method of the discipline while discarding its racist ethos"[33].

Okello Oculi's paper too, makes profound and pyrrhic economic demands on the poetry. For one who had been influenced by p'Bitek and had written The Prostitute, such demands would be strange. There are economic themes treated conveniently in other collections, and besides, Lawino's lament echos her insecurity as an uneducated housewife. The new social classes emerging after independence point to class stratification which is always based on economic relations. It would be best to probably treat the Song of Lawino from a metaphorical sense and as a

beginning of a trend with a cultural primacy to the contemporary dilemma of African existence. The success of the song lies in producing a mirror of what the new class of elites have become. The poetry is not esoteric as it is written in the Acoli tongue which widens the horizon of perception for the liberation.

The oral traditionalist approach in p'Bitek's style with cultural nationalism as its guiding philosophy is the more acceptable interpretation of the poetry, at least from the analysis of the poetry and the light in which p'Bitek has established his own lenses of perception in his other works.

On the whole, the trends in the literary criticism of Okot p'Bitek seem to be cyclical. As late as 1986, the anthropological notion mentioned in the early sixties is coming up again to dominate the discussion of p'Bitek. So from Okot p'Bitek we go to South Africa, to examine Sipho Sepamla.

The trends in the new generation of South African poets, which includes Sipho Sepamla, could be established as having started in the late 1960s when their poetry started emerging.

Protest And Conflict in African Literature (1969) by Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Monro, features articles concerned with alien rule as Clive Wake's 'The Political and Cultural Revolution' and the passionate essay by Dennis Brutus; 'Protest Against Apartheid'.

Interestingly, Brutus draws a continuum on which fall the whole spectrum of South African protest literature. In this manner, he safely creates a room for the later Black Consciousness poets to be somewhere between Alan Paton and Alex La Guma. Whereas Ezekiel Mphahlele's Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays (1972) is a critical work that traces the genesis of Black literatures through culture and politics.

A more serious analysis of the new generation poets through Oswald Mtshali could be seen in Mphahlele's The African Image (1974). Mphahlele reports the tactics of survival adopted by this group of writers, telling the reader their own caged situation in conventional English idioms by juxtaposing moments of social reality. They are walking on a tight rope. The new generation of poets are shown as "groping for a language" (p.239). Mtshali's urge to reach out for traditional inspiration is shown as one

> who spins out custom-made images and tries to let rhetoric do the feeling for him. But we find here an image of a man grappling with life in his own ghetto, trying to understand it in the context of social chaos. And that is a good beginning (p.239).

In a similar view, Nadine Gordimer's 'Writers in South Africa: The New Black Poets'[34] establishes that a new craving for poetry has been experienced in South Africa with their emergence, mostly induced by the availability

to the blacks. This has been so because

> out of this paralytic silence, has come the black writer's subconscious search for a form less vulnerable than those that led a previous generation into bannings and exile (p.132)

while on the other hand, taking the euphemistic possibilities of the poetic genre for double effect. It is a conglomerate of "the oral tradition and the politically charged idiom" (p.133). The essay is a thorough study of the styles exhibited by these new poets, tracing their "cryptic mode" to similarities found in the Skaz genre in pre-Revolutionary Russian literature. The allegory is also traced to a similar situation in the 'fabular Aesopean genre'. Although Gordimer shows the achievements of these poets as against their predecessors and raises most of the apparent themes, Sipho Sepamla's poetry has not been discussed.

Nadine Gordimer's ideas concerning driving creativity into itself is axiomatic in many of the poets because a similar trend has been reported by C.V. Wedgwood in her <u>poetry and politics Under the Stuarts</u>, written in 1961, where satire, irony and murky allusions are shown to express pent-up emotions. So inspite of the sophisticated world in South Africa and the under-developed black world through Apartheid, inhabitants of both worlds are shown as confined beings

with gloomy masks on their faces.

Another of Nadine Gordimer's essays, 'English Language Literature and politics in South Africa'[35], sheds more light on her political notions about South African writers. She examines most critical works, writers and poets as having "no overt commitment to a political line" (p.116) because they do not use political clichés. But her assessment of the poetry of the mid seventies is with the recognition of their Black Consciousness appeal. She commends the culture of writing introduced through imperialism and inspite of her preoccupations with censorship, she examines cultural identity as the basis for the "exploration of self in the imaginative writer" which "makes a national literature" (p.119). It is in Oswald Mtshali's 'Black Poetry in Southern Africa: What it Means' also in Aspects of South African Literature, that a portrait of the life of the blackman is shown as a series of poems in itself.

Mtshali, who is also part of the new generation poets, examines how an artist is influenced by his environment more than anywhere as in the restrictions found in South Africa. So poetry emanating from the blacks is heavily shaped by the laws that govern their lives. Although the article records a comparison of poetry of the seventies with those of twenty years ago, the harshness of the laws is shown to encourage the

proliferation of poetry. Mtshali recommends writing in the vernacular because it provides a writer with a world of freedom and a bigger audience as Ngugi recommends. In this way, he pledges for the liberation of the blackman through his poetry. Gerald Moore's indignation of African poetry in English - "English is not a tom-tom and it only sounds boring when it is played like one"[36] - is given a good counter statement when Mtshali says that their language is that of "urgency" because the poets are putting across their feelings. The experimentation of the new adaptations influenced by the political and cultural experiences show the operations of a new language of poetry within the Black Consciousness Movement.

As in the case of Lusophone literature in Africa, there are historical essays that help to show the social events which inspired poetry in South Africa too, especially for an understanding of the new generation poets. Archie Mafeje's 'Soweto and its Aftermath'[37] is an important assessment of the 1976 students' riots with a close-up of revolution itself as an ambiguous encounter.

In a similar assessment with Mafeje, Ngugi waThiong'o, in Writers in politics (1981), makes a casual reference to the children of Soweto who attempted to resist fascism to dismiss Mphahlele's earlier comments about the superiority of the English Language

which produced "sophisticated class of leaders" (p.57) although within the context of political resistance in South Africa. In a similar respect, A New Reader's Guide to African Literature captures the trend of events in this region.

The earlier publication of the guide was in 1972, but with its revision in 1983, there is a clear attempt to show the increase in African literature. Sipho Sepamla's poetry features. The Blues Is You In Me is presented as the joint winner of the 1977 Springle Award. The poems are described as simple and humble yet with a deep reverence for craftmanship; with a dauntless courage in exposing the injustices apparent in South Africa.

Many writers have, however, called for the accessibility of African poetry in simple language: Awooner in 'Prison and Poetry'; Chinweizu et al in Towards The Decolonization Of African Literature; Okot p'Bitek in World Literature in English edited by Berneth Lindfores. John Haynes' paper: 'Africa Was Never Discovered: A Reading Of 'In Search Of Roots' by Sipho Sepamla', however, explains that simplicity may not be a value per se, but it should be the type of simplicity that is "often the result of complex and difficult thought, and of sophisticated craftmanship" (p.2) as found in Sepamla.

Clive Wake, however, has a different assessment of Sepamla's poetry. In his essay, 'Poetry Of The Last Five Years'[38], Sepamla appears "wordier" in contrast

to Mtshali. The Soweto I Love is shown as somewhat prosaic with the poet's association of image and moral. He, however, acknowledges the style as similar to Mtshali and Sepamla's exploits of popular speech agree with Wopko Jensma's. The political preoccupations are shown as Negritudinal. This quality, however, is part of the Black Consciousness tradition of assertive poetry, which could equally be true of many of the poets of this generation.

The speech exploits as shown by Wake in Sepamla is not different from Mphahlele's observation of Mtshali's leap into imaginary tradition in The African Image. But in Sepamla, there is the influence of tsotsi-taal or street dialect of the black community which further buries his protests in face of the authorities but establishes their own lense of perception through the instrument of communication he has adopted.

It is Vernie February's review of The Soweto I Love in the same journal, African Literature Today, that comes to the rescue of showing the poetic qualities of Sepamla, whose simplicity of diction as in everyday speech carries a very deep symbolism or allegory which is not so easy to achieve. As stated by Clive Wake, February also assesses the influence Soweto has on the poetry of the generation which had become the focus of the world. Soweto is shown to have acquired various

connotations, the most prominent being political. Above all, it has a "cult value". The poetry is also shown to carry the echo of Can Themba but not without affirming the controlled anger which is always heading to give way to peace. February, therefore, acknowledges the political content of the poetry, and uses Nikki Giovanni's words to say "There is no difference between the warrior, the poet and the people" (p.258).

Although published in 1973, Robert Royston's edition of Black Poets in South Africa, which also includes one of Sepamla's poems, is a landmark in heralding the new talents which brought a revival of South African poetry after the bannings.

The nature of Sipho Sepamla's poetry falls within the new generation poets of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. In his poem 'To Whom It May Concern', his impact and association with the poetry of this generation could be seen. Although his only poem in Royston's anthology, it had carried the title of the earlier South African edition of this collection. He brings in a new form of alliterative metaphors like his contemporaries, which breaks what Gordimer calls the "paralytic silence" with a cacophony of new protest sounds. In 'To Whom It May Concern', the alliterative force in the repetition of the voiced bilabial plosive, B, cultivates the bastardization of the Bantu people.

It is, however, in Sipho Sepamla: Selected Poems

(1984) by Mbulelo Mzamane that there is a selection of Sepamla's poems in all his works of poetry which establishes his poetic vision. In the introduction Mzamane shows the poetry as not radical in comparison to the strident movement of his contemporaries. He is not a "fire-eating politician" (p.15) although his political messages come through indirectly. In The Blues Is You In Me, the poet is shown as trying to drop the regalia of euphemism and adopting a more audacious stand. In Sepamla, there is a stronger attachment to culture to an extent which cannot be said of the others. The Chakijana or Mmutlanyana myth of the Anansy figure is found in his blend. Mzamane shows that Sepamla's close experience with violence in Sharpville and again in Soweto hardens him to realise that South Africa may be heading for an unavoidable revolution which also changes the cadences of his poetry.

Because of its overt implications, it is true that Sepamla colours his phrases in euphemism as can be seen in Hurry Up To It! and even to some extent in The Blues Is You In Me, but he changes as observed by Mzamane to be more bold in his protest which fetches The Soweto I Love a ban. In his protest, one can sense the unfolding of revolutionary trends as in Neto. Whereas Neto has been hardened by prison, Sepamla is hardened by practical violence in Sharpville and Soweto. It is also true that the influence of Mtshali can be

seen in his personalized presentation of events in which there is a deep sensibility which attimes becomes reomantic as in his image of the peach tree. In his poetry, we see the trials of a new beginning.

The distinguishing feature of the New Generation poets in South Africa is basically centred on their styles rather than the perspectives which their poetry may adopt as in how Neto and p'Bitek have been handled by the critics. This is in line with the criminal ban the South African government has placed on the writers who came before the New Generation poets. Their task is no easy one as they are establishing poetry anew. Sipho Sepamla's poetry has already been fairly known, at least the context it is operating in, themes and styles, from the critical analyses applied to his contemporaries especially Mtshali.

However, the cultural and political trends critics are trying to establish can still be seen inspite of their preoccupation with the styles. Sepamla's poetry has been described as Negritudinal, Black Consciousness oriented, more enclosed and euphemistic; explicit traditionalist and overt revolutionary.

The methodology is derived on the basis of applying literary criticism to the poetry of Neto, p'Bitek and Sepamla in separate chapters. The three poets are chosen for the study in recognition of their political and cultural views at different stages of Africa's

experiences in the course of history i.e. colonial, independent and neo-colonial stages. This, it is believed, shall provide a scientific insight to the contemporary position of Africa. There is a need to give a historical explanation through the literary activities of these poets and what consequence they have for the immediate and the future.

Africa has experienced a lot of nationalist movements in her history. There is the need to re-examine some of these movements as they still continue to influence some of our poets and politicians. So the impact of the poets on their generations and the repercussions experienced today give us a need to reassess their roles in shaping the political and cultural activities of the African people.

The relationship poetry has with culture and politics should be examined critically so that we comprehend the behavioural attitudes of poets to certain given situations and understand their societies for the rehabilitation of Africans under domination. So poetry emanating from Africans has lots of similarities observable on the continuum of African thoughts provoked by colonialism. The three poets provide an array of views and experiences which could help shed light in this direction. The poets are chosen for their profound political and cultural views.

The breakdown of the chapters is based on defining the key terms for the study in Chapter One.

The chapter also considers the critical trends through a review of existing literature on the three poets. The researcher's views are also placed side by side. The chapter then establishes the methodology. The analyses of Agostinho Neto's poetry is conveniently broken into two chapters. The materials derived from the analyses could not be easily compressed into one chapter and besides, Neto's poetic vision had eventually changed after prison which further necessitates the division.

The analysis is influenced by the notion that Black cultures the world over are spillovers of cultural renaissance in the New World and Africa. This is seen in the concatenation of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and Pan Africanism through Negritude and Cultural Nationalism resulting in Black Consciousness in South Africa. Black Consciousness had been implanted by the 1920s in America which was sustained and tailored to meet the contemporary aspirations of the blackman.

In order to establish critical realism as a tool for analysing these poets, a lot of historical books have been consulted to help shed more light on the African revolution. The political developments have been captured especially in the enstrangement of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress on the Freedom Charter and the representation of the Congress of Democrats (white liberals) on the

Congress Alliance in South Africa. The Struggle For South Africa and No Easy Walk To Freedom give a good picture of this.

Frantz Fanon's The Wretched Of The Earth further concretizes the trend of examination. This helps to establish a discourse on the social, cultural and political life of Africa through the experiences of the Algerian condition. The thesis shares Fanon's ingrained feeling that whatever conditions suffered by the African, he does not succumb to the spirit behind that condition. In every fabric of the African's culture, there is the feeling of liberation and explanation, the collective value of which is to exorcise the culture because the African "discovers reality and transforms it into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom" (p.45).

It is the contention of this research that written poetry in Africa today owes much to oral poetry even in the case of the new generation poets. Albert Gerard's paper 'preservation Of Tradition in African Creative Writing"[39] argues that "the novel came to Africa as a new genre, alien to traditional art" (p.35) unlike poetry. This is not only in the technicalities involved in the acquisition and subsequent display of this new art, but it has been an art slowly and gradually developed by a society which is alien to the African background.

The praise poem is an example of oral poetry which encourages leaders and elders of a society and is blended to make the leaders not only conform to the basic norms, should they divagate, but also provide the succour, instigate valour and instil self-pride. The researcher has mused over the idea of treating Song of Lawino (at least some portions) as an example of the praise poem. The method of approach also conforms to the view that song composers in the oral tradition have been men of wisdom and great intellect, "the Swahili poet was often a religious teacher as well"[40]. Although people have disavowed the achievements of the praise poem, and Mphahlele believes it has been relinguished with the European conquest, due to maybe Africa's inability to decide who to sing to or that African heros are either dead or in jail and that even if alive, they appear too real. Albert Gerard, however, shows that it still exists though in a modified form.

The genesis of Africa's present-day realities, however, pushes poets to treat cultural, political and economic issues as motifs, rather than persons or personalities.

There is also the notion of African theatre as a more successful genre than poetry, but even here, popular theatres have verse-related compositions which proves the heavy indebtedness to oral poetry.

But Ali Mazrui's Towards A Pax Africana: A Study Of Ideology and Ambition links African nationalists with politics. Mazrui gives a definition of culture which makes it inevitable to align with politics. Culture, he shows, has seven basic elements. First it provides a way of looking at reality (lenses of perception), standard of evaluation (good or bad, legitimate or illegitimate), it conditions motivation (inspiration to act or not), medium of communication (language, gestures and modes of dress), it links people with the means of production (economic situation) and it defines identity (we and they). He uses these variables to examine if the contact with Europe has changed the African condition. It is an important observation which shares points of similarity with the literary field.

To shed more light on the study, effort has been made to contextualize word usage within the norms of the poet's society, and propositions drawn by Mounah Khouri in Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt are used as a guide.

The views presented by Micheal Wolfers in a review of Basil Davidson's The Ideology Behind Guerilla Warfare[41] are seen essential, especially in the technique for the liberation of Africa promoted by the MPLA, FRELIMO, POQO and Umkonto We Sizwe. The ideological commitments of anti-colonial nationalism and post colonial progress provide the study with more tools. Anti-colonial nationalism is shown as a mere change of

guards, from whites to blacks as shown by p'Bitek, while post colonial progress is a resolution of conflicts of class "within the new nation state in favour of many and not the few", as in the establishment of a socialist government in Angola.

Even as late as 1977, Steve Burniston and Chris Weedon when giving a discourse on art, literature and ideology in a book On Ideology, explained that they

> had become increasingly convinced of the impossibility, at present, of this project. On the one hand, it is impossible to theorize the literary text in isolation from much larger theoretical operations. On the other hand, the existing larger theories themselves do not seem to provide an adequate basis for the theorization of artistic practices (p.199).

They went further to assert that it was the first attempt to try to explore this area. There is a general sense of inertia in what they have embarked upon. Poets, however, have been exploring this for quite some time as in William Faulkner's Nobel Speech in 1950, where he does not talk about ideologies but shows the relationship poetry has with society; as a voice, poetry is a vehicle that enables the poet "endure and prevail"[42].

It is in this way that the methodology establishes a trend to view African poetry. The Acoli pastiche, Angolan and South African practices address themselves not only to the seamy side of their lives but also to the brighter and more glamourous aspects of their culture and traditional heritage within their

"contemporary literary norms". These are what a historian of literary change would find necessary and a point of departure for the evaluation of new literary works. "They determine the manner in which a given work is integrated into the national literature"[43].

The critical trends in Neto have been shown as viewed from very narrow channels except for few instances. There is a general observation of his poetry as Negritudinal but some critics have also captured the revolutionary nationalism which is the mark of his later poetry. The trends in p'Bitek are, however, varied. Critics have tried to establish the Negritudinal qualities, but the earliest observations are based on anthropological conception which also recur in the late eighties to suggest a cyclical trend. His poetry has also been observed through the angle of martyrdom, but the oral traditional considerations have given a new insight through which socialist realism is also applied to the poetry. The observation of Sepamla's poetry, however, is within the context of the Black Conscicusness Movement. Critics have helped establish the style of writing introduced by the New Generation poets. His poetry is also seen through the Negritudinal appeal and has been observed as euphemistic and later overt protest. But the study establishes a tendency toward revolutionary nationalism. It is then pertinent to proceed to an analysis of Neto's early poems in Chapter Two through the critical realism established in the methodology.

FOOTNOTES

1. Research in African Literature Vol.1 No.1 (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1970) p.104.
2. Ezekiel Mphahlele, Voices in the Whirlwind & Other Essays; (Hill & Wang, New York, 1972).
3. Mbulelo V. Mzamane, "popular Culture and Revolution: The Example of FRELIMO Poetry in Mozambique, 1962-1979". Paper presented at the conference on popular Culture & The Media, ABU, 1984.
4. G.D. Killam (ed), African Writers on African Writing. (Heineman, London, 1973).
5. Ezekiel Mphahlele, Voices in the Whirlwind & Other Essays (Hill & Wang, N. York, 1972).
6. Ali Mazrui, Towards A Pax-Africana: A Study of Ideology and Ambition (Univ. Chicago, 1967) p.4.
7. Ibid, p.43.
8. Ibid, p.200.
9. Ibid, p.195.
10. R. Priebe and T. Hale, Artist and Audience: African Literature As A Shared Experience (Three Continents Press, N.Y., 1979).
11. Review of African political Economy (No.18, May-August 1980) p.30.
12. "popular Culture and Revolution: The Example of FRELIMO Poetry in Mozambique, 1962-1979", p.1.
13. Modern Language Review: A quarterly journal edited for the Modern Humanities Research Association 1982, p.714.
14. Africa Events Vol.3 No.II (November 1987) p.52.
15. Ezekiel Mphahlele, Voices in the Whirlwind, p.156
16. West Africa, (April 17, 1978) p.750-751.

17. Ngugi WaThiong'o, Barrel of A Pen: Resistance to Repression in Neo-colonial Kenya (New Beacon Books, London, 1983) pp.55-71.

18. Ibid, p.81.

19. Ezekiel Mphahlele, The African Image, (Faber & Faber, London, 1974) p.67.

20. Ibid, p.9.

21. Albert Gerard, Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic (Univ. California, Berkely, 1971) p.125.

22. Zuka, No.1, 1967.

23. Saiwa, No.3, A Journal of Communication, A.B.U., English Department.

24. This condemnation, however, is in abstraction because he feels that self-apprehension "amounts to intellectual bondage and self-betrayal" p.viii.

25. The article appears in Robert Rotberg and Ali Mazrui's edition of Protest and power in Black Africa (Oxford University Press, New York, 1970) p.874.

26. Bruce King and K. Ogungbesan, ed., A Celebration of Black and African Writing (ABU Press, Zaria, 1975).

27. Mphahlele is specific in mentioning Angola and Mozambique.

28. Abdalla Abdilatif, 'The Visionary Neto', Africa Events, (August 1988) p.32.

29. G.D. Killam; ed., African Writers on African Writing (Heinemann, London, 1973).

30. Eldred Jones, ed., African Literature Today No.10: Retrospect And Prospect (Heinemann, London, 1979).

31. Author of the famous Pedagogy Of The Oppressed.

32. The essay appears in Saiwa: A Journal of Communication Issue 3, English Dept., A.B.U. Zaria, 1984.

33. Paper prepared for Conference on African Literature, University of Calabar, Nigeria, May 1986.

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35. Christopher Heywood, ed., Aspects of South African Literature (Longman, London, 1976.)

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CHAPTER TWO

AGOSTINHO NETO'S EARLY POEMS 1945 - 1954

The poetry of Agostinho Neto presents the political and cultural values of the Angolan people prior to the formation of serious political organisations by Africans and the subsequent events that unfold the revolutionary tendencies for liberating the nation.

The Angolan people have been experiencing the bondage of colonialism for centuries to which they have voiced out their dissent as early as the 1880s. That had been the period Portugal embarked on an armed conquest of African lands. Literary expressions have come into print at these material times when life had been saddened.

Contrary to the claims of Andriano Moreira[1], a portuguese anthropologist, Jose de Pontes Pereira in a weekly published in Angola (The Future of Angola), "castigated Portuguese rule, which had brought only slavery and ignorance"[2]. Ever since the 1880s, poetry began to be used as a weapon to counter the atrocities of the colonialists. Cordeiro da Matta was one such patriotic poet of that era. Up to the 1920s, poetry has been a useful tool for the propagation of the African way of life and demand for that life. At the turn of the century, a publication of Angolan intellectuals came into force (The Voice of Angola Crying Out in The Wilderness). This publication intellectually challenged

Portuguese policies and showed their contradictions clearly. It had been a serious political document for revealing the political, cultural and economic situation of the Angolan people and people living under the domain of portugal. It set the Angolan people on a pedestal of political awareness and some took to publication as a gesture of their response. Volatile literature came into being though the colonial regime had started clamping down on writers by the 1920s. This had been the period of the rise of fascism in Europe.

> In Europe and Asia, there was a mounting struggle between the popular forces and emergent fascism, which further institutionalised racism, terror, slavery and death, and raised the denial of science and culture to the level of state policy. Fascism in portugal intensified the cruel repression of the Angolan people and their spokesmen[3].

The people in Africa have been experiencing the political polarities of Europe as all state policies were implemented in the colonies. This, therefore, had been the reason for the long silence of the Angolan people and their poets in the two decades before the 1940s. It was not until the second half of the 1940s that poetic activities resumed; that is, precisely after the defeat of fascism in Europe in 1945. In terms of cultural degeneration, the Angolan people have also suffered similar fates with French colonies in Africa

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which Neto acknowledges in his poetry.

Agostinho Neto is Angola's prominent poet and statesman, who helped found the modern era of Angolan poetry in portuguese in the late 1940s;

> the African languages were rarely written in the portuguese colonies, except in a very few periodicals started by Africans from the 1880 . . . The native-born intellectual would tend to express himself in portuguese even and especially if he was an African nationalist[4].

Angolans experienced a lot of hardship under portuguese colonialism. The poems that emerged by the late 1940s only allude to the untold suffering and brutality which their natives have countenanced over the centuries. It is in many ways similar to the South African situation, and people have argued that portuguese colonialism has been more repressive and vicious than South African fascism.

Agostinho Neto, a medical doctor by profession, involved himself in the cultural movement led by Viriato da Cruz and Antonio Jacinto for the 'rediscovery' of Angola. This cultural movement was for the retrieval of their community's lost identity and sense of political awareness. At that initial stage, they had realised the uselessness of western culture which was pervading Africa. At his imprisonment in 1960, he had also been knee-deep in the activities of the democratic resistance movement which aided his escape from portugal in 1962.

An important distinction in Angolan poetry is the uniqueness of Neto's poems. There is a high development of the art of poetry through the craftmanship involved. His type of poetry stands the test of propaganda even though he is advocating for a cause. His skill is highly refined, documenting the events in a dynamic way inspite of his leadership goals. He does not revolve around the issues as a measure for personal aggrandisement or to score cheap political points. The poetry exhibits unique characteristics which one realises are vital and handy for the evaluation of the society. Neto's poetry transforms into a genuine demand of the Angolan people and all the oppressed people of Africa. It explains the stand of the oppressed as people pushed to the wall. The efforts of Neto and indeed his other colleagues in the organisation, the MPLA founded in 1956, became a threat to portuguese activities. The colonial regime, therefore, decided to crack down on the organisation. Most of the members were banned, imprisoned or banished into exile. The nationalists, however, did not relent in their efforts of liberation. They joined the military wing of the organisation to continue to fight. Neto continued to gain support and recognition and continued writing poetry even when in jail.

The history of Angola saw the total ban on poets from 1961 to 1974. Poetry became a weapon to fight the

Portuguese. Before 1961, their poetry had been the cynical type with high records of achievement. The poets delved into historical exposé to bring home their metaphorical inference of the condition of the blackman. The clairvoyance of Angolan poets could be seen in their trial to show the world the possibility of racial integration and harmony which is embarked on by their nationalists. This is contrasted with the evil intents of racism backed by western civilization. This is very easy to discern by glancing at the role of the type of people participating in the war of liberation.

There had been a high restriction of the circulation of their poetry which appeared in journals as 'The Luanda Message' published by the cultural department of the Association of Angolan Nationals between 1951 and 1952. Some appeared in 'Cultura' published by the Cultural Society of Angola between 1957 and 1961. The Portuguese police, PIDE, made a number of arrests in 1959 and 1960 in reaction to the poetry emanating from the nationalist Angolans. The ban on poetic publications that encourage nationalistic feelings among Africans was effected in 1961, which made the literature scanty and obscure. The ban was in all the African colonies of Portugal.

Poetry in Angola is only recently being accorded significance by the English-speaking world. It was, however, first made available in French. Agostinho Neto's

poetry supersedes in heralding the atrocities of the Portuguese and the agony of the Blackman in these colonies. His poetry has appeared in Europe and other anthologies in Africa. Some others appear in the selection of Angolan poetry translated by Margaret Dickinsen published under the title When Bullets Begin To Flower by the East Africa Publishing House in 1972. The poems, however, are generally available under the title Sacred Hope published by the Tanzania Publishing House in Dar-es-Salam in 1974.

The poetry coming from the two cultural organisations which metamorphosed into a political one on 10th December, 1956 as the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, MPLA, represent the view of the majority of those under the colonial hegemony. They had a voice of dissent which culminated into their arrest. Their works were generally labelled 'forbidden' poetry.

Neto was one of the regular contributors to the 'Mensagem', a bulletin produced by the House of Empire Students.

The 1964 - 1974 decade saw very repressive actions taken against the Angolan poets by the colonial authorities. The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola, MPLA, embarked on a programme of enlightenment.

Although their movements were heavily monitored and their activities censored, they were able to reach out with their message to get a few people. The guerilla

organisation became a standing army of liberation when they adopted the name; People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola, FAPLA.

When dealing with the issue of politics, poetry and culture, it is impossible to separate Agostinho Neto's political poetry from the culture of the Angolan people.

> Agostinho Neto's political pre-eminence is well matched by his reknown and standing as a cultural force[5].

The political nature of Neto's poetry could be discerned in his fight for the freedom of his people. Under his leadership, the MPLA organised an information Bureau in Conakry. Though they were relatively being forced to exile their activities, in Guinea, they were able to salvage support and gain the sympathy of people who were entirely unaware of the condition of the Angolans. By 1957, the portuguese have resuscitated the PIDE to counter the activities of the nationalists. The MPLA had rejected the presence of the portuguese Air Force as a design by the colonialists tc further enslave their people. Arrests were made and MPLA's pioneer president, Llidio Machado, together with 59 others, was arrested and tried at the Trial of the Fifty in July 1959. Neto's arrest was made on June 8, 1960. After his arrest and subsequent jailing, the MPLA leadership had seriously been crippled.

However, those remaining in Luanda carried on with the struggle.

Portuguese territories in Africa have experienced the anguish of colonialism for over four hundred years but little of their poetry is published. This could relatively be due to the scanty number of speakers of the portuguese language[6]. This may also explain the equally relative non-awareness of people in the world about portuguese repressive policies in her colonies. Not until the hijacking of the luxury ship, Santa Maria, by a former portuguese colonial Inspector, Captain Henrique Galvao in January 1961 did the world realise the state of portuguese colonies. Galvao's action as a political commentator and activist has not been egocentric. In 1947 he had indicted the portuguese government over her colonial policies; "The natives are still generally regarded as mere beasts of burden"[7]. Because of this accusation, he was imprisoned. Galvao's piracy of the 'Santa Maria' and his incendiary speeches saw to the overthrow of the Salazar regime. He had been inspired by revolutionary activism and many confidants of the portuguese regime opted for the African revolution. More foreign journalists trooped into Angola to report on the activities of portugal which had been obscured from the world.

Inspite of the progressive attempts made by Galvao to end the repressive activities of his country in

Africa, he had suspicions about African nationalists as communists. This scepticism had to be solved by journalists for whose presence Galvao takes the credit. Galvao's contradiction had been an inborn social indoctrination which he had not totally overcome:

> Civic ambition on the part of the Angolans had always been regarded as a criminal act. One explanation for this is that the portuguese dictatorship has, itself, no democratic traditions to pass on. But these African demands were also regarded as a threat to the everlasting link between portugal and her colonies. As for independence, it was never so much as mentioned; not even as a utopian possibility. This is why no dialogue has ever been able to take place between the authorities and the African parties[8].

Kinaxixi is the name given to the Luanda Central Market. Neto's poem 'Kinaxixi' written about 1950 gives a sense of resignation as experienced that time. It is a poem that captures the slow poison of portuguese colonialism as experienced by the poet. He becomes a participant observer of his society to document its existence. The pitiable condition of his people is clearly expressed in this poem. It is a poem that captures an evening in the people's day-to-day activities as they while away their time drunk without any purpose. The people drink, not to get drunk but to reach out for something more in every drop of alcohol. Their search for love and glory is in vain and suggests the strong

absence of a binding cultural force. His poetry only laments in this respect the evening where Africans are supposed to spend their time with their families around the fire place or the village play playgrounds. It is a picture of a people yearning neither of happiness nor hatred. There is an allusion to their lack of political freedom and loss of culture. They are satiated of emotions at sunset with the simplicity of their lives that they have to perpetuate which strangely is a burden. They are shown as trapped people as they inherit servitude because of their colour.

Beneath the lamentation, the poem has a very strong message. It operates on a subterrenean level with a strong indictment on the culture of passivity and monotonous routine of rumbling. Neto suggests that Angola should adopt an alternative measure to this sort of life. "After sunset / the lamps would be lit?" (p.10). He is suggesting for the lamps of freedom to shine and that the sun would rise for their struggle to be a success. His poetry operates both on the literal and the symbolic levels. 'Kinaxixi' is a poem full of Negritude images and the similarity that may abound in Neto's poetry with that of the Negritude Movement, especially David Diop, is in the tone of rejection and lamentation. Diop's earlier poems are more hopeful as those of Neto. But Neto's 'Farewell At The Hour Of Parting' is one exception to this generalization.

There are moments when the passion in poets may fall into a low tide over the fantasy with freedom. 'Farewell . . .' is one poem that represents the hopeless condition of the African; "But life / Killed in me that mystic hope" (p.11). There is a tone of despair even though it is part of Neto's African society to be patient at bad times. He boldly says "I am no longer patient" (p.11). Due to the revolutionary tendencies of his poetry, he does not stop at that. This produces the ambivalence of his poetic tradition as Neto introduces the theme of the migrant worker to drive home his idea of hope only in a revolution:

> We are the hope / your sons /
> Who went away for a faith that
> sustains life (p.11).

Through the poetry, we catch glimpses of the nature of the society in which the Africans thrive. Children wander in their nakedness without schools. Although Diop longs for this nakedness as he blames the conquerers of giving his people uniforms of steel. Nelson Mandela[9] also laments for the lack of schools for his own people as Neto does in 'Farewell . . .'. Children like the adults around Kinaxixi in the evening, wander because of their depressing situation. This realization brings the horrors of a pessimistic future.

'Farewell . . .' is a poem that raises the theme

of economic exploitation through the activities of the contract labourers who burn up their lives in the coffee fields. The Africans are forced to adopt a culture of snobbery; "show respect to the whiteman / and be afraid of the rich" (p.11). The under-development of their living conditions is given more prominence with rejection and indictment in the poem. They build the society but do not possess rights and good housing. They dwell in shanty towns. It is the picture of a people who starve in a land of abundance always tipsy as the frustration corrodes their lives. They are "lost in a rhythm of a death drum" (p.12).

The portuguese authorities have completely alienated the Angolans on their own land as they are made timid; "ashamed to call you mother / afraid to cross the streets / afraid of men" (p.12). Despite the taming of the Africans, the poet in a paradox hopes against hope that "Tomorrow / we shall sing anthems to freedom / when we shall celebrate / the day of the abolition of this slavery" (p.12). political and cultural freedom are the basic concerns that would lead to a total economic self reliance and freedom. The poem ends not only with the hope of freedom "go in search of light", but "go in search of life" (p.12).

The political and social appeal that come from Neto's poetry could be discerned in his disgust over the impoverishment in his society. The shanties

described in the poetry which denies the people their own privacy are "in the skeleton of stick and mud / bent threateningly / as it bears the weight of the zinc roof" (pp.8-9). The image gives a political, cultural as well as an economic picture of a burdened Africa.

The issue of contract workers is raised in the poetry to show how the Angolan victims are cut off from their families and thus lose touch with their culture. They spend their lives day in, day out in the colonial plantations and mines. Their lives are eroded bit by bit by the cheap liquor illicitly brewed in the Shebeens. The African drums bring them to a nostalgic state as they long for their homes. This category of people often stay for more than two years minimally and as long as their contracts are not terminated before they could see their families. It is a deliberate policy to dehumanize them gradually. As they lose all links with their people, there emerges an alien culture of confusion and fragmentation. The migrant workers play the drums during their free times until they are choked with emotion. The guitar is manipulated to produce similar Jazz music and Rythm and Blues as produced by Blacks in America and the West Indies.

Inspite of these images that give a realistic picture of Angola from the 1940s, the portuguese

authorities have argued over the years, saying:

> by the intensive settlement of people from continental portugal. For this settlement depends the formation of the integrated multi-racial communities without which, I repeat, Africa will have neither progress nor order nor civilization nor the rights of man[10].

These images presented by Neto are not meant to shock us, but rather give a vivid picture of the disintegration of the cultural values of a society in contact with alien political and cultural forces.

Agostinho Neto, therefore, urges the Africans to run the gauntlet of the whites' racial war. The Africans are portrayed as condemned people "awaiting their hour" (p.9). But the poet cheers the people up not to conform to pessimism.

Freedom is one of Neto's main concerns that feature in his poetry. There is nothing more oppressive than the lack of freedom. He captures the feelings of the Angolans and indeed oppressively colonized people when he writes:

> In men / burns the desire to make the supreme effort / so that man / shall be reborn in every man / and hope / shall turn no longer / into the lamentation of the crowd (p.9).

The society as a result of the clash between the two conflicting cultures seems to have lost its sense of morality. The European type of dance described by

Lawino in her song is found here too. The muffling of the cultural voice is presented through the mystical anxiety experienced by the people. All the anxieties experienced push the people to acquire a sense of identity by "unfurling heroic banners / in the enslaved souls". The aggression and fear find an outlet through a political idea of uniting for a purpose[11].

The themes that espouse Portuguese political domination and lack of care about the colonies range from "The aridity of the Earth, longing for fertilizing showers, physical exile and a spiritual emptiness, a cavalry of bodily and mental agony"[12].

'Saturday in the sand slums' is a poem that introduces the issue dealing with the mental experiences suffered by Africans under colonialism. There are three main features that govern the African mind: despair, hope and anxiety. The poet justifies the humility of the African as the "Sand-slums are humble townships / for humble folk" (p.3). Saturday is the Jewish Sabbath which also is marked in portuguese territories. The poem is reflective of Oswald Mtsali's 'Its Saturday Night'. Neto uses the image of the twilight zone to describe the beginning of rest days. It is on a Saturday that he observes the lives of the colonizer and the colonized. It is on a Saturday that the cultural impact is registered more on the conscience when everything becomes "topsy-turvy with life itself /

transformed into despair / into hope and into mystical anxiety" (p.3). It is a zone where the observer clearly perceives the contamination of African culture. The African cannot break free from the "veiled presences" silhoutted by the twilight. It is only through his crepuscular vision that Neto succeeds in retracing the path of his Africanity because:

> in recent times, even the native born African writer in those countries has lost direct, living contact with the patrimony of folklore, whenever he moved to the city and received his education there, as in the case of Mario Antonio Fanandes de Oliveira, who went to Luanda (Angola)[13].

The paradox of life produces a chilly poignance in the life of the African. The city is an urban jungle where life is unsafe and insecure which is so enigmatic to the African mind; "jumbled in bizarre orchestration" (p.3). It is as a result of this puzzle that people develop an anxiety to know the "meaning of things / and of human beings" (p.3). They develop anxiety and restlessness in a peer-group fracas. Alcoholism is the hallmark of this quest for the comprehension of things. The depiction of the vagueness of their lives is in many ways similar to the devices found in the literature of the absurd, especially in the treatment of the theme of understanding.

Fear is one very important factor that shows the

negation of their humanity. It is a factor that grips the people due to the terror the colonial police have promoted. The colony is a police state with all sorts of barbarism, where people are killed at the slightest provocation. The typical policeman is a sadist who "puffs out his chest with satisfaction / at having maltreated a man" (p.4). This notion is in consonance with Frantz Fanon's idea of the synonymity of colonialism with police brutality. This is a poem that captures almost the whole landscape of colonized Angolan life; the anxiety and fear which pervaded the territories.

Violence is institutionalized[14]:

> Others will shy at passing / where
> the truncheon has downed the man
> will turn on their heels / will
> jump over walls / will tread on
> prickles in unshod feet will cut
> themselves / on the shards of
> bottles smashed by innocent
> children (p.4).

The last two lines metaphorically capture the innocence of African culture. There is an allusion to not only alcoholism in the broken bottles which endangers the lives of the people but also to the fragmentation of the African way of life through colonial interference. Each of the fragments becomes a dangerous possession as it does not fall within the context of a whole; but it serves as an element of identification and at times consolation; this is the confusion:

Apart from the brutality of the police, and unlike many other African colonies, the Angolan climate is also marked by the presence of soldiers. They seem to be set loose on the inhabitants like mad dogs. They are similarly sadistic, "having fun / as they lurk in the shade . . . in wait for the unwary passers-by" (p.4).

From the poem 'Saturday in the Maceques' alone, one can deduce that Angola has been made a sordid jungle controlled by amoral people, unschooled in African cultural standards and social etiquette. The authorities ride on a wave of abuse and commit all sorts of crime. They molest the innocence of children and sometimes buy off their parents.

The poetry turns out to be an avenue to report the crimes against humanity and hold dialogues on social conventions without being preachy. This is evidenced by the laceration of the community and the explicit revealing of the interference of the authorities into the reserves of the African people; whether private or public. The authorities defy the very norms they label western civilization. In this way, they carry the seeds of their own destruction as acknowledged by Cabral:

> The most serious mistake made by the colonial powers in Africa may have been to ignore or underestimate the cultural strength of African peoples (p.13).

It is through poetry that Neto reports the poverty

and impoverishment of the people as the colonial authorities continue to harass the freedom of the people.

The notion of innocence is carried further in his poetry to harangue the reader as children blame their fate. Innocence is yet transformed into naivety in a philosophical arrangement. People quarrel over debts and in beer palours. Their frustrations are revealed through these brawls. This expository method of revealing to the world the condition of the Angolan people is a feature in Neto's early poems; as it is with Antonio Jacinto ('Poem of Alienation').

It took Nelson Mandela bolder statements and confessions in the fashion of calling a spade a spade to announce the demand of his people in the crowded court room during the Rivonia Trial[15]. Agostinho Neto's society has not been allowed to come face to face with the authorities. 'Saturday in the Maceques' as the poem appears in Sacred Hope is written about 1948 which is prior to the formation of any strong political or cultural organisation to seriously challenge Portuguese colonialism. The poem shows people gropping. This does not in any sense give an idea of the people giving the colonial situation a benefit of the doubt. Far from it, the Nationalists have experienced the anguish and plunder of the European political motives ever since they set foot on the continent. Whatever the meaning

of what they are experiencing, they already hate it. Although conspicuously silent as a result of fascism, there are "tears of hatred" which is the beginning of the culture of resistance and opposition.

The trauma of civil disturbance and general disorganisation are the issues that seek explanation in in the mind of the African. This has been the cause for his development of anxiety which spreads in all directions as ripples.

Even in places of entertainment such as the cinema, the African has that anxiety, due to oppression and the fragmentation of his own culture. As a result of this, the oppressed does not have the solace he desires, his conscience is disturbed. The gadgets in the cinema only register more confusion on his psyche. The colonization experienced is one that tells on the people physically too. The restlessness and worry is also found to stir up in the African drums. Natural African tradition with its romantic life is compared in the metaphorical inferences of pairing, "The full moon / burning instead of lamps / of street lighting" (p.3). The paucity of an African standard of brightness and beauty is thus uniquely portrayed in the poetry.

Anxiety grows in the child who runs away from the police as seen in Sepamla's <u>The Soweto I Love</u>. The brutality is in a similar trend as both states conform to fascist laws. But Neto here, in the poem

'Saturday in the Maceques', uses the word 'anxiety' for emphatic purposes to report the undertaking of the Africans, it is in this way that we realise the candour of the word. It turns out to be the yearnings of the people "Cry of longing . . . days of liberty"[16] (p.7).

As early as 1945, one of the recurrent themes in Angolan poetry had emerged. Neto's poem, 'departure for forced labour', was written that year. It is a sad poem that brings the image of the suffering Africans in a picturesque manner. "The face depicts the soul / creased with suffering" (p.2). As a result of the culture of insecurity that was taking shape in Angola, Sao Tome is identified as a cold place where the hopes of the Africans are drowned. People are generally conscripted to forced labour:

> Far on the horizon suddenly / the sun and the ship / are drowned / in the sea darkening / the sky darkening the earth / and the woman's soul (pp.2-3).

This depicts the complete subjugation of the political and cultural life of Angola, with a pun on dark and light. The whole continent is thrown into darkness of unbearable proportions; "Blackness / only blackness", with "no light / no stars in the dark sky" (p.3).

The political message which Neto's poetry presents is vivid and done without the mincing of words.

Although he uses a lot of Euphemisms as a poetic technique, they do not result in mystifying his objectives to the level of obscurantism. Unlike, for example, Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okigbo, who are influenced by the oral myths of their traditions, Neto does not make the tradition of his people an end in itself. Soyinka, for instance, is so much attached to the cult of Ogun that he becomes rather incomprehensible and obscure; worse still, he uses metaphors like Okigbo that reflect the tradition of lands other than his own. Neto's sensibility depicts the culture of his people almost at all levels of their colonial experience. 'Departure for forced labour'[17], therefore, recollects with pathos the death of his people's freedom. The verisimilitude of his poetry can be sensed in the lines as he does not preach about strong hope which propagandists would immediately venture to embark upon. He poses a strong question: "left for Sao Tome / beyond the sea / until when?" (p.2). The ubiquitous image of darkness and twilight are also captured in this poem to bring to the realization of the world that the life of the African people has been silhouetted; caught in the trap of colonial cultural manipulation; depersonalised to mere shadows on Earth.

Agostinho Neto's charisma, achieved through his poetry, could also be seen in his poem 'the bush path' written about 1948. It has been adopted by the freedom

fighters as their anthem ever since the Angolan war of liberation began in 1961. The people draw inspiration from his poetic profession.

The thematic strength of Neto's poetry takes into consideration, the burning political and cultural issues in Angola. His poetry interprets culture for political awareness. In his poem, 'Fire and Rhythm'[18], the technique of contrast is used to bring home the paradox of African life. There is contrast between paved city streets and footpaths of old. There is also the contrast between natural and unnatural "sounds of shackles on the roads" (p.1) which connotes the culture of slavery and "songs of birds" that implies freedom in nature. This image of the contrast in 'Fire and Rhythm' is further heightened to the picture of destruction as in "Coconut groves / fire / fire in the bush grass" (p.1). There is a destabilization act which the picture portrays. portuguese political ambition has set fire on the African way of life. In a Negritudinal posture, Neto celebrates the African way of life in the rhythm of the tom-tom through these contrasts. Although the exaltation oi Africaness in poetry had also been a phenomenon marking Mozambican poetry in the late 1950s and early 1960s[19], there is a distinct approach to the celebration of the African past from the romantic verbosity of Negritude poetry in Neto. The contrasting images are then synthesized at the close of the poem.

This carries a sense of gradual approach in raising the issues discussed in the contrast to seek for a panecea within the contradistinctions in the society.

African foot paths are abandoned for the desolate city streets, people seem to be "in exodus from everywhere" (p.1) signifying the proletariat class as a product of the new culture. In Angola, they are of mixed colour though heavily dominated by the blacks followed by the mesticos. The MPLA as an organisation uses four main languages for propagating her ideals: French, Portuguese, Kikongo and Kimbundu. Angolans living in their thousands in the Congo are appealed to through the French language. Angola has a large Bantu population and to the south of this country live the Heroro and Obambo[20]. The country roughly lies between the 6th and the 18th parallels of Southern latitude. Kikongo and Kimbundu live to the east. Congo is to the north. As the crackdown on opposition continued, Angola's Southern part which contains the Kalahari desert became the home of nationalists.

The land is personified in 'lands felt' to expose yet the burden it has in containing the atrocities committed by the portuguese on its inhabitants. In all respects, allusions are made to the lack of freedom too. "perfume of the flower / crushed in the forest / by the immorality of iron and fire / of lands felt / in the dream soon dissolved in rattle of prison keys" (p.40).

The repeated use of rhythm in 'Fire and Rhythm' gives a clue to our understanding of Neto's society. It gives a clairvoyance of the heavy military drills which take place in almost all the Regions controlled by the guerillas for political liberation. But there is the symphony of rhythm in all the activities of the African people, their movements, celebrations and battles. People have toiled for the success of the MPLA and the Angolan revolution. The slow but steady movements of the Angolan people with all the anguish and suffering, exposition to the harshness of natural forces and hazards of life, to achieve their independence is captured throughout the poetry. These pictures are set against the background of an Africa that had never experienced such agonies: a garden of Eden in rot through the interference of the whiteman. This is clearly a Negritudinal[21] approach, but it is only through such juxtapositions that a fair degree of authenticity may be derived.

Agostinho Neto's 'African Poem' which appears in the anthology of African poems edited by Soyinka, is a more explicit registration of Africa's loss of culture. The sudden loss is mourned in the metaphor of a burning tree: "There on the horizon / the fire / and the dark silhouettes of the imbondeiro trees / with their arms raised / in the air the green smell of burnt palm trees". Neto's success in poetry can be

traced to oral tradition which is rich in euphemistic language conducive for poetic connotations. The image of the mulatress is brought into this particular poem to show them as an aspect of social reality as a result of the contact of the two races. The mulattos have always aspired to be recognised as part of the white entity; especially in Southern Africa where it is an avenue for higher standards of living. Neto again uses the image of the twilight to issue a strong comment on the changing cultural pattern as a result of the contact. This theme recurs in his poetry: "On the horizon . . . / on the sky the reflections / of the fire / and the silhouette of the blacks at the drums".

Satire is one of the stocks in Neto's trade, although it has not been developed into a motif. Even if such tones, he argues over the danger posed by this change as the blackman suffers himself over trivialities; "the sleepless man thinking / of buying knives and forks to eat with at table". The contradictions in acquiring meaningless cultural traits and other such decorum is clearly put in perspective. The poet's sensibility to the suffering of the lower class of people can be read between the lines of his poetry; "on the road / the line of Bailundo porters / groaning under their loads of crueira".

The irony of Neto's poetry could be deduced from the comparisons apparent between the Builudo porters

and the mulatress prostitute making her face up. The social concern with cosmetics and their use in Africa is one given thorough treatment by Okot p'Bitek. It is raised here to expose the folly of parodying Europeans. The poem ends with a note of alarm over the rapid spread of western cultural standards of beauty at the expense of Africa: "The burning coals consuming / consuming with fire / the warm country of the horizons".

The images of 'The grieved lands'[22] continue to pervade the greater part of Neto's poetry. The general concern with the African people in Angola is extended to the forests of Africa as well. The poem is a dedication to the African landscape which is grieved and made desolate as a result of foreign occupation. The poem laments the crushed flowers, the beauty of the African landscape and forests crushed "by the wickedness of iron and fire" (p.13). The land is enstranged from its people, "in the dream soon undone in jinglings of goalers' keys" (p.13). With a sense of aural appeal, colonized Angola is shown here as a prison for the Africans. The insinuation about an unnatural existence is deduced in the stifling of the peoples' way of life. The poem is in many respects a metaphor of the crushed life of the African people. But the poet does not stop at that, he identifies the African people as an indefatigable social reality.

people who have survived "the tearful woes of ancient and modern" (p.13) slavery. poetry is used as an unflinching tool for the propagation of African woes and promotion of hope that is "Alive". The impingement of the centuries of slavery hardens them to appear unflagging as "They shout out the sound of life" (p.13).

Despite all the suffering inflicted on the Africans, Neto sings in his poetry the hope in living on "the grieved lands of Africa" (p.13). The unity of Angolans is in the consciences, for there is "the harmonious sound of consciences / contained in the honest blood of men" (p.14). Reality, according to Neto, is in living, as the African people do not perish with their culture, there always is a hope of revival, the upsurge of which proves the essence of reality and living.

From the assessment of his poetry so far, Neto has sacrificed his entire life to the struggle for the freedom of his own people. In a poem written on his birthday 'A birthday' in September 1961, he presents the picture of his society through telegrams and letters. The usual bustle of life in his society is captivated in a mirror-like presentation. He writes captivatingly about the humility and stoicism apparent from his people as a mark of the legacies inherited from a dying tradition, the African way of life: "poverty / calmly

accepted in a religious life" (p.15).

The poet also gives a picture of the hope bestowed by his people on those trained in western education, the pride they have in his training as a medical doctor. The expectations of their society place them to adopt the role of liberators. The western type of education is not rejected by the Angolan elites, only the denial by the portuguese of the privileges associated with their statuses is strictly rejected. The poetry laments and at the same time rejects the culture of terror spread around the world by the colonial west. The poem has a similar revolutionary tone with Pascal Gwala's 'The Growing', when Neto says "in the world there is building / And our son trained in medicine / will also build!" (p.16). With these lines, the poet registers his protest against the negation of African values and picks up the challenge "with the certainty and uncertainty of instants" (p.16) to always remain opposed to alien subjugation.

The strength of Neto's poetry is in vocalising his own sour feelings in an environment made so mute by portuguese authorities[23]. Tasting the sourness of life had been part of his constitution ever since childhood. His feelings on this particular day, tasting the bitterness of life is portrayed vividly. On his birthday, very much like other days "of tasting the tamarind / when we say nothing do nothing suffer

nothing / as a tribute to bondage" (p.16). The repetition of the word 'nothing' carries a sense of poverty of the Angolan people. Life as an exiled Angolan is like being in a state of inertia observing one's age going in a resigned state of inactivity. But as typical of Neto's poetry, he ends the poem rhetorically "A useless day like so many others until one day / but of a necessary uselessness" (p.16).

The genius of poetry as a weapon for political challenge and an equipment to feel at one with one's aspirations is clearly perceived in 'Shadows'. The choice of this particular image is not without its causal effect of the depersonalizing of human beings. When people are cut off from what binds them together, they are reduced to shadows. They do not become their real selves. The coming of the portuguese in large numbers after 1926 (when Salazar came to power) to Angola was like a whirlwind that confuses a settlement; worse still, it was an ill-wind. In their quest for survival, the Africans "go / striving in uncertainty / to embrace / the question marks of existence" (p.19). Enigma, therefore, is a recurrent theme in their bid to comprehend the motives behind portuguese intrusion. It is through the genius of poetry that Neto joins the ranks of the suffering majority:

> They cross me / dragging / by way
> of glory / shackles and chains /
> with foolish smiles . . . They
> pass through me / and I follow them
> through myself (pp.19-20).

Neto is not merely glorifying his poetry to capture the recognition of people, nor does he exhibit any qualities of affectedness. There are serious life questions raised in his poetry which projects the type of future he envisages. Through retrospection and projection, there is a philosophical demand that implants Neto as part and parcel of his own society;

> Men / who arrived / and did not
> find each other / and the anguished
> / who moved up in life / and were
> lost in confusion; / and those who
> are coming / hesitantly / through
> this world / unknown by those
> already arrived (pp.19-20).

The pattern of existence has an idea of continuity and it is because of posterity and the suffering majority, Neto's contemporaries, that he accepts the urge that drives him to join the ranks. But Neto realises early in his poetry that heroic dreams can only be justified through heroic deeds. He does not want to be like Lord Jim who becomes a nerve case in moments of action;

> like a beach wanting to be a wave /
> to bring itself into life / into
> immensity / to feel in the breast /
> the violence of ship's keels / to
> gather anguish / and the last sighs
> of the ship wrecked / and contem-
> plating static / the movement
> beyond (p.20).

But in the following stanza, Neto justifies what poetry can do. He gives the documentory powers of poetry and reveals to enable posterity perceive the

damage done to the people and land, the throbbing passions beating at that time:

> to those who are to come /
> I shall show the broken chains /
> and with them share / my desire
> to be a wave / in this procession
> of the sad / who are lost (pp.20–21).

The languor of these poems tell the untold mutilation of human soul[24], both through atrocities and the puzzling ideas of the colonial encounter. The death toll in portuguese territory led Neto to conclude with a bold assertiveness: "They follow on / dragging themselves through hopes / asking death / what life is" (p.21).

1948 had been the year in which the literary magazine, Mensagem (Message), was launched by a split faction of the African National League founded in the 1920s. The new faction, Association of Angolan Nationals, was purely aimed at the rediscovery of Angola. It is quite similar to the Abbey Theatre aspirations of the Irish people. Neto, therefore, ends 'shadows' with a dialectical cry that ushers in a new concern with poetry as a vehicle for expressing the condition of the colonized Angolans and with a development of a newly found self confidence unexhibited before: "and I follow myself through myself". It is in a way a victory for his poetry which also is his station in life. He as a poet may yearn to be a nationalist fighter.

Moreover,

> A feature of African reaction to injustice was protest through poetry, a traditional means of expression. This happened in both Angola and Mozambique[25].

So the stage was set in his profession both as a poet and a potential medical doctor to channel his energy towards a political and military organisation to counter portuguese colonialism. So the burning fire of nationalism could be traced in his voice as early as 1948[26], a time when Africans were generally confused about the type of political inclination towards nation-building and liberation.

Poetry emanating from Africa has certain peculiarities as pointed out earlier. But there are poets who champion the course of nationalism not quite as an in-born emotional or instinctual gesture but as elites to keep pace with the tide of events and hijack the sentiments of that time and arrogate for themselves the role of being the mouthpieces of their communities; in this way we could understand Neto's role as not only exhibiting the ideology of anti-colonial nationalism, but also post-colonial progress as we shall later discover.

Poetry may be a work of art which involves a high sense of mental capacity to co-ordinate and arrange in the nature of craftsmen. Neto's ethereal mysticism

and efficacy gives us the idea of hope against variables much too strong and nihilistic. His lyricism, however, carries a sense of sorrow and longing in a suggestively hostile environment. It directs itself to the social milieu to capture the pathos of Africans and other sympathetic readers. The lamentation is not a total sense of resignation, as there is a consciousness lurking between the metres about a definite answer to their condition.

The cultural force which engulfed the African traditions so much so that people became colonially bound and express their lifestyles through the westernized variations is captured in 'Western Civilization'. Neto gives an ironic expression of the general concept of civilization as found both in Okot p'Bitek and Sepamla. It is rather exposed as a form of servitude which enslaves the Africans to create wealth for the west at their own expense. Their dwelling places are pitiful with an indictment akin to his earlier convictions, the shanty towns, "Tins fixed to stakes / driven in the Earth" (p.18), are brought up for further re-examination. The irony of this civilization is shown as "The sun piercing the cracks / awakens the inhabitants" (p.18). Forced labour[27] is further raised to examine the danger brought to the people "After twelve hours of slave / labour / Breaking stones / carrying stones . . . old age comes fast" (p.19). The civilization,

therefore, does not carry only the meaning of exploitation but also dehumanization. This is carried to intolerable levels through inhumanity, degradation, mutilation, hunger, starvation which hurries the African to his grave. It is Neto's facade of indifference over what the portuguese were capable of doing to his life as projected in his poetry, that makes his bravery so astonishing. A bravery prototype of African patriots and warriors of old.

'A Succession Of Shadows' is a continuation of the poem 'Shadows'. The search for meaning in a meaningless life is continued. Neto retraces the happiness of uncolonized days through his poetry in the Negritude style. He was born into a colonized Angola. So it is only through the "remembrance" of "happy days" he "did not live" that Neto sees "light where there is only darkness" (p.21). His poetry had always been a vehicle for the transformation of his own community: "I am a day in a dark night / I am an expression of yearning" (p.21). He poses rhetorical questions about his yearnings. He was always conscious of the extent to which he could dream. He then reminds himself that he had never seen the sun and what could he remember. He imagines he was yearning over nothing and that it was virtually madness. He considers himself literally a dreamer in this respect. "Return to reality / dreamer" (p.22). In a poetic device, he

demarcates the poem into two sections with the use of ellipsis. This poem has a style similar to John Keats' 'Ode To A Nightingale', as the word 'dreamer' lifts him out of his deep reverie to the harshness of his circumstance in a colonized world. Unlike Keats, however, Neto does not romanticize.

The description of the blackman is done in the poetry when he is no longer in an imaginery world. He is described as one:

> with downcast eyes. / His back
> seen through his torn shirt /
> bearing a heavy burden / of
> ignorance and fear / He does not
> cry out his longings / lest he
> perturbs a world / Which dazzles
> him / with the false glitter of
> its fake gold (p.22).

The misery in which the blackman wallows is evoked in these lines. The poet goes on to describe the oppressed man as one who is "fearless / before combustion engines" (p.22) and justifies his dreams as a yearning for "his days of glory" (p.22). The poem is an anthem for the victory of truth over falsehood, humanitarianism over terrorism. No matter the fact that such gestures have not fully been achieved, the realization of the values inherent is in itself progressive. So the poem turns out to be a dedication to all nations of the world, where people are denied their culture, their freedom and humanity.

The image of the burning bush that engulfs the entire land is again present in 'Symphony', another poem dedicated to the struggle for freedom. Various connotations and literary efforts are geared by the poet to describe what it means to lose one's culture and political right. "And the music of men / swept by the fire of inglorious battles" (p.23). The death of African indigenous music is seen through the staccato of "death rattle", "pains" and "anguish". For the poet there is no music left except a struggle for survival "the glorious struggle of the people / The music / my soul feels" (p.23). This is the only meaningful rhythm in the lives of oppressed people. The impatience orchestrated in musical symphonies with the grandeur of its rhythm creates for Neto a scherzo in his poetry to achieve a heroic verse for the folk-music of his people. But this liveliness is created through sad images.

This is the condition which has come to feature prominently in Neto's poetry. The sympathy of the poet is captivating as he writes "far away looks / fearful hearts / strong arms / smiles deep as deep waters" (p.24). It is a cry over the depreciation of people to the level of beasts, experiencing anguish hitherto unknown to them. The poet is not idealising the African past in these lines, they present genuine observations confirmed historically to show the

encroachment on African humanity by alien forces. 'Symphony' is very suggestive of the poet's mood, the lines get shorter and more aggressive with adequate choice of words for effect. The 'symphony' of the poetry has a transcendental aspect in trying to relay the mundane activities of the colonized Angolans. For instance, those made lonely and castigated, it is only through their songs that they sustain their yearnings for family ties. It is such a sad poem that depicts in every line the mood of these workers cut off from any meaningful existence; "Tired / exhausted by work / but they sing / Filled with injustice / silent in their innermost souls / and they sing" (p.24). Their songs fill the poet with a sadness that inspires him to compose his symphony and poetry. As we discover the emotive response of Neto through his poetry, we begin to decipher his role in the political and cultural struggle of his people to overcome the unnecessary injustice done to the Angolans.

Neto suffered a lot of troubles in his attempt to study medicine in Europe. He had saved money[28] to embark on this venture, by 1947, despite the racism to which blacks were exposed. Therefore, part of the Angolan struggle was to overcome racism with its attendant exasperation and domination.

The total degeneration of the Angolan people,

their dignity expressed in their culture which has been seriously challenged by portuguese policies is clearly written in 'The Market Woman'. Neto shows the ironies involved in light, shade and blindness. These images are interwoven to produce a patch of social concern about the inevitability of prostitution under cultural and political domination. This leads to the loss of economic powers of the people. They had sustained their lives through agrarian economies and promoted subsistence agriculture. But this value has faded with the exploitative policies of the Europeans. The market woman is exposed to the harshness of the sun in a little shade to sell items that may not be adequate enough for her own sustenance. There is a grave concern over the exposition of people to natural forces as the sun that can destroy a human life. Deep in the poem, there is a philosophical notion about the ontological exposition about life. The irony of life can be seen in the lines which say:

> Light plays in the town / its
> burning game / of brightness and
> shade / and life plays / in
> worried hearts / its game of
> blind-man's-buff (pp.12-13).

The poetic device here is dialectical in working on images and choice of language to portray the life lived by the commonest of people in Angola. Every member of this community has developed a certain degree

of bitterness towards the system. The market women's song is a very sad one that touches the soul because of the pathos it evokes:

> Buy sweet oranges / buy from
> me too the bitterness / of
> this torture / of life without
> life (p.13).

The poetry pervades all areas of emotion to expose the cold acceptance of portuguese colonialism. Neto changes style in his poetry to dramatise the type of life situation experienced by people in all walks of life, which are determined by the colonialists. There is a tendency in his poetry to expose the psychological aspects of emotion too. Suffering according to Neto as an emotional response to brutality can have a limit. There are times when the manifestation of one's suffering cannot be expressed through cries or tears: "I exhausted the smiles / with which I cried / I no longer cry" (p.13). These lines convey the catastrophy of living in colonial Angola. The poem sets out to compare the plantations where the Africans die with the oranges sold by the woman.

The question of human existence is raised to philosophical heights for more comprehension. When the suffering becomes unbearable, alcoholism and neurosis become the hallmark of the people's existence. Stoicism through religious discipline can, therefore,

only be achieved by a few endeavoured. This calmness in itself is shown to corrode human essence as it indoctrinates people into passivity to accept the culture of silence. The market woman, therefore, laments over her condition; "and I / became a part / of the very problems of existence" (p.14). Her degeneration is inevitable as a result of the experience she is undergoing. In order for her to sustain her life, she justifies what she has to do "perhaps selling myself / I possess myself" (p.14).

In his attack on assimilation introduced by the portuguese to strip the Africans of their culture, Neto writes a poem akin to the revolutionary poetry emerging through Negritude pens in its tone of rejection. He engages in a discourse to assess the cumbersome events that threaten the blackman to lose "his country / and the concept of being" (p.15). The poem 'Old Blackman' is a beautiful tribute to his rejection of assimilation in an angry and uncompromising language:

> Sold / and transported in galley / lashed by men / lynched in great cities / dispossessed of his last coin / humiliated to the dust / always always defeated / Forced to obey / God and men / he lost himself / He lost his country / and the concept of being / Reduced to rags / they mocked his gestures and his / different soul / sold / black rag / lost in time / and divided in space! / when he passed in his loin cloth / with his spirit well concealed / in the silence of concave phrases / they murmur: / Poor blackman! / And the poets say they are his brothers (p.15).

Despite the Negritude trend in French colonies in Africa, Ngola Ritmos was formed by Carlos Aniceto, Vieira Dias - or Liceu as a cultural revivalist troupe to counter the excesses of portuguese assimilation policies.

Neto continues to heighten the theme of night and darkness in his two other poems, 'Midnight At The Stall' and 'Night'. The poet's sympathy for women is brought in through his explanation of exploitation in the former poem. Because of the demand made on them, women suffer in toiling for their loved ones. They sell items in the market to collect money for their children. Ironically, the money a woman would suffer all day to collect is for the son who "needs a hundred milries / to pay the tax" (p.16). The weight of her grief is so heavy that the poet aptly concludes "for the heart of Sa Domingas / suffers more than the body at the stall" (p.16). The tone of the poem 'Western Civilization' is very similar to the quartet here.

Neto's 'Night' is a picturesque portrayal of the social and political conditions of the Angolan people. Night, with all the darkness it entails, is the metaphor he uses to depict the impoverishment of the people. The poem has a general indictment of the African living condition. "I live / in the dark neighbourhoods of the world / without light or life" (p.17). It is not the

matter of having the glow of electricity light that is inferred here. Africans have lived without such amenities and yet had life. Light has a double effect here; both in terms of the darkness of their under-developed status in comparison with portuguese settlements and their total lack of freedom. There is not the slightest trace of brightness where they live - "slave neighbourhoods / worlds of misery" (p.18). Through the choice of images, Neto uses poetry to capture the sympathy of his readers. He traverses with the reader in all the nooks and corners of his people's abode in a captivating journey to reveal their situation. The poetry conforms to social realism to allow people to have a fair judgement of what the people are experiencing. It is a place "where wills are diluted / and men become like / things". It is the experience of living in an urban jungle entirely unnatural "encumbered with mystery and terror / arm-in-arm with ghosts" (p.18).

Agostinho Neto does not colour some of his poems with phrases that may obscure his frankness about certain notions. 'Cruelty' continues his frankness in exposing the deeds of the colonizers. The jingoistic response which his poetry carries shows the popular acceptance of his leadership motivations in the liberated regions. Neto's charisma as a result of his conscious and persevering attempt to appeal to the world

through his poetry; expressing the attachment he has to his people's sufferings and cultural values shows one of the closest associations which poetry, politics and culture could ever achieve.

Neto's poetry, therefore, interprets the suffering of the local community as a result of the sadistic brutality of the colonial police:

> They all fell in the snare / of
> the men posted / on the corner /
> And suddenly / in the neighbourhood the dance ended / and faces
> hardened in the night (p.11).

The poet brings to light the callous interruption of the lively activities of the African people. This sort of rude interruption ushered in a culture of silence, people get arrested for no just cause as they are bewildered with the mystery behind this enigma:

> There remained the silence / of
> a dirge without cries / which
> women now wept / in alarmed
> breasts / mystic reasons
> whispered (p.11).

Neto further juxtaposes the idea of light and darkness to pursue his notion of freedom and bondage. The picture tells more stories than those of bondage:

> From the lit-up town / come
> bursts of laughter / of a
> cruel disgust / To render
> trivial / a daily event (p.11).

The poetry commends the nationalists who continue the worthwhile struggle of the people. It also castigates "those who betrayed without Love". Neto's prison poems recommend the efforts of his people in defiance of the portuguese policies. He recognises the systematic approach and discipline amongst his people in their quest to free the society. The poet senses "Calm youths in the aged" and celebrates his optimism as "more than hope it was certainly / more than goodness it was love". The poetry goes as far back as 1617 to remember the ancestors of the Angolan people in their efforts continued by his contemporary fellow nationalists in their efforts of freeing the nation.

By 1951, Neto's profession as a poet set him to participate in political activities more openly. He engages in collecting signatures for the Stockholm Peace Appeal. 'Awakening Consciousness' is a poem written the same year. It describes the process of his arrest. The tension in Europe due to the Korean war is felt in his lines. The alertness of Europeans to their security over this tension is also captured. Neto's growing consciousness over his freedom has generally been affected by European attitudes over their welfare. History seems to repeat itself as he asserts boldly his conviction for the total freedom of his natior - "with dry eyes". The collection of his poems,

Sacred Hope, had earlier appeared with the title; With Dry Eyes due to the recurrence of this phrase in his poetry. Because of his active involvement in politics, he got arrested that year and was placed in Caxias prison near Lisbon for three months.

Politically, Neto's short poem 'Pause' is a recollection of what stands between freedom and bondage. He had experienced both to some extent unlike most of his fellow Angolan citizens, so there is authenticity in his claims. This is an anological poem that depicts the distance between anguish and joy, being beastly and being human. The contradistinction is made with beautifully selected set of images. It conveys a sadness over animals moving about leisurely without restraint while human beings, who tame them, are not free; as for some to pry on others without any meaningful human cause:

> Worms prepare to devour a lovely child / in an indecorous orgy of cruelty (p.34).

The joy of being human could only be achieved through one's freedom "when morning advances sweet and strong" (p.34). It is only then that the cultural heritage becomes more comfortable and that "between anguish and joy / a great track from the Niger to the Cape" (p.34) exists. It is only when the "Marimbas and arms drums and voices and arms / harmonise the

inaugural song of New Africa" (p.34) that life would acquire a flavour of meaning for the existence of the blackman.

Neto's autobiographical technique in his poetry is apparent in 'Friend Mussunda' in which he makes a commentary on the role of poetry. It is a poem that reaches out to a childhood friend to remind him of the days lived in misery and suffering. But the confidence the poet has over the will of his people is unmistaken; Neto feels their determination "strength / transforms the destiny of men" (p.35). Although conscious that his poetry was not generally understood and followed, he reassures that "it was not this / we wanted, I know" (p.36). He is together with the people in all their misfortunes and follows the same path with them towards the achievement of their societal objectives. He, therefore, justifies poetry as not quite an impotent endeavour but one of the many fronts pushing for independence despite its short-comings.

All Neto's poems have a political appeal, either through the reference to the culture of his people or clad in philosophical allusions. For example, 'The Path Of The Stars' is highly philosophical. For freedom to reign, it is "necessary and inevitable" (p.37) to experience the hardship of life. Africans should follow "ideas without colour". Even if they were alone in their fight for freedom, they should be confident.

The poet urges Africans to form standing armies well organized to participate in clandestine activities "clad in the green of the new smell of forests after rain". The culture of the people should be the inspiration as in the Mau-Mau and the Maji-Maji revolts. It should provide them with their own myths and military manouvres to tread the path of the stars in order to restore harmony on earth:

> In a rapid and clear rhythm / of
> Zaires Kalaharis mountains / red
> light of infinite bonfires in
> the grasslands / spiritual harmony
> of tom-tom voices / in a clear
> rhythm of Africa (pp.37-38).

The poetry is laced with the notion of traditional background for the success of Africa's freedom. The command in the lines is achieved not through the preaching of Marxism or any other foreign ideology[29], but in asserting the richness of what Africa provides through her humiliation. It does not take foreign metaphors to bring to the Angolan people what they should strive to achieve. Neto realises that the erection of an ideological platform is not in the interest of a struggle for freedom in colonial bondage. 'Re-conquest' is a poem that raises this consciousness. The poet urges the African not to completely shut himself in the cocoon of his heritage alone;

> Do not shut yourself in the castle
> of infinite / Meditation / on the
> memories and dreams you might have
> lived (p.38).

Africa should borrow the best from the world to achieve her "most just aspirations" (p.39). It is a poem for Africa similar to David Diop's 'Africa'. Africa should recreate her image which is considered "dead in our skin ill-covered / under the suit borrowed / from the most wretched of ex-noblemen". Africa should come out of herself, acknowledging all the damages done to her pride and culture and without vengeance. The voice of Africa should be heard and no more conquered and it is obvious for Africa to step forward and not lag behind humanity so that she realises her dreams.

The poetry is interwoven with aspects of freedom. The lack of freedom is the strongest issue that motivates the poet to write countless words on the theme. The poem 'Lands felt' is a concern over the harshness in silencing a culture: "Lands of Africa felt / in the dream soon dissolved in the rattle of prison keys" (p.40). The poem also incorporates the theme of unity.

Neto's poem 'Bleeding and Germinating' adopts a tone of dedication to those who died for the land. The multiplicity of their number is so alarming but every drop of blood germinates in "the soil of hope" despite the culture of silence in "the harmonious sound of muted marimbas" (p.42).

The recurrent theme of the drum which stands for the African way is given a new light in the poem 'On The Skin Of The Drum'. It is not only expressing

the culture of Africa but it gives an insight into the poetic inspirations of the poet too. The rhythmic effect of the drums when played, inspires him in his poetry, which boils his blood to express his culture. Through this imagination, Neto remembers the stories told at the fireplaces. These feelings elevate him to achieve certain glories for Africa "outside the darkened chasms of negation" (p.45) and fill him with joy for his motherland. The poet tries to sustain the feeling as it begins to fade. He, therefore, cries out for its continuation "ONWARD".

The political nature of the poetry is also expressed in the dirges sung to the brave, those who died in their attempts to change the society and the fate of the Angolan people. 'February' is dedicated to the workers massacred in Sao Tome. It is a dirge sung in recognition of

> the rightness of men's sacrifice /
> for love . . . even faced with
> death by the dint of the hours . . .
> / even in the small defeats
> accumulated for victory (p.46).

Neto's contribution to the Movement for Democratic Unity of the Youth in Portugal sets him on a course for recognition in the colonies. Neto discovers Bamako[30] as a place "on which the sun discovers gigantic Kilimanjaros / under the blue sky of peace" (p.47). It is a place that gives meaning to his poetry, where

poverty and maltreatment have been conquered, where the muffled voice of Africa gets a new sound to speak out.

Neto's early poems are, therefore, characterised by his efforts in trying to establish a strong link with the aspirations of his people while being aware of their own determination as the decisive factor more than any overtures to ideological leanings. Although romantic and Negritudinal these poems are, it is suggestive of the general sadness experienced around this time when there is a high sense of skepticism in what people are engaged in. But in the course of Neto's experiences with the outside world and the insensitivity displayed by the colonialists to his people's condition which they have created, his disgust begins to manifest. This is so because he has already become disillusioned with what Democratic traditions could achieve. Although the Movement for Democratic Unity of the Youth in Portugal had been partly responsible for his popularity in the colonies, such traditions are at most in negation. Coupled with this problem is the mass killings and his subsequent jailing which make it obvious for him to change his style.

So in Chapter Three, there is an examination of the poetry from the realist posture Neto adopts in order to be more bold and less euphemistic. In this way, Neto's mission is clearly established.

FOOTNOTES

1. Former Portuguese foreign minister and a defender of fascism.

2. Agostinho Neto, Sacred Hope (Tanzania Pub. House, Dar-es-Salam, 1974) p.XVII.

   All other quotations with page numbers are from the above source.

3. Ibid, p.XVII

4. Anders Ehmark & Per Wastberg, Angola and Mozambique: The Case Against Portugal (Pall Mall Press, Banie & Rockliff) p.190.

   *Eduardo Mondlane talks about the unifying factor of Portuguese language while Senghor the beauty of the French language. The disparity of their understanding of European languages is clear.

5. Micheal Wolfers, Poems From Angola (Heinemann Educ. Books, London, 1979) p. Introduction.

6. "Of the African populations in Angola, Guinea and Mozambique, 99.7 per cent were classified by the Portuguese as 'uncivilised' . . . The illiteracy rate for Africans in Angola and Mozambique is over 99 per cent" - Articles 16 and 19 of the report, Angola, by the World Assembly of Youth, Brussels, Belgium 1962.

7. Anders Ehnmark and Per Wastberg, Angola and Mozambique: The Case Against Portugal, p.13

8. Ibid, p.17.

9. "Children wander about the streets of the townships because they have no schools to go to, or no money to enable them to go to school, or no parents at home to see that they go to school" p.188 - Nelson Mandela - No Easy Walk to Freedom (Heinemann, London, 1965).

10. Andriano Moreira, Portugal's Stand in Africa (Capital City Press, Montpelier, 1962) p.201.

11. "A first principle of our party and our struggle . . . is 'unity and struggle', which is even the motto" - Amilcar Cabral; Unity and Struggle (Heinemann, London, 1980) p.28.

12. J.A. Ramsaram, New Approaches To African Literature (University of Ibadan Press, Ibadan, 1965) p.61.

13. Gerald Moser, 'Louis Bernardo Honwana', A Celebration of Black and African Writing (ABU Press, Zaria, 1975) p.190 - edited by Bruce King and Kolawole Ogungbesan.

14. "Whatever the material aspects of this domination, it can be maintained only by the permanent and organized repression of cultural life of the people concerned . . . In fact to take up arms to dominate a people is, above all, to take up arms to destroy . . . to paralyse their cultural life" (pp.139-140). Amilcar Cabral, Unity And Struggle: Speeches and Writings (Heinemann, London, 1980).

15. "We want equal political rights because without them our disabilities will be permanent" (p.188) Nelson Mandela, No Easy Walk to Freedom (Heinemann, London, 1965).

16. All quotations with page numbers to this point are from Micheal Wolfer's edition, Poems from Angola (Heinemann, London, 1979), while the rest are from Agostinho Neto; Sacred Hope; (Tanzania Pub. House, Dar-es-Salam, 1974).

17. Article 25 of the Report of the W.A.Y. on Angola states: "It is estimated that at least 250,000 Africans a year are rented out to agricultural, mining, and construction concerns as forced labourers" (p.19).

18. Appears in Poems from Angola.

19. Jose Caveirinha and Noema de Sousa were poets of this generation.

20. "Break-down on the languages spoken by Angolan Africans was: Kikongo - 500,000; Kimbundu - 1,000,000; Umbundu - 1,500,000; Chokwe and Luanda - 500,000; and the other languages approximately 500,000" (p.25) Angola: Report of the Mission of the World Assembly of Youth; (Brussels, Belgium, September 1962).

21. Joao Dias, a blackman who died in Portugal in 1949 had influenced Mozambicans and indeed Angolans through Black Consciousness originating in the Americas. Gerald Moser in A Celebration of Black and African Writing ed; Bruce King (ABU Press, Zaria, 1975) pp.192-193.

22. Both this poem and 'A birthday' appear in Michael Wolfer's edition of Poems from Angola (Heinemann, London, 1979).

23. Portugal had tried to silence her colonies through legislation and in 1951, the government declared "that the portuguese colonies are not colonies but overseas provinces of portugal" so that no international bodies would carry out surveys; especially the United Nations Organisation. Report of the Mission of the World Assembly of Youth - Sept. 1962, Brussels, Belgium; Article 10.

24. Syl Cheney Coker for instance asserts the obvious nature for poets to live the content of what they write otherwise it would be used against them by the very people who constitute its audience. So there is an element of the physical exile not the spiritual in Neto - West Africa Magazine, December 21, 1981.

25. Fenner Broackway, The Colonial Revolution, (Hart-Davis, McGibbon, London, 1973)p. 392.

26. This had been Neto's first year in portugal, having left in 1947.

27. In Article 27 of the W.A.Y. Report: Galvao says "Only the dead escape forced labour. There are employers who have 30 per cent mortality rate among their workers and they never had any trouble obtaining new workers".

28. "From about 1944 to 1947, he worked in the Angolan colonial health services... He saved money to travel to portugal to study medicine and left Angola in 1947 for Coimbra. While in Portugal he was awarded a scholarship by the American Methodists" (p. 103). Poems from Angola select, Michael Wolfers (Heinemann, London, 1979).

29. This could be seen in Holden Roberto's refusal to merge his party, Angola Communist Party (PCA) with the MPLA, which was formed prior to the MPLA.

30. The manifestation of his political ambitions became more plain and hopeful after his attendance of a Pan-African conference in Bamako in 1954. He had a burning sensation after the conference to achieve the resolutions. Bamako became a hope for his political ambitions which pervades the whole continent of Africa with a new light of political panacea. It was a conference that had an indelible impact on his political ambitions.

CHAPTER THREE

AGOSTINHO NETO'S LATER POEMS: 1955 - 1960

The early poems are characterised by Negritudinal romanticism, although Agostinho Neto's poetry has a social-realist approach to the political predicament of the Angolan nation; but his experiences with the portuguese authorities over censorship and jailing had affected the nature of his poetry.

In their introduction to Modern poetry from Africa edited by Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, they describe poetry from Portuguese Africa as "little more than a cry of sheer agony and loss"[1]. But poetry from Angola alone would not conform to the description above. The theme and style of Neto's poetry does not dwell on an egocentric cry of his own immediate dilemma, rather it is a reflection of his own society from the perspective of his own imprisonment and the subjugation of the Angolan people. It is far more than a lamentation about the loss of freedom but the persistent strength of his, to use their words, 'unquenchable spirit' not only of his humanity but his society's unacceptance of servitude to portuguese culture and politics.

Agostinho Neto's poetry has been marked by a sense of control in the pitch, tone and flow. But as a result of the experiences he had encountered for writing to demand the rights of his people, there is a significant change noticeable ever since he had started experiencing

prison situations. The intimidations he suffers in the Aljube Prison force an outrageousness in his otherwise expository poetry. He was for instance fond of using euphemisms to colour his poetry as a mark of the pattern of discipline inherited from tradition. This was always done with a controlled pitch and not without any signs of duress. Neither did he write leisurely as to suggest a susquipedalian indulgence. In the poem 'We Must Return', Neto's audacity is clear. He uses short lines that betray his anger akin to David Diop's to register his protest. His boldness, therefore, dares any force.

Neto is not merely celebrating his wish to return to Angola through the glamour of poetry, neither is he conforming to Negritudinal romanticism. He does not seem to regard poetry as mere escapism. His life-time and career was consumed by being actively involved in the struggle to free Angola from colonial bondage. It is through his poetry that he develops a fortress to check the excesses of portuguese domination. He had expressed his ideas against portuguese aspirations at the subterranian level in his lines, but with instances of necessarily bold erruptions to manifest his commitment to the rejection of portuguese colonization. His assertions exhibit the condition of his people for which he got a prison term. Imprisonment hardens him and further dawns in him the aggressive intolerance of

the portuguese. The prison situation becomes unbearable and agitates him to take fiercer lines. This makes him write commanding statements in his poems. His love for his people's culture is yet demonstrated when he says:

> To the freshness of the fig tree / to our legends / our rhythms and fires / We must return / To drum and thumb piano / to the throb of carnival / We must return[2] (p.19).

It is also in this poem that he makes one of the most remarkable statements about Angola's future. They were to go back to Angola from Sao Tome prisons, plantations and other places of exile and banishment. It is not merely to return:

> To our homes, to our labours . . . To our diggings of diamonds / gold, copper and petroleum;

but

> We must return / to liberated Angola / Angola; independent (p.19).

The first person plural Neto uses betrays him as a leader and voice of his own people. This theme of return is prominent in Angolan poetry because so many have been exiled. A great number of Angolans were exiled to work on the plantations in Sao Tome while many languish in prisons both in portugal and Africa. Neto's reticense on the political demand of a totally independent Angola of earlier years is loudly compensated

for in this poem.

Black South Africans and indeed Angolans fall into the mining zones of Africa. Precious metals and gems are extracted by the imperialists through their multi-national corporations. Blacks are conscripted to work the mines without having any share in the product of their motherland. The European Economic Community has a need of such minerals as vanadium, bauxite, chrome, magnisium, uranium, gold and diamond. This has been the basic reason which:

> makes certain African countries and their mining operations 'indispensable' to western capitalism[3].

Angola and South Africa derive a greater percentage of their foreign earnings in the export of minerals. This has posed great dangers to peasant activities:

> The imperatives of labour recruitment typically in opportunities for peasant agriculture, and with the usual patterns of migrant labour and the absence of males, this meant the impoverishment even of subsistence agriculture and of course further determined the mono-cultural nature of the economy[4].

Although the MPLA came into existence in 1956, the armed struggle proper was sparked off in 1961 by the revolt in the Angolan prisons.

Neto's presence in Europe opened him to the European mode of life to realise that Europe too is

built through the toils and labour of black people.

> My hands laid stones / on the
> foundations of the world /
> I deserve my piece of bread
> (p.26).

His confidence is expressed in his "aspiration" to acquire freedom for his people. This aspiration comes through poetry which is his "desire / transformed into a force" (p.28). His consciousness of the social conditions is desperate which urges him to leap from poetry to determine the political role poets can play. Life was generally sad and without the elements that make a person cheerful in a colonial situation. Neto cannot afford a smile at a time when his people were in a state of political and cultural dilemma. His efforts as a poet may not be adequate to fetch the desired applause for glories to be achieved. He adopts a mournful gesture over the conquest and torture of his people as he remembers. Images of torture are not things to bring happiness. The task of people who constitute the force is not a small one though "Honours fall to the generals" (p.28). He describes his task as that of an "unknown soldier / of mankind" (p.28). Suffering and endurance are his glory by participating in the course of freeing the society;

> Neither smiles nor glory / only
> the hard force / of he who builds
> the road / which has to be
> travelled / stone after stone /
> on difficult ground (p.28).

The poem 'Don't ask me for Smiles', therefore, is a revolutionary expression of what the future holds for a toiling people. It is a poem that asserts the inevitability of fulfilment for the African inspite of the uncertainty and difficulty involved;

> I have not discovered myself in life / and untamed woods / hide the paths / along which I must go / But I shall find them / and follow them / at whatever price (p.29).

It is only when he fulfills himself in life through the freedom of his own people that the gloom on his face shall blossom into a cheerful smile.

Neto's message is to all the oppressed people of the world as we experienced in his 'greeting' poem, though written about 1950. It is a poem that is timeless. It is a summary of the culture of domination and inertia. There is an efficacy in his message when he says:

> This message / may it be the link which binds me to your suffering / indissolubly (p.29).

It is a prayer which acquires him salvation to overcome the grim perpetuation of life. It also is a prayer in a way to reawaken the bitterness of his own people. The poem carries him to the homes of all those in the struggle and sit at their table

> to forget the nakedness and
> hunger of the children / and
> feel with you the shame / of
> having no bread to give them
> (p.30).

It is a prayer, a wish, to overcome their fears to create for themselves a free society. It is a revolutionary prayer and hope that urges the down-trodden

> to overcome / the inertia of
> muscled arms / Now is the hour
> to march together / bravely /
> to the world of all men (p.30).

As Neto consolidates himself more and more as a poet, we begin to realise that his poetry does not only open the reader to his society, but also is an avenue to acquire more knowledge about his biography.

The poem titled 'poem' was written in Caxias prison on 25th February, 1955 after his arrest. Neto acknowledges that poetry puts him in jail. It was around this period of his poetic mission that he gains more recognition and wide acclaim as the leader of his people. Because of his charisma that had built over the years, protests were organised for his release. In the picture in his casual mood, the concern with freedom and confinement are felt deeply. There also are strong images of the love he has for people. The idea of liberation is in the blood of the Angolan nationalists. The rose flower which is a symbol of western sense of beauty is used by the poet to relieve

his mind of the burden he is carrying. Roses seem to grow in their blood. The poet heightens the image further to suggest that roses are a symbol of either love or longing. But the metamorphosis of their blood is short-lived due to vague realization of these dreams. These flowers, therefore, wither "on the chill of our distance". We also realise that this is one of his early prison poems. But inspite of the confinement "in the iron bars / where freedom dies", Neto dreams for a day when "roses shall ever grow". NO matter the length of the period of their suffering, they are hopeful of the day they shall assume the captainship of their destiny[5].

There is sarcasm in his style here when Neto says: "If winter is long / and voices are tired / it is because / our path is uniquely love". The early poems, therefore, show hope against the background of passive resistance. But by the late '50s, he realises that to achieve freedom, for roses to ever grow, he shall go to any extent; "the farthest prairies . . . least accessible mountains . . . the chasms". It is also a poem that justifies guerilla warfare.

'The green of the palm trees of my youth' is one of the poems that tell the bitter story of the life of the poet from his youth to his present circumstance in an alien land locked up in prison. The political conquest of his land is given through the metaphor of the overflowing river that sets the crocodiles to

'feast in abandoned corrals' (p.54). His coming to Europe is likened to running away from himself. He is in an insecure place. Through his poetry, he has been transformed by his people into a god; an idol. There is an indictment on the western religion of christianity as in Okot p'Bitek's 'Song of Lawino'. It has killed the culture of his people because it becomes "A new language! / No more stories told in the shade" (p.56).

While in prison, he remembers the activities of his home with nostalgia; "the sweet taste and joy of tradition" (p.56). He regrets the idea of leaving Africa even for medicine which he was to study. He felt his people also have their own traditional medicine through the invocation of spirits, sacrifices by the fetish priests and diviners, "the metaphysical breath of sacred forests" (p.55). Even poetry is a medicine that soothes the senses. He felt he had wasted his youth ironically by trusting or "cherishing the finger of insecurity" (p.57) by accepting the scholarship from the American Methodists. His people were maimed all these years like "rootless trunks" (p.57). He realises that he was one without land, without language, without country / playing with adventure" (p.57). But this was rather a condemnation of his actions. He was, however, hopeful in his toil to acquire the certificate of a medical doctor, "hopeful / for hybrid metaphysics" (p.58).

He exhibits the traditional warmth of an African and hopes for the freedom of his people and land which he acknowledges shall be beautiful.

. . By 1957, Neto had gained the recognition of the portuguese elites which the authorities tried to distabilise through PIDE. They would not allow his poetry to flow.

> Arrested in February '55, he was released only in June 1957, having been held in prison for 10 months' imprisonment[6].

Although absent during the formation of the MPLA in 1956, Neto was recognised as one of the leaders. He had continued writing revolutionary poems in prison and became together in spirit with the aspirations of his people.

Africans have also experienced around that time the rising consciousness of cultural movements. Most of the cultural movements had strong ties with the political demands the nationlists were making. The system of education, racial concern and religious situation of the people were generally called for reorganisation in order to "strip away all distortions instilled in the minds of both colonizers and colonized by colonialism which used racism to justify privilege and oppression[7].

An international conference had been held in Paris in 1956 which was the first Congress of Negro Writers and artists. They defined the aspirations of the

African culture which had emerged as an integral part of world culture. They had condemned the damages done by colonialism to this culture and

> saw culture as a dynamic instrument for change within a world in a process of constant change[8].

All such changes and new developments serve to widen Neto's scope of vision and further justify his claims. Throughout his stay in jail, he had, therefore, constantly endeavoured to write poems with added strength to his convictions which was growing gradually.

Although the Portuguese exert pressure to make the prisoners submissive, such persecution does not deter the poet from his convictions. He feels his prison sentence as

> days of sacrifice / and audacity /
> for the right / to live . . . /
> freely humanly (p.62).

Whatever the mode of persecution, he seemed to be stoic enough to resist; but deep down in him;

> grows / the longing to be / with
> our peoples / today always and
> ever more / free free (p.62).

Neto's 'two years away' written in PIDE prison in Oporto in 1957 tries to capture the reality "Between dreams and desire" (p.26). This poem also reports the censorship involved in love letters and other communication activities of the colonized. This act is also

reflective of South African life:

> In the silence / are the talks
> we did not have / the kisses
> not exchanged / and the words
> we do not say / in censored
> letters (p.62).

The poetry is full of the torture carried out by the portuguese and the image of what the palmatoria[9] could do to break the resistence of people is given a new light. Neto, therefore, writes "Against the dilemma of today / of being submissive or persecuted" (p.62).

As a poet, Neto is possessed by what he sees beyond the suffering and existence of his own people. His perceptions of events to come are "seen" beyond poetry itself. He has a vision of "Sculptural hands / . . . Beyond Africa of centuries-old backwardness" (p.48). He also sees unity and peace beyond the "sculptural hands of a people who construct / under the weight of what they make to destroy themselves" (p.49). He then qualifies as a visionary of his people's freedom with the beauty of "roses and bread / and future" (p.49).

In the process of continuing his activities, the poet is always inspired to write, and Neto says: "I feel like writing a poem" (p.49). He is not only writing a poem for his people's freedom, but he writes to assert his personal freedom as well like the chirping of birds in the trees. Neto, therefore, is a 'trapped weaver bird', a 'shuttle' in a crypt as Soyinka may wish to say. Poetry, therefore, is instinctual response

to the environment as the forces operating in the milieu touch the sensibility of these men of vision; who aspire and yearn for the recognition of their societal values. Neto, therefore, justifies his poetry as an art with a set of its own rules, it is a tool for solving the mystery in which Africa as a continent is wallowing. Africa herself is in a big question mark similar to her shape for understanding the puzzle of her colonial situation. Neto sets out through poetry to find answers to the question of Africa. "A poem / (Ah, who compared Africa to a question mark with Madagascar its dot?) / A solution poem" (p.50). His poetry is indelibly written with beauty and inspiration "traced on steel" (p.50) that is full of hope and depicts for Africa a foresight for freedom which is like a "dawn glow in the eyes of men" (p.50). The poetry harmonises the experiences of the African people, their love and hatred, suffering and moments of joy which is synthesised and spiced by the drum and the African xylophone to penetrate the recesses of any language to assert Africa's aspirations. The concept of music as a universal language is alluded to in his poetry. The sadness of African music tells the tales of their centuries-old domination by alien cultures.

The synthesis of the African Marimba and the western piano is not to be considered as an element of contradiction in his poetry, but rather of strength in acquiring certain values of the culture the African people have

come in contact with. It becomes an element of cultural integration without any damage to African heritage. Values that are prominent in western culture should be sources of guidance to the new generation of Africans just as his poetry also serves as a guide.

In a way, Neto raises certain issues about his poetry which set the mind to wander in search for interpretations. Poetry in itself seems not to relieve him from his dilemma. He becomes sceptical of what actually can be achieved through poetry. He questions the damage done by violence, conformism, slavery and dishonesty to resign from writing poetry. He would rather write letters to fill the blank spaces of his creative indulgence. He would rather sing songs and dream of his love and the weather at spring time. But all these would stir in him "the bitterness of not writing a poem" (p.52). He reassures himself that whether he does not write of all the foresight and aspiration he has over the condition of the Angolan people, they still are certain to come; "like the brilliance of the stars" (p.52) which cannot be extinguished. His poetry gains consideration as a political document depicting the condition of his people as it depicts their culture of silence and slavery. Despite his realization of the danger to which poetry had placed him, he continued to write longer poems in prison and shade more light on poetry as he continued to compose.

The greyness of prison life stiches freedom in every fibre of his poetic lines. This notion pervades

the greater part of his convictions. Neto picks up the image of an

> African train / climbing from a difficult African rail / creaking creaking / slow and absurd (p.12)

to portray the task before the colonized people of Angola. Very reflective of his mood, he develops sacred hope as he reminds himself through a powerful consolation that "he who has strived has not lost / but has not yet won" (p.12). The image of the train stands for a metaphor of all trapped people who suffer the anguish of colonialism;

> Many lives / have drenched the land / where the rails lie . . . / slow absurd and cruel / the African train (p.12).

Basil Davidson eulogises the efforts of Agostinho Neto in his forward to the anthology Sacred Hope and defines, though loosely, the role of a poet:

> the poet is honoured as a man of action; that is how the world knows Agostinho Neto . . . He is loved or he is feared as the spokesman of a people fighting to be free. He is followed or opposed as a leader of a struggle for the future . . . The poet is all these things, and with a purity of aim and courage that are inseparable . . . a poet, ineluctably a poet inescapably a poet (p.vii).

Therefore, the poetry of Neto tells not only of the

story of how the Angolan people cherish hope but also their genuine machinations to realise this hope.

> They tell of a man born within the walls and barriers of oppression and who afterwards, grown to manhood, was often shut away in bitter prisons for refusing to accept the power of those walls and for defying them with a power of his own, a power they tried to contain and crush but could not . . . They are, therefore, the poems of a profound humanism, and speak with an unextinguishable love of life (p.viii).

These poems indeed transform into an anthem for the oppressed people in Africa and indeed the world, as there is the tendency to internationalize his grievances. This is done with the power of oration deduced in his metaphors. The freedom of the Angolan people is Neto's quest motive and it is through his poetic practices that he elevates himself to a higher stage of intellectual life that is not possibly achieved by all. His poetry, therefore, relieves him from the tyranny and cold complicity of the brutal colonial force. The act of living in Angolan territory itself conveys a prison situation to the poet where freedom diminishes.

Solitary confinement is a phenomenon feared by both Brutus and Soyinka. Neto too relays his fear of this maddening experience. He cherishes:

> the freedom to think and plan and believe and act, so that they were endowed with the right and privilege of speaking for their people (p.xi).

An urge to continue this struggle without faltering is carried in the poem 'Create'. The people are inspired to continue the resurrection of their cultural heritage to strive hard so that "festive sounds" are created "over swinging bodies on simulated gallows" (p.73). The poem also tries to picture the historical connotation that freedom carries in relation to bondage.

As Neto continued to stay in Aljube Prison, he wrote more poems. His style got more refined and his motives more concise. He no more colours his motives with flowery language. He asserts his political views more freely. Each line goes out to stab the colonizer. He gets impatient as he writes 'Haste'. The mounting crises in the Angolan region bring out his audacious condemnation of the portuguese activities. He relegates poetry and tries to leap out to go beyond;

> Let us end this tepidness of words
> and gestures / and smiles hidden
> behind book covers / and the
> resigned Biblical gesture / of
> turning the other cheek (pp.73-74).

The poetry gets more fierce through the exacerbation of his tension within the prison walls. Neto calls for a full force military action for counter-violence;

> Come vigorous action / of the
> people's army for the libera-
> tion of men / Come whirlwinds
> to shatter this passiveness
> (p.74).

It is only through such military attacks that the

revolution could be achieved. Neto calls for the crushing of the enemies of African soil to end the sacrifice of the people for centuries. The poet gets more angry and it becomes manifested in his poems. He dares anything in his angry lines:

> Come storms tearing trees up by the roots. Draw lightning to the majestic tree to startle the beasts of the fields and burn the unholiness of saints and prejudices . . . Let us not wait for heroes; let us be heroes (pp.74-75).

The poet's message is very clear as he supports any action that is vital to the independence of Africa through the strength of the fighting force in the forests.

'Struggle' is not only a poem dedicated to this cause but betrays the poet's mounting anger and conviction that struggle can overcome any force, be it physical violence or mental in prison situations. The poet assures that if there is a continuous wave of struggle launched by the patriots, they shall overcome the forces of fascism: "Until there remains of violence / only our pardon" (p.76).

By the time Neto was in Aljube prison near Lisbon, freedom possessed his mind to the extent of personifying the inanimate objects around him to read their yearning for freedom. This possession in his poetry is not an absurdity. It came to add more spice to the zeal of his freedom fighting. For the poet in 'Green fields',

freedom is "burning, imperishable as always" (p.76). He shows in his lines that the notion of freedom is the essence of life which conforms to the laws of nature and creation:

> on green fields, mountain ranges,
> tender lakes / blaze ingeneous
> flames, seas roared / glittering
> with hate, with smiles in a
> thousand caresses / They are the
> chorus of voices in impatience /
> seeking peace, life in age-old
> weariness / their lips whispering
> one word: independence! (p.76).

If we consider the definition of culture as incorporating the way of life of a people, then certainly exile has become a way of life for most visionaries in human society. Due to Neto's charisma as a poet and the international respect he commanded as a nationalist of the Angolan people, there had always been an international concern stirred up in his arrests. The portuguese exiled him to Cape Verde in order to silence him. They began to realise that their policy in Africa has created a monster against them. He could not easily be tracked down. 'Exile' is a poem Neto wrote in exile. The poem urges his fellow nationalists to develop courage and endurance to continue the struggle until his return. His consciousness of struggle and revolution are dropped along his lines as unracial campaign for peace on Earth for the perpetuation of humanity.

In one of his lengthiest poems 'With Equal Voice',

Agostinho Neto prophecies the dawning of independence. In many respects, it is a celebration of what shall come to Africa; "We walk already victorious" (p.79). The equality of voice is in acquiring freedom and the status of nationhood which is essential "A vital daybreak" (p.79). The African voice shall be a hope for democracy;

> Men emerged from cemetries of ignorance from the unburied bone heaps of city suburbs in the villages and on the sterile lands are the elect, The true participants in the festival of new life (p.79).

The poet goes into a historical narration of the burden of the blackman and the inequity he is suffering today. He goes on in a language similar to Walter Rodney's to prove the enriching of the west by the Africans, whose dead ancestors "gave glitter to the metropoles of gold and diamonds" (p.80). Neto writes this anthem in recognition of the wonders done by the blackman and how he heroically survives through the ages. Their story is of a people "unsurpassed in history" (p.80). They liberated America and gave her rhythms. Their capabilities in sports and schools are equally excelling. His hope in the success of the struggle is based on the wonders the blackman has performed in history. The poet in his confidence is urging for one more such miracle for the political freedom and the revival of their culture.

The proletariat culture created by the portuguese is vividly described by the poet with a new force in his voice about the certainty of independence. By October 1960, many African states had gained their independence, this affects the poet greatly. In his poetry, he begins to recapture all shades of emotion of his people especially in exile towards their goal of independence; "From chaos to the world's new beginning" (p.84). He arrives at this conclusion after the assessment of what the people have gone through. The staggering losses encountered was enough to win freedom for the nation and he urges his fellows to shake off their suffering and embrace "the form and essence / of the African style of life" (p.84) which unalloyedly would bring them peace, independence and the sustenance of all Africans. These are the key variables apparent in his poetry in exile.

After his arrest and subsequent jailing in Luanda in 1960, Neto had written a poem titled 'In Exhaustion He Thus Clamoured'. This is strangely a poem which depicts the cruelty involved in extorting confessions from prisoners. It exposes the brutality of the portuguese in forcing prisoners to give information. It, however, is clearly a poem that sanctions the innocence of the Africans and celebrates the power of will over all inflictions and terror driven into people by the portuguese. Although too extortionate a price

people pay for their refusal to say anything, the poet is convinced that he has nothing to say. The people of Icolo e Bengo who protested over Neto's arrest were dispersed by bullets. "Thirty people were killed and two hundred wounded" (p.10). His poetry, therefore, tries to maintain the innocence of the African:

> I never did anything against your
> country but you have stabbed ours
> I never conspired never spoke with
> friends
> or with the stars or with the gods
> never dreamed
> I sleep like a stone flung in the well
> and am stupid as vengeful butchery
> I will say nothing I am innocent
> I will say nothing I know nothing . . .
> Even if they offer me freedom (pp.62-63).

Neto's lamentation over the killing of the innocent is carried further to rebuke the authorities of their denial of his rights to partake in the funeral. The irony of his situation could be seen in his arrest and imprisonment when many African nations were acquiring their independence:

> Enclosed between four walls /
> without light / without even
> seeing the dead face of my
> daughter / I suffer the anguish
> of darkness (p.64).

The death toll over his release and not for the Angolan freedom brings back the anger into his poetry. His egalitarian nature is exhibited when he dares death and challenges the colonialists:

> Let them burn me rather / take me to the lime kiln / incenerate my viscera and my brain / and these hands which can do nothing / against the walls / against that metal door / against these armed men filled with fear (p.64).

As a medical doctor[10], the wanton destruction of human life because of him causes double tragedy and irony in his life. He was made to look like a parent who watches his children being lynched. Neto tries to search for comforting answers to the moral dilemma the portuguese have created in him. It is a pathetic situation which causes more grief and despair to his soul. What would be the penalty for the death of people over him, he seems to ask. The moral justification would be to throw him into the lime kiln he wishes to say.

The saddest moements in prison are described in 'Prison Nights'. Nights of restlessness and insomnia. Their dilemma is more and more heightened as the drums reach their hearts "when in a dirge the drum mouns a corpse" (p.65). The torture within prison walls also drive terror into their hearts. It is not only the concern with oneself that disallows one to sleep; "who will sleep / when he hears his best friend go mad" (p.66). The terror experienced in prison is so great and insurmountable that "There are minutes when the world / is summed up in the torture chambers" (p.66). Through the images that come to his mind despite the maddening situation, Neto's political concern come

out as mosaics. Fidel Castro's beards are seen on faces of prisoners; Neto chooses Biblical phrases that suit his prison situation to exert his confidence in the certainty of freedom. The Biblical assurance for those who suffer for a cause is used as a prayer; "For theirs shall be the country / and the love of their people" (p.67). These, therefore, are his goals as he reconciles his former attitudes towards his own self which results in extremism provoked by the massacre. Human emotions, no matter how controlled, can erupt due to tensions created by certain situations.

Throughout his sentence in the PIDE prison in Luanda in 1960, Neto composed poems with varying tones and attitudes for the values he stands for. 'Here In Prison' is a poem that discusses the gradual development of his attitudes towards the course he fights for. As a hero of his people, he recalls their sacrifices and matyrs through their traditional songs for the brave in war fronts. The stories he had heard as a child of the greatness of his ancestors and their bravery has inspired him to follow their example. Western values are fake values that evoke only the torture he had experienced as it is not meaningful to his background. Neto reassesses all the concepts that develop in him in prison and asserts his reawakened confidence by saying:

> Here in prison / rage contained
> in my breast / I patiently wait /
> for the clouds to gather / blown
> by the wind of history / No one /
> can stop the rain (p.68).

This is a significant conception of the revolutionary foresight in overhauling the nature of the Angolan society. It is through these captivating insights that the dynamism of his poetry as a political document for social change come to inspire the people of Angola.

Agostinho Neto as a medical doctor brings his medical language into poetry. He diagnoses the African condition and discovers the symptoms. The symptoms exhibited by Africa are found to be bondage and exploitation. The symptoms of not being free is captured in 'The Tears of Africa'. The violence inflicted on the African through servitude, wounds and deaths are examined by the poet in his medical language. The care for this disease should come "from the haemorrhage of the rhythm of the wounds of Africa" (p.69).

It is a poem that depicts the "tears of the centuries / where outraged truth withers away in the iron circle" (p.69). The death toll which produces "cadaverised bodies" (p.69) should be ended "in violence" (p.69) for the love and fulfilment of the African.

Another poem dedicated to the Angolan nationalists who have sacrificed for the revolution their lives is 'The Hoisting Of The Flag'. It is for the people who fought for the right to live and some killed in the process "gone forever / for ever victorious in your death for life" (p.71). The hoisting of the flag also conveys the difficulty in nation building. The poet commends organisations that have contributed towards

the freedom of Angola.

The concern of the colonized people in the world has always been on how to free their societies, how to rid the society of all values that tie them to the cultures that dominate them. Whatever efforts made by the people towards the freedom and fulfilment of the societal objectives are worthwhile gestures commended by the people. Agostinho Neto has found poetry as a tool at his own disposal, not only for the cultural assertion of his societal values, but he shapes and refines poetry to demand for him the political freedom of his own people. It could, therefore, be concluded that

> such a struggle also dictated a deepening of ideological awareness at all levels: an understanding of imperialism, an eschewing of exploitation, a critique of racism and a redefinition of nationalism[11].

He extracts materials from culture and politics through poetry and places them at the crossroads for the disenfranchisement of a nation that has never experienced democracy.

This chapter captures the audacity in Neto's later poems in the course of the revolution. The poet has a reassessment of some of his own earlier views and his anger is so high in some of these poems. Neto cultivates Revolutionary Nationalism in the general

perspective of his new trend which rightly portrays his position on the MPLA. He mainly addresses himself to the struggle and in certain instances, doubts the achievement of poetry. But he tries to reassure himself by making his revolutionary poetry an anthem for freedom.

Poetry after independence is still yearning for the African freedom from the neo-colonial bondage. An examination of this shall be encountered in the next chapter where Okot p'Bitek registers his disillusionment with Ugandan independence which is a microcosm of what obtains in Africa in terms of political and cultural enslavement.

FOOTNOTES

1. Gerald Moore and Ulli Beier, ed., Modern poetry from Africa (Penguin Books, London) Introduction.

2. Quoted from Micheal Wolfers, ed., Poems from Angola.

3. Paul Fauvet: 'Nitista Coup in Angola'; ROAPE No.9, May-August 1978 (Russels Press, Nottingham).

4. Ibid. Introduction.

5. Nkosi's description of the poetry is valid here; "Neto's poetry is nothing if not an attempt to give voice to the voiceless and the poor, to the brave and unarticulated hopes of the down-trodden and the forgotten"; Lewis Nkosi, Tasks And Masks, (Longman, Essex, 1981) p.165.

6. Agostinho Neto, Sacred Hope (Tanzania Pub. House, Dar-es-Salam, 1974) p.xxvi.

7. Ibid. p.xxvii.

8. Ibid. p.xxviii.

9. "Palmatoria: a wooden paddle with holes in it used by the portuguese colonialists to hit the palms of people's hands. The impact of the blows draws flesh up into the holes, causing the skin to burst" (p.63), Agostinho Neto; Sacred Hope (Tanzania Pub. House, Dar-es-Salam, 1974).

10. Neto had qualified as a medical doctor in 1958.

11. Samora Machel; Mozambique: Sowing The Seeds of Revolution (Russel Press, Nottingham, 1974) p.3.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE POETRY OF OKOT P'BITEK

The power of language in depicting cultural values for political awareness has been demonstrated by Chinua Achebe with a measure of success especially in his novels. Okot p'Bitek's power of expression is also profound in Africa today. His poetry takes as its referent traditional African oral songs. Commenting on the character of the poems, G.A. Heron says:

> Song of Lawino does not fit into any western model for a long poem. It is not an epic poem. This written 'song' form was born in Uganda while Okot was writing Song of Lawino[1] (p.7).

The overall consideration of the poetry can be seen in the culture-based approach to the predicament of contemporary Africa through Acoli values and traditions[2]. This, however, is not to descend from objective social realism to assert traditional values in parochial chauvinism. The images created in Lawino's song shock us into awareness of the cultural practice among educated Africans. Lawino as a humble village woman shows the danger of being educated. She is not raising issues against western education as a means of enlightenment nor is she condemming it for bringing ignorance. Far from that, she is condemming academic eccentricity and parody in social life as

part of educated behaviour, with grave political implications for Africa.

The acknowledgement of the success which these poems have is not only in their urge to end colonialism, but in their defence of the African culture by sanctioning the roles and functions of certain African behaviour as found in Acoli tradition.

'My Husband's Tongue Is Bitter' is the first song that also captures the mind of the listener with a striking force of freshness. The originality of this composition can be sensed prior to the explanation on the effect of translation from the Acoli. The sense conveyed is enough to quell ambiguity in our minds so that we do not wander in search of what issues are being raised. "Husband now you despise me / Now you treat me with spite / And say I have inherited the stupidity of my aunt". This Lawino explains is "Because I am like the things left behind / In the deserted homestead". Whatever mists formed in the reader's mind begin to clear as the conflict of social change begin to dawn in the reader. The last two words strike the reader with a sense of total departure from one culture to another. This Okot tries to explain is the creation of the problem situation in drawing margins between cultures. people like Ocol have no sense of cultural integration but rather assimilation, which makes the margins unnatural and dangerous. The danger lies in Ocol's misunderstanding of western education as

Lawino explains; "He abuses me in English / And he is so arrogant" (p.35). Ocol's obsession with western mannerism can be seen in his trial to obliterate his own Africanity. When Lawino sings: "Take care of your tongue / Be careful what your lips say / . . . you are now a man / You are not a dead fruit! / To behave like a child does not befit you! / Listen Ocol, you are the son of a chief" (p.34), she is making a rehabilitative effort to bring her husband back to the society of his people. Ocol's background as the son of a chief becomes vital for assertion in order to affect him. In this way, Lawino tries to liberate the Acoli society of novel ideas and behaviours that threaten it. Oral poetry is shown here as a guide for unity and she tells her husband; "Songs about you should be songs of praise" (p.34).

The poetry adopts a gradual progression of unravelling the significant questions over the clash of cultures.

As a social Anthropologist, Okot finds an important ground for presenting the colonial bogus on primitivism and civilization. The words in the song are sung with axiomatic pronunciation of the Acoli world-view without apology. Okot, therefore, wishes to see the world through African view. In this respect, he conforms to the notion which qualifies the artist as one who

> creates within a cultural tradition, a tradition that defines its own aesthetics and functions. For literature and art in tradition were

> not limited in their role to a utilitarian system per se, but expressed the continued endurance of a certain theological order . . . with a fundamental process of integration and survival . . . opposed to . . . destructive absolutism of a one-dimensional totality[3].

Lawino's concern over what Ocol says "I am primitive / Because I cannot play the guitar" (p.35) is part of the scorn to which the African is exposed. She asserts, through her song, not only the culture and tradition of her people the Acoli, but her own humanity as well. It is not quite self-aggrandizement, but an assertion out of necessity in a threatened environment as she says "Ocol treats me / As if I am no longer a person" (p.35). Lawino's tradition does not accept such aberrations that turn a person into a stoic. She could no longer be a passive sponge "that frantically drinks" everything as we find the image of the blackman painted by David Diop in 'Loser of Everything'.

The political nature of the song could be traced to Lawino's solutions when she sings "My husband pours scorn / on Black people, / He behaves like a hen / That eats its own eggs / A hen that should be imprisoned / Under a basket" (p.35). This beautiful symbol of life as found in the hen and the egg is no less exhilarating in symbolising the polemics over the predicament of origin of life and the debate over cultural conflicts.

Lawino's ideas and solutions are not, therefore, to be regarded as coming from a simpleton within the socio-political context of a complex Africa. Although naive about the complexity of politics and its machinery, the views and solutions are effective and rare as coming from an uneducated person in the western sense.

By the time the reader arrives at the point Lawino echoes "He says Black people are primitive / . . . Their dances are mortal sins . . . / Ocol says he is a modern man, / A progressive and civilized man, / He says he has read extensively and widely" (p.36), her voice becomes ironic as the words get hollow and Ocol continues in disrepute.

In Agostinho Neto, we have observed the efforts of a poet in trying to achieve political liberation. Okot p'Bitek in an 'independent' Uganda strives to achieve cultural emancipation for a meaningful independence from colonialism. Satire, therefore, is used to good effect in order to draw those satirised to rehabilitate. Based on the psychological minus value theory of Frantz Fanon, Okot projects in strong metaphors one of the absurdities of culture blindness in Clementine. Ocol's infatuation with this lady "who speaks English" is sustained to promote Lawino's flabbergast. In her constantly searching mind, she strives to comprehend Tina's aspirations to behave and look like a white lady. The description of Clementine is highly visual with all the aura of an Acoli woman

seeing such cosmetic make-ups for the very first time:

> Her lips are red hot
> Like glowing charcoal,
> She resembles the wild cat
> That has dipped its mouth in blood,
> . . . Tina dusts powder on her face
> And it looks so pale;
> She resembles the wizard
> Getting ready for the midnight dance (p.37).

The rest of her body would not succumb to the rapid change of her face in the bleaching process. The "body resembles / The ugly coat of the hyena; / Her neck and arms / Have real human skins! / She looks as if she has been / Struck / By lightning" (p.37). The political mirror reflected in this image is the sad situation Africa has found herself in. Foreign garments in form of governmental structures and cultural idiosyncrasies which have no meaning for Africa would further serve to deform and enslave the continent. The neo-colonial insinuation could be seen when Lawino sings "The woman with whom I share / my husband / Walks as if her shadow / Has been captured, / You can never hear / Her footsteps" (p.40). Okot as a poet has demonstrated the position of the artist as one living at the outskirts of the society yet central to the social machinery.

When Lawino sings "Only recently I would play / On my bow-harp / Singing praises to my beloved. / Only recently he promised / That he trusted me completely. / I used to admire him speaking / in English" (p.36), there is a Negritudinal tone in her voice that conveys

the harmony and pride in those who would change their society equipped with the whiteman's tools. This, however, is not to show any contempt for other cultures, her respect for the traditions of other societies is unparalleled. In these simple but yet strong images, the power of culture and tradition for political stability is conveyed. "The pumpkin in the old / homestead / must not be uprooted" (p.41) which becomes a recurrent poetic truth in the songs connotes the notion of socialization through cultural integration and not by throwing the baby with the bath water.

From the perspective of her people's dance, Lawino yet justifies the African culture in Acoli land. Almost every aspect of Acoli life is marked by certain dance oriented musical compositions which have cultural implications for the people as in many African cultures. There is an African taste in dancing because "when the drums are throbbing / And the Black youths / Have raised much dust / You dance with vigour and health" (p.42). This Negritudinal robost is recollective of what the toms-toms of Africa could compose as demonstrated by Agostinho Neto and David Diop. The verile and masculine image seen in these physical contortions of human muscle "may be deciphered as in an open book the huge effort of a community to exorcise itself, to liberate itself, to explain itself"[14]. Lawino then tries to convince the listener through her blunt comparison of the two cultures:

> It is true, Ocol / I cannot
> dance the ballroom / dance. /
> Being held so tightly / I feel
> ashamed, / Being held so tightly
> in public / I cannot do it, / it
> looks shameful to me! (p.44).

She also extends her concept of lust to western culture: "Girls hold their fathers, / Boys hold their sisters . . . / They dance even with their mothers" (p.45). This, however, is not unconnected with the spill-over from the colonial mentality of regarding the native as:

> insensible to ethics, he represents
> not only the absence of values,
> but also the negation of values
> . . . in this sense he is the
> absolute evil[5].

The manifestation of Africa's under-development could be seen apparently in what Africans indulge in promoting; "At the height of the hot season / The progressive and civilized ones / put on blanket suits" (p.45).

Through Armah's excremental vision, Okot conveys the decadence of Uganda after independence which is an epitome of Africa's disintegration. The symbol of a woman conveys this idea vividly:

> you meet a big woman / she
> staggers towards you / And leans
> on the wall / And before she has
> untied her / dress / She is
> already pissing; / She forces
> out the urine / As if she has
> syphilis (p.46).

The poetry further asserts the trapped nature of such

environments; 'inside a cave', 'hyena's den', 'lion's mouth' etc. This gives us a glaring picture of a neo-colonial society.

Lawino concludes that Ocol is not an Acoli hero and, therefore, "cannot wield the shield!" (p.50) which makes him "stagger to white men's amusements" (p.49). As it would not be befitting for a custodian of culture to borrow from others to the detriment of the national culture, Lawino begins to sing a dirge. When comparing Ocol with his father, Lawino is yet affected by the oral tradition which encourages hyperbolic language in war songs "when his men struck the enemy / The heaven shook from its base" (p.116). This shows Okot's indebtedness to tradition as documented in The Horn Of My Love.

In relaying what has destroyed Ocol, Lawino's suspicion of the books is clear even though naive about the contents. The books have succeeded in stuffing her husband, thus indoctrinating him with foreign values:

> Some are green / Others red as blood / Some books are black and oily, / Their backs shine like / The dangerous ororo snake / Coiled on a tree top. / Some have pictures on their backs. / Dead faces of witch-looking men and women, / Unshaven, bold, fat-stomached / Bony-cheeked, angry revengeful-looking people (p.114).

These are the images that have pushed her husband into the imaginative world of alienation where "the boiling darkness / Bursts your eye balls. / And the sticky juices / That drop from the gum trees / Block the holes

of your ears" (p.114).

The political views carried by Okot's poetry is profound in the comparison of the two cultures, while asserting the African values. Misfortune, fate and courage come to dominate Lawino's mind as she digs the root cause of misfortunes through Acoli tradition. It is in this way that she integrates her theme of death into the raging political debate of the continent by acknowledging the universality of death which defies the whiteman's medicines. It is a phenomenon which the 'agoga' bird sings a song to. This, therefore, symbolically alludes to Ocol singing his own swan song in the Acoli cultural perspective.

The political nature of Lawino's poetry manifests itself more clearly towards the eleventh movement of her song captioned 'The Buffalos Of Poverty Knock The People Down'. This is the era of independence. Ocol's shout over 'freeing' Uganda from her colonial status is portrayed with a sense of hollow echo.

> He says / They are fighting for
> Uhuru / He says / They want
> independence and place / And when
> they meet / They shout 'Uhuru!',
> 'Uhuru!' / But what is the meaning
> / Of Uhuru? (p.103).

The quest for power is the central concern of the politicians unlike in the poetry of Neto and Sepamla. It is interesting to notice the absence of such politicians in Neto, while partially absent in Sepamla due to

the neo-colonial situation involved in Uganda. But this, however, is not to suggest their non-existence. Here, there is a manipulation of the different ethnic groups to set themselves against the colonial authorities in a facade of nationalism. The poetic justice with which Okot dispenses his ideas could be seen in his disenchantment over the political climate. In this way, he arrives at the visionery post from which the poet sees the society. This post had already been arrived at by Neto and it is the same vantage point through which Sepamla relays the skirmish in Apartheid South Africa.

Lawino's cultural independence becomes a value for which the politicians strive, but in essence, it is a value which they could never achieve due to their cultural pervasion. "The new parties have split the homestead / As the battle axe splits the skull! / . . . Is this the unity of Uhuru? / Is this the peace / That independence brings?". With the dawn of political activities, all the vices associated with the game; lies, murder, bribery, thuggery, bitterness, intolerance and vandalism are institutionalized. Uganda then becomes, to some extent, a microcosm of Africa. Ocol says:

> His brother is dangerously /
> jealous of him / And has
> smuggled a pistol / And has
> collected money / And hired a
> man / To bump him off! / . . .
> His brother will bring /
> communism! (p.105).

The poetry, therefore, exhibits the disillusionment with 'Uhuru' because the people are "sleeping on the same earth / They slept / Before Uhuru" (p.110).

The politicians represent the kites in a symbolic sense. Although people have no inborn aversion for the kites, and the dry season is enjoyed for the festivities, as reported in The Horn Of My Love, the politicians have come to give a new meaning to the kite and what it stands for in Acoli culture after independence.

> They return / To the countryside / For the next elections / Like the kite / That returns during the dry season / When the kites have returned / The dry season has come.

The connotation is more than the barrenness that it carries. Okot's poetry, therefore, serves as a guiding voice apart from reporting the nature of the state:

> pythons of sickness / Swallow the children / And the buffalos of poverty / Knock the people down / And ignorance stands there / Like an elephant (p.111).

Ocol's economic motives of controlling some resources and participating in the game of capitalism as an exploiter is clearly exhibited through his rash actions. Lawino, however, does not accept Ocol's views without her logical and rhetorical questions. She wonders whether it is

> the money? / Is it the competition for position / Someone said / Independence falls like a bull buffalo / And the hunters / Rush to it with drawn knives (p.113).

The scuffle over material things is clearly portrayed, and behind these images lurk the peril faced by the governed. The seriousness of her voice is shown in how the society is degenerating into a chaotic hub, with the fast erosion of traditional as well as cultural values. One begins to notice that Lawino's voice as a representative of Acoli values is also endangered. Okot's exile from Uganda because of his poetry can also be seen in the light of this enstrangement[6].

In a rehabilitative measure, Lawino sings:

> Take a small amount of millet
> porridge, / Let them prop you up /
> Drink some fish soup / Slowly,
> slowly / you will recover (p.117).

The Malakwany Dish would poetically replace the lost spirit and zeal in Acoli tradition and hope for Africa's liberation because:

> Every native won over, every native
> who had taken pledge not only marks
> a failure for the colonial struc-
> ture when he decides to lose
> himself and to go back to his own
> side, but also stands as a symbol
> for the uselessness and the shallow-
> ness of all the work that has been
> accomplished[7].

It could also symbolically mean that it only takes an African political system to find a permanent solution to the crises-ridden life of the continent. In this respect, Okot shares a similar idea with Neto's

colonial-days analysis of the Angolan society.

Ocol's song is initially written in English as a reaction to Lawino's song. The poet uses this medium for a synthesis of the two songs so that Lawino's song is confirmed by Ocol. His anger is clearly shown: "Take all the clothes / I bought you / The beads, necklaces / And the remains / Of the utensils, / I need no second-hand things" (p.121). Ocol's arrogance and pomposity is conveyed in the last line. In trying to scorn Lawino's song, he stumbles over the cultural and political issues she has raised:

> Song of the woman / Is the confused noise / Made by the ram / After the butcher's knife / Has sunk past / The wind pipe, / Red paint spraying / On the grasses; / It is a song all alone / A solo fragment / With no chorus / No accompaniment / A strange melody / Impossible to orchestrate (p.121).

He tries to measure up to Lawino in resorting to Acoli tradition but to no avail. The image of the ram as a sacrificial object is desecrated and he betrays his bigoted hatred towards Acoli culture which transforms into an ailment. The image of the butcher further serves to reproduce through Ocol's mouth, what the new politicians are and the irony is too vivid in the blood which is a mark of revolution. Both in the literal and symbolic sense, the imagery is effective in nailing the political idea of social corruption of Acoli tradition and the inevitable upsurge. His patronage of western

music in his condemnation of Lawino's song does not only show his lack of patriotism, but makes him a mouthpiece of western civilization; an instrument for their advertisement. Culture, therefore, carries an ominous lable of commercialization.

Ocol raises dust in a smokescreen to protect his false values:

> Song of the woman / Is the mad bragging / Of a defeated General, / Ten thousand men / Dead, dying, / The others scattered; / It is the pointless defiance / of the condemned (p.122).

Lawino's acclaim could be seen in Ocol's gullibility in not realising the strength of his native culture. She penetrates him to corrode the false values which introduces anger in the tonal pitch of his song. It is not the type of anger seen in Neto or Sepamla.

Although one cannot fail to notice the transitional aspect of culture as at the era of political independence, because of the dynamism of culture, the values of the larger community are not actually in ruins. Ocol's claims are, therefore, far-fetched than those of the Europeans; his masters. His understanding of civilization is very destructive as he says:

> Make compost of the pumpkins / . . . We will uproot / The trees demarcating / The land boundaries / And throttle native tongues / To dumb death (p.124).

culture does not connote a sense of the gown which could be discarded completely for another. In this way, Okot p'Bitek shows the banal propositions of blind westernization. Ocol's idea of native language is partly borne out of an evasive mechanism to dodge Lawino's intelligent questions and partly due to the condemnation by social Anthropologists that some African languages are deficient i.e. without symbolic effects of possibly explaining certain western concepts. The question of the beauty and versatility of the European language has been raised by Leopold Senghor[8]. Okot's documentation of Acoli poetry in The Horn Of My Love debunks such false assumptions to which Taban Lo Liong also is a contributor. In this collection, he demonstrates how language of the Acoli is driven to its conventional limits within the context of Acoli world view.

It is through the notion of the preconceived fallacy that Africa is an "Idle giant / Basking in the sun, / sleeping, snoring, / Twitching in dreams" as presented by the Ocols in Africa that Okot villifies the pseudo-anthropologists. When Ocol sings:

> What is Africa / To me? / Blackness, / Deep, deep fathomless / Darkness; / . . . Chained to the rock / Of poverty, / And laughing . . . / Stuck in the stagnant mud / Of superstitions, / Frightened by the spirits / Of the bush, the stream (p.125),

he registers all the vices within African ways in

contrast to European ways. We then begin to sense an ominous anthropological sound in his song[9]. He becomes a fore-runner in bearing the torch of the inglorious assumptions of the so-called authorities who fabricate superficial and unintelligent hypotheses about Africa 'the dark continent'.

Through Ocol, the confirmation of Africa as a "rich granary / Of taboos, customs, / Traditions" (p.126) is manifested, but he goes on to say:

> We will smash / The taboos /
> . . . Do you think / We plan
> merely / To bring light / Into
> the hut? / We will set it ablaze
> / Let fire consume it all / This
> lair of backwardness" (p.126).

This exhibits the notion of cultural hegemony through destruction. We sense cultural colonialism beginning to manifest in Ocol's mind. Agostinho Neto's fears of the blazing fire of western culture then comes to our minds. In Ocol, Okot p'Bitek shows how a perverted African can be so cruel and as a midiocre politician, his plans sound risky and unconvincing. That is why he resorts to sycophancy as shown in Lawino's song. poets too must go in his plans and this is not out of a sobre recollection of what poetry can really achieve in fighting a force as seen in Neto, but out of a venomous anger provoked by Lawino's song. His notion of progress is warped as Ocol does not see the relevance of African antiquities to African studies "Who built the

citadel / Of Zimbabwe? / Of what relevance is it / Whether blackmen / Architected the pyramid?" (p.129). This idea is extended to challenge the activities of African patriots and champions of nationalism.

> Teachers of African / History, / A bonfire / We'll make of their works, / . . . Where is Aime Cesaire? / Where is Leopold Senghor? / Arrest Janheinz Jahn / . . . All the preachers / Of Negritude; / . . . Du Bois is dead / We will erect / No memorial for him (p.129).

Pan-Africanism that evolved in the west among disillusioned Negroes is put to challenge on African soil. It is in this way that Okot shows how the Ocols of Africa have involved themselves into the troubled waters of contemporary African politics.

Ocol's contradictions are shown to manifest through historical acknowledgement of the achievements of the blackman. But in Ocol, we see the mind of a sadist working against these achievements. Lawino's song, which reflects his background so that he could see the extent to which he is brainwashed, is to be silenced too; "Smash all these mirrors / That I may not see / The blackness of the past / From which I came / Reflected in them" (p.129).

The concept of poetry as a political appeal for cultural emancipation has been demonstrated in the oral poetry of Adok Too[10]. Ocol's cynicism is clear when he sings; "The blind poet's voice / Is piercing the thatch,/

The arrow of his song / Strikes the woman / Like lightning" (p.131), he is not only showing the sensous nature in which poetry affects the African, but also acknowledges the defiance and strong political views found in Acoli oral poetry. But he goes on to say "Listen not to Adok Too's / praises, / They are spurs / For the tired horses, / Blinkers for donkeys" (p.131). Okot also achieves a symbolism in the realistic image of the blind poet who has 'Sight' and Ocol who is blinded by western culture. The allegorical nature of the poetry is a style which Okot develops in order to reach out for further explanation on the political dilemma faced by Africans. When Ocol says "Woman of Africa / Sweeper / Smearing floors and walls / . . . Cook, ayah, the baby tied on your back / . . . washer of dishes, / planting, weeding, harvesting", there is an indictment of the society over the exploitation of women. The dramatic irony found in the contentment of Lawino in her role as a woman within Acoli tradition could be seen in Ocol's description of how the woman is treated in a blunt way:

> In Buganda / They buy you / With
> two pots / Of beer, / The Luo
> trade you / For seven cows, / And
> what is that Madi hoe / The Acoli
> men give your father? / . . .
> They purchase you / On hire purchase
> even, / Like bicycles (p.134).

Such extension of Okot's views on his society is

successfully achieved as the poet's presence is rarely felt. This could also be seen when Ocol says "you scholar seeking after truth . . . / Can you explain / The African philosophy / On which we are reconstructing / Our new societies?" (p.150). But it is not acceptable as suggested by G.A. Heron that Okot's sense of integration is only in the technical aspect. Borrowing of western technology itself has far-reaching cultural implications for Africa.

The style of Ocol's song inspite of the far-fetched ideas is also based on the insult tradition apparent in certain African oral literature. When he sings about the territory of the Lango, he very much resorts to this technique and reduces the geo-political nature of the Empire into

> A large arc / Of semi desert land / strewn with human skeletons / Barely covered by the / Hostile thorn bushes / And the flowering cactus, / A monument to five hundred years / Of cattle theft! / Wallowing in the mud / Of poverty and ignorance / You recited poems / About the beauty of your beasts, / Sang songs about the might / Of your spears / . . . Believing you were / The richest of the earth, / Drunk with the illusion / Of real power / . . . Firmly holding to the spear, / The symbol of your backwardness (p.136).

Through the use of blunt metaphors, the poetry transforms into cynicism. The Ghanaian poets in Kofi Awoonor's Guardians Of The Sacred Word are shown to resort to the

semantics of abuse in their poetry. Ocol's audacity is, therefore, a technique devised by Okot in order to achieve a convincing tone appropriate to his values as in Neto and Sepamla's euphemistic language. The bold and assertive nature of the insult tradition, however, results both in political fear and cultural confusion:

> The blowing of war horns / will be punished / . . . All the men with moc names / And those with 'killer' marks / On their backs / And on their arms / Will be hanged for murder (p.137).

Ocol's fear is part of the ideosyncracies of the propertied class, to use his own song, "Men on Nandi hills / Tending cattle in the rocky pastures / Always suspecting an impending raid" (p.135). The bourgeosie are shown to lack sensibility as a result of obsessive protection of their property:

> We have property / And wealth, / We are in power; / Trespassers must be jailed / For life / Thieves and robbers / Must be hanged, / Disloyal elements / Must be detained without / Trial . . . (p.142).

The grim reflection of the laws operating in Africa are shown here as part of the extension of capitalist machination as a result of the colonial encounter. Ocol's situation is egoism that has germinated into a sentimental avarice for material wealth through power.

Through Ocol, Okot further achieves levels in poetry; descriptive, realistic, symbolic etc as wide as his imagination could go, mostly with a cultural or political message. When Ocol sings "What was your contribution / In the struggle for Uhuru?" (p.139), he is asking a tell-tale question in a realistic manner. But the reflection of what others have acquired as 'token reward' gives the question an added notion of coming from Okot himself. There are portions of the poetry that portray the destructive force of poetry itself;

> We will uproot / Each tree / From the Ituri forest / And blow up / Mount Kilimanjaro, / The rubble from Ruwenzori / Will fill the valleys / Of the Rift. / We will divert / The mighty waters / Of the Nile / Into the Indian Ocean (p.146).

The cacophony of sounds produced through these incredible hyperboles are part of Okot's criticism of sheer iconoclasm as found amongst African poets. When commenting on popular culture and revolution in Mozambique, Mbulelo Mzamane says:

> Culture becomes a crucial element in the transformation of the struggle from a broad nationalist front to a self-consciously revolutionary movement, which was itself transformed in the process. I shall focus upon poetry, as one particular cultural practice which has been involved since the earliest days of cultural nationalism[11].

It is in this respect that Ocol is seen to identify with the aspirations of the people "We spent years / In detention / Suffering without bitterness / And planning for the revolution". But this identification leaves an acid taste in the mouth when one reflects the fire that had burnt Neto's stomach and and other genuine African revolutionaries. Ocol's deceit in using radicalism to gain entrance into the upper class is clearly exposed. His elitism is some times far fetching when he asks: "Do you appreciate the beauty / Of my roses? / Or would you rather turn / My flower garden / Into a maize shamba?" (p.139). In this way, Okot develops devastating irony with which he laces the poetry. The chill that envelopes Ocol's song is found through his contradictions and his tone becomes sarcastic as he continues: "Behold, / Africa's wildest bush / Is now a garden green / With wheat, barley, coffee" (p.141) which is owned by the capitalists. His distance from the people results in alienation and insensibility as a comprador bourgeosie; "Did someone tell you / That on the morning of Uhuru / The dew on the grass / Along the village pathways / Would turn into gold, / To be collected by the women / Going to the well". The nouveau riches are shown as people from grass to grace exhibiting contempt due to their affluence.

In the style of poetic justice, Ocol's cynicism is turned into myopia. The hunter who predicted revolution carries a cyclical idea of human society which entails

that no one can actually stand in the course of history. "A hunter / Sat in the shadow / Of a rock, / Rubbed two sticks / A flash / Thunder roared, / Flames / purified the land!" The shadow brings a lurking sense of genuine revolution to which Ocol has shown his continued aversion. In this way, the hunter's vision is the vision shared by Neto and Sepamla. The false assumption carried in Ocol's song; "Comrade, / Do you not agree / That without your present leaders / Uhuru could never have come?" (p.139) shows how confused Ocol is in his choice of terms. But what make the poetry exhilarating are the nuances apparent as a result of the style of dramatic juxtaposition; in a beautiful verse Ocol sings with a decadent image over the social condition of Uganda; "A herdsboy / Sat on the bank above, / Threw small stones / Hit the carcass, / The flies rose / Like white ants, / The boy sobbed / Eyes smarting with pepper" (p.143). This could well be an extension of the poet's mind as it is when Ocol says:

> In the valley / A stream let / The lamb / Uhuru / Dead as stone, / The shimmering flies / Giving false life / to its open eyes! (p.143).

There is disenchantment over the slow pace of life in a pessimistic way. The futile attempts by the politicians to rekindle the lost spirit is also echoed to further give a picture of the absurd political climate.

Independence carries a sense of innocence and peace in the image of the lamb; but it is a lamb to the slaughter! In this way, we see through the verbiage of Ocol to reach the poet as can be seen when the character of Ocol is more asserted:

> Out of my way / You cowardly fool / Creep back and hide / In your mother's womb; / Vex me no more / With your hollow wailings / And crocodile tears / Over Uhuru! (p.145).

We then continue to witness the denouncement of his character through the destructive and retrogressive assumptions qualified in vague phrases "Mourn / The death of / The old homestead! . . . / Pilgrims to the New City . . . Say Goodbye / For you will never / Hunt together again, / Nor dance the war dance" (p.148). The recurrence of the war dance in Acoli tradition catches up with Ocol despite his claims of completely breaking away from the past. We recall how the tension within the society has been summed up which entails a climax for the revolution:

> We reaped cynicism / Stored it / In a concrete granary / Wider, deeper / Than Mwintanzige / We distilled Anger / From the laughter / Ten tons / Of venom; / Stored it in a tank / Underground / Acrid steam rose / Like lazy smoke, / Trees and grasses died; / A smouldering mound we made / Of Frustrations and Fear / Higher than Kirinyaga / Its fiery lips / Licked the clouds, / Heaven wept (p.145).

Ocol's song is at the precipice of Okot's poetic vision. The picturesque quality achieved through the weaving together of rare artistic materials that give a kaleidoscope of the society is one of the heights to which Okot drives the beauty of his poetry. In a way, the irony in which Ocol is treated is too sad. In placing these beautifully interwoven images in his mouth, the poet agrees that "it is generally within the cultural factor that we find the germ of challenge which leads to the structuring and development of the liberation movement"[12].

Ocol also throws the African past into complete oblivion when he sings. Obviously there are people caught up between these horns of dilemma which the poet feels are not comfortable.

'Song of The Prisoner' shows that "The poet is not separate from his people and thus can articulate their pain, hunger and suffering"[13]. The riddle of a political drama set within the context of East African cultural values is the major social concern of the song. Through his traditionally influenced form, Okot yet captures the pulse of his society. The pessimism of the poetry is based on social realism through the prisoner's dilemma. When we are confronted with images evoked by prison situations and bondage, we may begin to wonder the role of poetry in such cases[14]. Poets in Africa have, however, continued to invite us into such abodes, where, often the most refined of thoughts on all aspects

of human condition are produced. Kofi Awoonor, on 'prison and poetry' in 1978, says:

> Before prison, I dealt with writers like Pablo Neruda almost abstractly . . . The poet has always been a commentator on the political conditions of his people . . . the poet soils his hands in the despair of his people[15].

Iconoclasm is one of the factors that creates prison situations for poets and other visionaries and moreover, "poetry today has become an instrument of social conflict and involvement"[16] which brings the poet face to face with the challenges of the society; be it cultural or political.

'Dung of Chicken' introduces the callousness of a prison cell and the harrassment it can cause to the mind with a sense of the unbearable stench as in Stanley Mogoba's 'Cement'; "The stone floor / Lifts her powerful arms / in cold embrace / To welcome me"[17] (p.11). The personification of the environment is a poetic device to show how the prison cell can break the human spirit:

> She kisses / My bosom / My neck / My belly button / My back / My buttocks / And shoots freezing bullets / Through my bones (p.12).

It embalms the prisoner with the cold which symbolises the tomb. Between fits of dream and reality of the "bleak white walls", the prisoner's disturbed conscience yearns for an outlet and explanation of the absurdity;

"I am dizzy / With frustration, / I am drowning / In the deep lake / Of hatred, / My heart is riddled / With the arrows / Of despair, / My head is bursting . . . / Oh!" (p.13). It is through the wallowing in fathomless frustration and hysteria that we visualize the reality of what Ocol boasts in his song; "We manured the land / Frustrations spouted / Bursting the soil / Like young banana trees, / Fat frustrations / Flourishing fast / yielding fruits / Green as gall" (p.143). The bitter taste of sorrow that results in utter loss of hope is similar to the despair suffered by Neto in 'In Exhaustion he thus clamoured'. It is in light of what the prisoner suffers in relation to Ocol's song that we comprehend what the prisoner symbolises. The prisoner sings a sad song; "I plead drunkenness, / I am intoxicated / With anger, / My throat / Is on fire" (pp.12-13).

The political message in the poetry can be seen in the prisoner's plead out of despair:

> Brother, / How could I / So poor / Cold / Limping / Weak / Hungry like an empty tomb, / A young tree / Burnt out / By the fierce wild fire / Of Uhuru / How could I / Inspire you / To such heights / Of brutality? (pp.14-15).

Through the images of human suffering, the poet conveys his feelings over the disenchantment with Uhuru. The danger of the events following the political

independence of Uganda where it is dark inspite of the torch of Uhuru is "Hotter than the pangs / Of child birth, / More deadly than / The venom / Of the black mamba" (p.17). Okot continues to pick up terse metaphors to qualify the peril countenanced by Ugandans. The Warders are trained to torture prisoners.

> your honour / Why do they beat
> me / With their clubs / And tie
> my hands / And feet / . . . Why
> do they / Punish me / Before
> I plead / Or am found / Guilty?
> (p.16).

The political and social insecurity apparent in the poetry could be heard in the prisoner's voice. The poet, therefore, magnifies the prisoner's voice into the voice of the oppressed. This style is also achieved by Sepamla in his poem, 'The Bookshop'.

The richness of the materials from Acoli oral sources with which Okot's poetry is woven, is evident in the metaphors he strikes, "My nose / Is a broken dam, / Youthful blood leaps / Like a cheetah / After a duiker" (p.14). Okot's sensibility to his surroundings qualifies him as a naturalist, but it is not the naive type of naturalism found in Rousseau's Emile. The poet yet shares Armah's excremental vision to drive home his idea of social decay; "The foul smell / Of the world / Rises like culumus clouds / And clings on the bare walls" (p.21). The cloud is used as a sign of hope that would wash the society clean through rain. The poet

shows the cloud is forced through the cumulative effect of mounting social vices. The rain also may be accompanied by lightning and thunder storm for a genuine social reform. 'Wounded Crocodile', therefore, introduces the images of hunger and disease as part of the mounting political problems. Through contrasts, the poet further visualises the situation with more poetic insights:

> Listen to the Chief's dog / Barking like a volcano, / Listen to the echoes / Playing on the hillsides! / How many pounds / Of meat / Does this dog eat / In a day? / How much milk . . .? / Have you seen / The mosquito legs / Of my children? (p.22).

The volcano is yet an image of revolution. The parasitic relationship in the society is also captured in the children. The hollow phrases coming from the politicians are portrayed through the symbol of a barking dog. It is in this way that the song of the prisoner traverses the whole spectrum of social and political life of the people with a critical tone. The prisoner pleads "hunger / Fiercer than a / wounded crocodile" (p.23). The corrosive nature of hunger makes the prisoner cry: "Olympic athletes throw javelins / Inside my belly" (p.23). Okot brings the images of sports to convey the height to which the social problems are driven just as Neto uses medical symbols to achieve more effective imagery. The parlous nature of the prison life is a

microcosm of what obtains in the larger society which is the picture of a waste land; "The Owls / Keep Silence, / cocks refuse to crow, / Bats clap their wings / Against the black mud / Of the night" (p.24). It is not a cheerful sight that is depicted. The association of bats and owls gives the spooky nature of events in a ghost city. It is the picture of human degeneration with a stale and rancid echo that harangues the listener, and the prisoner says "And I / Trembling, / Hungry / Mad / Sit, / Spit, / Shit / Hate / Wait . . ." (p.25). It is a moment when the predicaments in the society are summed up. The alliterative force in the prisoner's voice makes him fierce and the style connotes a sense of defiance as the prisoner accepts the challenges. The style is similar with the new generation poets in South Africa.

'Black Mud' introduces the acute peril of living in a police state in the manner of the prisoner's arrest. The police are described as

> Ten uniformed stones / Break into
> my tiny hell / Elephant trumpet /
> Rhinos scream / For blood / And
> charge, / The earth shakes her
> belly. / The walls jump / And
> dance, / The stone floor /
> Urinates / Orgasm . . . (p.30).

They are visitors described like death that deprives children of their parent. They leave sadness stationed in such homes where a dirge is the only company they have.

Okot contrives the animal symbols to convey the jungle law in existence, in this way 'Black Mud' resembles Neto's 'Night'; lamenting over the sense of urban jungle. It is also through the fight amongst animals; "hyenas / Fight over the remains / Of a lamb" (p.31), that Okot shows his disgust over social terrorism. The weak; 'rat' and 'lamb' are compared with the strength of the state; the 'hyenas' and 'rhinos'. Although the "Warriors / push the dark wind / with their buffalo-hide shields" (p.31), the people are ironically terrorized with sophisticated weapons bought through their tax money. "A stone wall / of guns / surrounds our village, / steel rhinoceroses / Ruin the crops / In the fields / And sneeze molten lead / Into the grass thatched huts" (p.32). This destructive picture shows a society at war with itself and one begins to sense the extent to which the culture of violence has been developed. The nature of violence in the society kills the morale of optimism in the prisoner. He pleads anger and smallness. It is too extortionate a price they pay to force the prisoners plead guilty. This seems to be the function of the law and the prisoner sings; "I am an insect / Trapped between the toes / Of a bull elephant" (p.34). His voice conveys the extraordinary nature of a monstrous state. The claustrophobia developed by the prisoner is not due to his confinement but rather out of his reflection of what the society has become.

'Bonfire' brings, like Neto, the image of pessimism; "The setting sun". Although this image as it moves towards twilight has captivated the minds of people over the crepuscular mystery it creates, to the prisoner at such moments; "The water is covered / with the blood / Of dying hippos / Crocodiles, fish / And fishermen" (p.35). It is a picture of chaos and agony depicting in a terrible way where the society is heading to. This situation is partly created as the prisoner's voice becomes ironic to ask; "Why did you / Not scatter your seeds / In the air / So that the wind may / Plant them in the rich / Black soil of the great / Clan?" (p.37). This depicts as in Neto's 'Kinaxixi' role ascription as a vicious circle that makes the society static. Okot in this way shows the nature of his society.

'Sacred Rock' is full of vivid and picturesque language that evoke sympathy for the prisoner's condition, "There is a carpenter / Inside my head, / He knocks nails / Into my skull" (p.42). It is the agony of fighting a psychic battle to stay in sane, because "The heavy smell / of Death / Fills the room / Like darkness" (p.42). The dungeon life throws the prisoner into the abyss of despair. It is in contrast with this misery that Okot introduces the theme of materialism. "The black Benz / Slithers smoothly / Through the black night / Like the water snake / Into the Nile" (p.43). In this way, Okot creates a continuum of extremes in

his poetic lines. The grimly dark imagery in the poem shows the stigma of materialism that corrodes the social life of the people, to which "The grasses on / The pathway / Hiss in protest" (p.43). These images continue to stir malevolent thoughts in the prisoner's mind to make him furious; "Big chief / Is dancing my wife / And cracking / My sacred rock!" (p.44). It is in this way that the political decay and cultural rot of his society becomes apparent.

Through his patriotism, the prisoner evokes more hopeful images to end this hopeless life. Although "The sharks of Uhuru / Devour their own children" (p.65), "Two bulls wrestle / With their horns, / The horn of the ruling bull / Breaks / And he tumbles down / The . . . hill / And plunges / Into the river" (p.70). Okot's poetry achieves corresponding human emotions in animals. In this way, poetry ascends to heights unachieved by other forms of language. Okot achieves these images through symbolism; "A fat mosquito / Hums a sweet song / And soothes / The snoring sleeper" (p.68).

Freedom is the major phenomenon that captivates the prisoner. It is an aspect that has possessed poets like Dennis Brutus (Letters To Martha), Wole Soyinka (A Shuttle In The Crypt) and Agostinho Neto too has been captivated by this subject matter in Sacred Hope. This is conveyed in nature: "Chicks / chip their thanks / in unison" (p.59), while he is in a miserable condition after the so much awaited independence of his country;

"Crippled by the cancer / Of Uhuru / For worse than / The yaws of / Colonialism" (p.50). The deplorable nature of the prisoner's condition could be seen in the diseases mentioned. Independence has ushered in corroding values which have never been experienced.

The prisoner's song tries to stir national consciousness; "Where's your nationalism? / Where is your patriotism / Where is your love / For the motherland?" (p.75). His sense of cultural nationalism does not depart with his freedom. He knows for instance that he has the "killer mark" which his society celebrates, because he has killed their enemy. He would be immortalized for trying to cut the nose on the neck of his society. His song carries an image of hope as he progresses with his ideas and calls for traditional sacrifices "Spear / A black billy goat / And pour its blood / As I enter the homestead" (p.77). In this way, the prisoner stands at the opposite end of where Ocol stands. In contrast to the newly acquired culture, the prisoner chooses the culture of his people. The artificiality of banal high class life is shown as the government representatives "Click glasses / And exchange winks / With glittering wives / And false smiles" (p.59) in a depressing economy.

Lullabies are sung to children, but the type of song Africa has for her newly independent states are dirges. "Listen to the millipede / Whispering a lullaby / To her newly hatched baby" (p.81).

The patriotism of the prisoner is genuine, although he was a government minister with a golden pen, he refuses to conform to the values of the new regime. Despite his "Thoughts of hope / Filled with poisoned needles / Of hopelessness" (p.87), the prisoner is firm in his choice. This is one of the personal battles fought by men of conscience, people who have chosen the hard task for the majority.

When the thoughts clamour and the pain is intense, his voice becomes pitiful as the prisoner seeks for intoxicants to kill the pains, "I want to drink / And get drunk, / I do not want to know / That I am powerless / And helpless / I do not want to remember anything" (p.94). The prisoner is yet driven to despair. We get more insight in the problem of addiction to drugs and pain killers. The concern with culture and politics is always discerned in the images presented in the poetry where cultural nationalism is opposed by the newly emerging upper class who project the interest of the imperialists. But the prisoner remains "A proud Eagle / Shot down / By the arrow / Of Uhuru" (p.94). The eagle conveys a sense of strength for those fighting for genuine freedom.

'Cattle Egret' captures the innocence of the children who naively play their games in romantic moods. It is a new leap from his lament to discuss nation-building, but even this brings him pain. The prisoner

realises that his children "Will grow up / With the wild trees / Of the bush / And will be burnt down / By the wild fire / Of the droughts" (p.101). It is in the theme of education that Okot's doubts over the achievement of their goals is felt. It is also interesting to compare that Sepamla's The Soweto I Love is heavily indebted to the reaction over the Bantu Education policy.

Like Sepamla's 'Sketches Of A Continent', 'Undergrowth' traverses the African continent catching the musical breath in the poetry to convey the political upheaval. "Listen to the orphans / Wailing in the Nigerian / Highlife tune, / Listen to the bombs" (p.114). This line depicts Nigeria's civil war and the cultural implication for the orphans. "The Congo forest / Is on fire" (p.115). The turmoil of the African continent is shown in the poetry as part of black suffering. The pain suffered through slavery is also sensed in Afro-American music, "Let me dance to the cutting throbs / Of your wounded songs" (p.114). It is music produced by people with disturbed conscience.

In a post Uhuru Uganda, Okot realises that his song is full of lament. When the prisoner says "I plead guilty / To pride, / I was not born to this, / I am a great soul" (p.100), it is the voice of the poet, to give more value and substance to his poetry. The poet does not personalise the issues he raises, he tries to

gain the confidence of the reader by suggesting that he has no malice against any personality. Such frailties he says are not part of his constitution as he is ready to forgive, but this is not without an indictment over spying as a new form of terrorism; "Why are the words I speak / Captured and locked up / In a safe" (p.90). The poetry depicts the only revolutionary choice left for the people through the class struggle perspective and registers its optimism for the success of this venture so that it would be crowned with a "jubilant throng". The prisoner then senses revolution in his cell; "I hear the brown ants / Shouting war cries / And blowing horns / In the bloody battle / Of the hillock . . ." (p.83). It is through this yearning for freedom and forgetfulness of what Uhuru has made him that the prisoner ends his song. But there is a deep concern for the class of people who are the wretched and outcasts of the society; they are the most progressive people in his song. Okot's sad laments and social concern over their welfare both culturally and politically is what his anthem seems to conscientize.

Song of Malaya is a critical exposé of the hypocritical nature of men and women through their roles in the society. Writers have not given much attention to the theme of prostitution through the poetic genre as Okot has in this song. When Malaya sings:

> Sister Harlots / Wherever you are, /
> Wake up / Wash up / Load your
> trays / With fresh fruits / . . .
> And plenty of fresh meat / . . .
> The hungry lions / of the world /
> Are prowling around . . . /
> Hunting! (pp.132-133).

There is a comic appeal in the song. It is not the comedy of making the sacred profane as the Acoli culture does not encourage this trade either, but it is the transformation of a social stigma through its functional reality to qualify the crime as a social responsibility.

In Malaya, the voice of the poet is much more prominent;

> But you / Big chief, / . . .
> Why do you hiss / Like a
> frightened cobra / And bark at
> me / . . . Was it not you /
> Three nights ago? / . . .
> Forcing me down / And tearing
> my knickers . . . / As if I were
> unwilling . . .? (pp.135-136).

Okot tries to prove that this is an irony that emanates from hypocrisy. It could as well be attributed to the colonially bred culture which commercialises this emotional situation. In her efforts to sing to the glory of prostitutes, Malaya raises highly disturbing and some times embarrassing images which are bizarre and genuine yet unaccepted by people in the society. Okot's choice of images are always found in the environment. The pregnant hippo does not only resemble the sweating drunk, but also qualifies the overfed

nature of the chief vis-a-vis the "skinny Indian Vegetarian". In this way, Okot delves into cultural restrictions and the problem of hunger and starvation.

The poetry goes further to recognise the "grief, shame and fear" (p.138) that govern human nature due to social stigma in patronising prostitutes; but the poet's voice is yet echoed in this beautiful phrase:

> Tell me you men / Who split
> open / The Opok tree / And
> scoop out the honey / With
> your bare hands, Fearing not
> the bees . . . / Do you take
> / Some . . . to your wives?
> (p.139).

The sweetness of honey which symbolises fun and enjoyment in life is shown as nothing to be ashamed of. In this way, Okot's poetry trespasses into the Acoli cultural barriers and shows the dangers of living in hypocrisy especially dealing with emotional situations that involve promiscuity.

When Malaya says "Tell me / You mayors and town clerks, . . . you who defeated colonialism / And imperialism" (p.140), "Do you not see / The wild thorn trees / Blossoming in your compounds?" (p.110), there is an irony in her voice. There is an ambivalence over the way in which the prostitutes are cursed and cherished. Malaya's prayer for health and wealth for her type remains so long as "The Solomons are singing / In the rose gardens / And the flutes of the frogs / Mingle with the honks / Of hunting car-men" (p.142).

The musical nature of the poetry becomes oracular carrying a sense of social decay through those who crave for a status symbol in the car. The noise signifies the poet's concern over the newly adopted values. The beauty of Okot's poetry could be seen when Malaya sings:

> I am an open pollok blossom, /
> Bees, butterflies, moths . . . /
> Visit me by day and by night, /
> Except when the moon / Has
> appeared, and the dam / Of the
> Red River is broken (p.150).

Okot achieves through poetic euphemisms what would be 'abhoring' in common-place speech. The secretive nature in which Malaya is visited makes the affair similar to the theme promoted by William Wordsworth in 'The Sick Rose'. It shows how secretive life can lead to destruction. That is why Malaya could not "tell the archer / That has scored the bull's eye" or "To convince another bull / That the seed in the gourd / is his" (p.151).

Okot's naturalist metaphors are not fetched afar; through household objects and materials, images that make his poetry profound are created. If he goes out to the fields and farms, it is to show the significance of cultural identity in Acoli agrarian life. But his poetry takes him out to the forests too as so often, through the moods of fierce animals to qualify him as a stoker of revolutionary fury.

Through the appeal of his language, Okot resembles Sepamla; "Listen to the ocean liner / crying in labour pain / As she approaches the habour. / Steel hawks / shifting at airports . . ." (p.153). It is through these images of people trooping into the country that Malaya's role in the society is echoed; "Trains' bellies / Bursting at the stations . . . / Do you see / The maggots / Limping from the wounds / Of loneliness?" (p.154). Because of the functional nature of prostitution, Okot tries to debunk the moral issues surrounding the affair. The stunning social realities are extended to capture the theme of the African extended family and social regeneration. The poet's voice comes out when Malaya asks whether her grandfather would be condemned to burn in hell "for loving ten women / And looking after their children" (p.163). Through pragmatic display of social realities, the poet creates puzzling images unresolved by moralists. The poetry displays kerygmatic annotations to drink to

> Eve / With her golden apples /
> And to the Egyptian girl / Who
> stole Abraham / From Sarah's
> bed . . . / . . . to the /
> Daughters of Sodom / And to the
> daughters of Gommorah (p.166).

In a way, Okot is using religious stories to show not only the temptation in men, but also to astonish the champions of morality who deny the flesh; as a hypocritical sham. It is in this way that Okot pushes

the champions of morality further to the wall by raising the question of illegitimacy. Malaya questions the virgin birth of Christ which betrays the poet's voice.

> Who was the greatest man / That ever lived? / The Saviour / Redeemer / The light . . . / King of Kings / The prince of Peace / My big boy, / Tell Mummy./ What was his father's name? / Was the Carpenter / Really his father? (p.172).

Here, the political views of the poet are closely tied to the dogma of christianity which is central to the neo-colonial culture. This apparently leads to the clash of cultures which makes the confusion more complex.

There is a devastating blow on the officers of law in 'Flaming Eternity'; "you sergeant / Arresting me now,/ Sir, / But we were together / In my house / Only last night . . .!"(p.181), "how can you now / call me / A vagrant?" (p.182). In this way, Okot surveys the moral issues in a new nation. He indicts the society which is infested with new and pretentious values.

At the conclusion, Malaya's audacity is clear. She dares the society that ironically patronises her type:

> Let parliamentarians / Debate and pass laws / Against us, / Let the police arrest us / And lock us up / In their cells, / Let the magistrates / Sentence us to jails . . . (p.184).

Both the legal and moral facades of the society condemn prostitution yet there is a social acceptance of what they offer. Okot, therefore, uses the poetic medium to convey the complex dilemma faced by the society through the moral issues raised by prostitution which is also doomed to eternal damnation. But the poetry ends with an eerie sound proclaiming that prostitution has come to stay; "But / Who can command / The sun / Not to rise in the morning? / Or having risen / Can hold it / At noon / And stop it / From going down / In the West?". This rhetorical and indeed puzzling question makes prostitution itself a transcendental affair. Malaya, therefore, feels her society and indeed human society is wasting its time over them. It is, however, a serious social concern that raises the questions of social regeneration. Does the society gain or loose from the hash treatment of prostitutes and is it necessary to embark on such measures? This, Okot seems to conclude, is part of the moral ambivalences experienced by the society. It is all the more complex as the society suffers clash of cultures. The sour reflection of the ban on prostitution in the west could be seen not so much for the moral implications as it is the government's inability to tax their proceed.

The chapter has captured the significant political and cultural points raised by p'Bitek through the assertive nature of the African praise poem. The notion of 'primitivism' in African ways is seen through what

'civilization' has done to Ocol through whom the poet confirms the existence of such gullible Africans. p'Bitek's achievement in arriving at the visionary post through his poetry is captured where he magnifies Uganda as a microsm of Africa. The insult tradition in oral poetry is captured in Ocol's song where the poet puts words into his mouth to establish the strong neo-colonial nature of contemporary Africa. At all levels of the poetry, the poet's stand is technically implied which makes his craft all the more exhilarating and ingenious. The pessimism in the prioner's song and its overt implications are captured and the achievement of the poetry is further scrutinized through some of these skepticisms exhibited at certain levels. p'Bitek's attachment to tradition is further established with his display of rich Acoli oral materials. The peril and subsequent suffering in the unnatural environments as shown in the poetry is seen as not much different from Angola or South Africa. Violence, freedom and confinement recur as motifs and through the prisoner, the poet is observed as trying to stir national consciousness which revolutionizes the poetry. The hypocritical nature of people in the society is captured in Malaya's song where the poet's view on western religion is further manifested. There is also an observation of the political undertones through the economic nature of the poetry and how the poet establishes the neo-colonial nature

of the society through Malaya. The ambivalence of the African predicament is seen in this respect. We now go on to consider the nature of Sipho Sepamla's poetry within the context of politics and culture in South Africa in Chapter Five.

FOOTNOTES

1. All subsequent quotations with page number are from Okot p'Bitek; Song of Lawino, Song of Ocol (East Africa Pub. House, Nairobi, 1972).

2. Rather than Taban Lo Liong's "A great event? Yes. Since there is literary drought" - Bruce King and K. Ogungbesan ed; A Celebration of Black And African Writing (ABU Press, Zaria, 1975) p.222.

3. Kofi Awoonor, 'Tradition and Continuity in African Literature', Exile and Tradition, ed. Rowland Smith (Longman Group, London, 1976) p.166.

4. Frantz Fanon, The Wretched Of The Earth, p.44

5. Ibid. p.190.

6. Syl Cheney-Coker Agrees in 'A Poet In Exile'; West Africa Magazine, December 21, 1981.

7. Frantz Fanon, The Wretched Of The Earth, p.192

8. "French: a gracious and an honest language - has enabled us to send to the world . . . the wonderful message . . . to contribute to this universal civilization" (p.87) - The African Image; (Faber & Faber; London, 1962), Ezekiel Mphahlele.

9. Anthropologists have started realising their mistakes; in an introduction to a new collection of P.A. Benton's writings - The Language and Peoples Of Bornu Vol.I, A.H.M. Kirk-Greene acknowledges "I am not, of course, thinking so much of the pint-sized pseudo-anthropologist District Commissioner lampooned by a contemporary African novelist's caricature of Commissioner George Allen and his ponderous tone 'The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger'" (p.5) (Nelson Printers, London, 1968).

10. Okot p'Bitek has given the example of a blind poet in The Horn Of My Love, who rediculed the colonialists over the system of forced labour. The poet's disappointment with the system bagged him a jail term in 1938. His real name was Omai Lakanu. He composed poems inspite of his two-year jail sentence which earned him the respect of his people. His composition; "If I could become Death. / If I could become Death, / I would fall on the whiteman" (p.13) brought him wide acclaim.

11. Mbulelo Mzamane, 'Popular Culture And Revolution: The Example of FRELIMO Poetry in Mozambique, 1962-1979' - paper presented at the Media Conference, A.B.U., April 1984, p.1.

12. Amilcar Cabral, Unity and Struggle (Heinemann, London, 1980) p.143.

13. 'Kofi Awoonor on Prison and Poetry' West Africa, (April 17, 1978) p.751.

14. 'The reward that a poet desires is recognition - that he is saying something which ought to be said. That is enough . . . in many cases he's going to be thrown into jail, especially if he is an African poet." Syl Cheney-Coker, 'A Poet In Exile' West Africa Magazine (Dec 21 1981) p.3056.

15. Ibid, p.751.

16. West Africa (April 17, 1978) p.750.

17. All subsequent quotations with page number are from Okot p'Bitek, Two Songs, (East African Publishing House, Nairobi, 1971).

CHAPTER FIVE

THE POETRY OF SIPHO SEPAMLA

Sipho Sepamla is comparatively a newer poet to Agostinho Neto and Okot p'Bitek. He was born in Krugersdorp, South Africa in 1932. Sepamla's poetry has been shaped by the political and cultural activities of the black people living under the anguish of Apartheid. The historical experiences of the Sharpville Massacre and the Soweto Upheavals are recorded in his poetry. So also are the periods of relative 'calm' which he shows are more corrosive through sarcasm, nostalgia in ribald and often wry humour.

The poetry could conveniently be broken into two parts. The early poems seem to centre on the problems faced by the blacks in terms of restrictions and oppression. The later Sepamla is the image of one who has resolved his reform notions and one who has experienced violence as a realist. The poetry gets closely tied to the principles of the Black Consciousness Movement which evolved out of the crises between the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress over passive resistance as a means of political emancipation. The A.N.C[1] which was founded in 1912 had practised the policy of passive resistance for about fifty years. But by the late '50s, it had no option but to abandon this policy.[2] History has repeated itself in these crises faced by the Africans. After the proscription of the political activities of the black people has been effected by the late 1950s,

the ban on literary activities was also effected. "Silence pervaded African political life in the 1960s" after Sharpville "to an extent which had not been known since the years before 1912"[3]. During the ban period, only the white liberal parties champion the course of the blacks until 1968 when students' organisations magnified the blacks consciousness ideals. By December 1968, a gruesome picture of "five hundred and seventy-nine people, black and white, . . . could not be quoted in the country . . . . All African writers living in exile were included in this list"[4].

Until 1960, the enormous amount of energy expended on the issue of political change and the condition of the blackman has been channelled in an attempt to always appeal to the liberals. They were thought capable of bringing certain changes, though not organic but cosmetic. Albert Lithuli's acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace prize is a testimony to this hypothesis.

With the Sharpville disillusionment, the realization is that the liberals are hypocrites, who wish to 'take care' of the blacks - hence their subservience. This, therefore, is the root cause of the rejection of liberalism. It is with the realization of the impotence of the liberals that the philosophy of Black Consciousness gained ground. This idea of asserting one's blackness as an important variable in determining one's priorities is inherited from Afro-American and Caribbean writers.[5]

Ezekiel Mphahlele who was opposed to Negritude which also has influenced Black Consciousness, had come up with

a philosophical rendition of this movement in an essay entitled, 'Epilogue To Apartheid':

> May be from the chaff I have been writing since 1947, a few grains have emerged . . . Every time something has been published that I wrote, I have felt patronized . . . I later discovered that it wasn't worth it. It was to myself and to my kind I needed to justify myself.6

There were poets in the Drum[7] tradition and much earlier who were addressing mainly to the black people, H.I.E. Dhlomo, A.C. Jordan and Vilakazi are a few of those who used varnacular.[8] But the era of new poets as in the Black Consciousness have generally registered their disillusionment and thus broken away from the liberal tradition.

The protest of these poems can be perceived in their form and language. The short sentences are not only to show a vestige of their anger, but they are also akin to revolutionary poetry.

> 'I' is the pronoun that prevails, rather than 'we', but the 'I' is the whitemanesque unit of multi-millions rather than the exclusive first person singular.9

There is also the usage of two to three words compounded as in the word 'Whathaveyou' or the use of ellipses as in the prose writings of this generation; 'therapathe...terror...peutic' and 'terrorpathetic'.

The third chapter of Mzamane's Children of Soweto[10] starts without a new paragraph as a sign of veering away from tradition. The poets also indulge in the use of non-capital letters in the poems. The coinages in terms of grammatical constructions are from the lingua-franca of the blacks i.e. tsotsi-taal which is almost unintelligible to the whites as they address their black counterparts. Sepamla's 'Come Duze Baby' and 'Dear Lovely' manifest these characteristics:

> Hela baby! / Zwakala daarso / of
> hoe seek? / Jy moet my notch /
> Kyk my moi sweetie. / Ekis nie
> een van hulle . . . Look sharp /
> otherwise jy val / met my 'M'
> (p.37)11

It is through these covert approaches to the political situation in South Africa that Sepamla's poetry becomes similar to the approaches adopted by Neto and P'Bitek. The success of the Black Consciousness Movement, however, is not enough for the blacks. Sepamla does not adore the cosmetic changes brought about after the riots:

> I see them scurry me
> paving my streets with gold . . .
> Wanting to share with me the moon's darkside
> I can feel my grin turn to a grimace
> My patience has been wearing thin (p.105).

Inspite of their racial arrogance, Sepamla cajoles the white community over their efforts to integrate with

the blacks. This, Sepamla seems to assert, has not been achieved through passive resistance. In the earlier writings of the South African people, oral tradition was hardly used because it would block the white liberals from understanding their poetry.

Hurry Up To It is the collection of Sepamla's earliest poems published in 1975. The political and cultural implications of paternalism under Apartheid feature as one of the modern day social inventions for political coercion - bitter pill in sugar coating. The political issues in this collection are numerous which include exile, exploitation and social chaos.

The poem 'To Whom It May Concern' features also in Black Poets in South Africa edited by Robert Royston. The earlier South African edition has the same title as the poem. The tone is of indictment through the vivid portrayal of the society's marginalization of the blacks. The Urban Natives Act of 1925 features prominently in the poem to show the degree of their restrictions. The freedom of the blackman is "subject to the provisions of the said Act / He may roam freely within a prescribed area" (p.19). The system further individualises the blacks as they are reduced to mere numbers not names. The African is stripped of even this possession. The sarcasm is clear as Sepamla writes "In keeping with moon-age naming / Bearer's designation is Reference

number 417181 / And (he) acquires a niche in the said area / As a temporary sojourner" (p.19). In the pass book, the system informs the society where to bury the bearer. The poetry is laced with these imageries which carry an echo of dehumanization.

Humour is one of the instruments used by Sepamla to expose the South African society. 'Hurry Up To It!' is a humourous rendition of marriage within the black community:

> For love is: / Knowing the girl's homeland, / Knowing her papers are right, / Knowing she has permission to marry, / And above all / Love is: / Knowing if you can make children (p.20).

The tense nature of the exposition makes the poem serious. Marriage is the centre of the African humanity but Apartheid intrudes by making blacks acquire certain papers and Certificates. The poet, therefore, shows the aims of the whites clearly as they always seek for cheap black labour. Sepamla, however, urges the people for a hope in posterity: "Hurry up for your sake and mine / For age can move ahead of wishes" (p.20). Sepamla poetry is in many ways an attempt to salvage the aspects of Black cultural and political life, as in Neto and p'Bitek for political emancipation.

Agostinho Neto's 'Night' echoes a sense of urban jungle as we find in the poem 'Darkness' where Sepamla captures the crime-ridden aspects of this grim society. Sepamla shows through symbolism that fear is cultivated in the hearts of those who cause treachery to the black man:

> Yes sir I have arrived / Walk
> the night if you dare / there
> I reign over death / 'Swonder
> you legislate the night / I
> walk erect in the night / You
> crouch in retreat / Crouching
> each nook in fear / Of the
> stench of my blackness /
> agitated by a darkness (p.24).

The crime that has come to mark South African life is a subject for poetic analysis through the works of various writers. Sepamla's uniqueness can, however, be seen in his more bold and assertive poetry, his ability to symbolise situations and events and his contrivance to create meaning out of common-place issues. His poetry also appeals to all the races in South Africa which could well be a new phenomenon. It is in 'The Applicant' that we see the insecurity and lack of stake in society faced by the blacks. The crime and fear are as a result of unemployment and even health care. As an instrument for political awareness, the poetry describes the Reserves and Locations where the blacks are confined.

The poetry that emerged after the bans, cannot be divested totally from the repressed black

culture through political decisions where their voices are not represented. The fairness of the system as the government claims is given in a sarcastic tone:

> Ja Meneer I admit / There is a fair spread / Almost epidemic, I'd say / of our special kind of red-pox / For which blame lies squarely / On unpatriotic elements / And / Or overseas influences / Coming in as they do / Through the improved Jan Smuts Airport (p.25).

Sepamla equates the activities of the whites to a disease which both literally and symbolically has a good effect on the poem. The poem has a mocking voice over the experience a blackman undergoes in looking for a job. His pathetic nature is raised vis-a-vis the apathy of the white employers as the blackman tries to evoke his experiences for the acquisition of a job:

> Ja Meneer I confess / My examination was quite an experience / Though I have yet to be certified clear / I was taken up strydom Tower . Then deep down a gold mine / To have measured my sweat gevaar / And my tolerance rating / Has been declared well above average / By the S.A. Bureau of Standards (p.26).

These expositions are necessary to give a picture of what it really is to live in South Africa as a black person. The system designs a programme through which the blacks are trapped. Their achievements are trimmed and rationalised through direct governmental intervention. poetry here educates the people on what they really are

through their cultural and political lives as found in the poetry of Neto and Okot p'Bitek. But here, the life is shown to dwell through the pecking order arrangement from whites ubiquitously.

Despite the apparent loss of traditional values, Sepamla's poetry has a pull by the cultural aspects of the black communities although these influences are mostly phenomenal. 'The Loneliness Beyond' raises images that can be traced to oral source of communal life, which Neto and Okot use as a sense of innocence: "Like sheep herded into a Kraal / They crowd numbered couches / Hopeful of a state landing" (p.27). Beneath his description lies the indictment and sense of loss suffered by his people. They live in impoverished conditions and Sepamla wonders over what happens to the black community; lonely in the "little holes of resting" to begin the daily routine "Tired from the hurrying of a city / spirits maimed by commands". This poem also conveys a comparison of their dwelling place with the grave. Sepamla feels it may not be different in a significant way: "I've pondered what might be happening / with the loneliness beyond" (p.27). Although the boredom is similar to the one found in 'Kinaxixi' and 'Song Of Lawino', the morbid imagination is more heightened in Sepamla than the despair to die evoked in the other two poets. The later Neto, however, achieves this vision.

The poetry has various techniques of exposing the

political message it carries. Through a contrastive visual effect, 'The Signs of Time' raises the question of the under-development of the blacks, the inertia and the general stagnation of their priorities. The contrast between the skyscrapers of "The carlton centres and the Strydom Towers" and the "Sowetos, the Tembisus, the Kwamathus" reminds one of Fanon's descriptions and Rodney's discourse on the under-development of Africa by Europe. Here it is taking place side by side. The irony is discerned in the labour force the blacks provide in the construction of these towers while they remain in misery. That is why the whites in South Africa demand a blackman to carry a visa, in order not to crowd the sophisticated white world.

The style of Sepamla revolves around exposition, lament and indictment. In 'The Bookshop', there is an indictment of the education system. The attraction which a youth has to learning and the desire to develop a reading culture is an aspiration which he may never realise. His language depicts the semi-literate class. The suspicion with which his life is held could be seen in the accusation levelled against him. It is through the frustration of wandering and loitering that the tendency towards crime begins to manifest. The negation of Black aspirations is shown in this poem. It is in 'The Start of a Removal' that the destitution of the blacks is obviously demonstrated.

Sepamla's approach takes a realist posture which is

quite devastating in effect. It is a style that does not allow people to feign ignorance or indifference. prostitution and moral decadence alluded to in the poetry reflects 'The Song Of Malaya' in terms of social pressures, the contextual placing may however, be different. Neto's 'The Market Woman' is equally evoked in this respect. But it is in 'Jam Tin' that Sepamla shows the life of a prostitute which is more reflective of Malaya. But here, the social restriction of being black colours the whole situation as she says "I have my regrets too / Someone has lost me my identity: / Made in South Africa" (p.34). Sepamla's approach to the moral dilemma on prostitution is more political than Okot p'Bitek's treatment. The latter sees the issue through purely social hypocritical lines although there is a vestige of the political. In Neto, it is economic.

Sepamla's mockery of the system can also be seen in the rhetorical questions he poses. 'The Will' is a glaring indepth assessment of the racial situation that gives a picture of the possessions of the blacks. The house is surrendered and vacated by the children as the permit does not bear their names. African heritage is generally shown to be missing in this imposed inheritance policy.

The racial undercurrent which the last stanza carries confirms Mandela's hypothesis: "The cat spotted black and white / you will have to divide / for that you'll need God's guidance" (p.30). This, therefore, is

a poser for the champions of Apartheid who base their theory on the separation of Black and White entrenched by legislation.

The style of the poetry takes a romantic course in 'The River'. It is not a mere romanticization of the political issues of the day to delude the South African experience. It is a genuine dream that takes the surging metaphor of the river as hope amid the confusion and devastation: "Messages lost to boulders / crest-fallen trees standing by", howling winds and "brooding trees / clutching perilously at the ears" (p.46). The river flows unflaggingly. It is a nostalgic poem soothing the pains of a destructive system and telling tales of hope for regeneration which we realise is an essential function of poetry. Sepamla's collection of poems The Blues Is You In Me, is also prior to the riots in which Sepamla touches on the sensibility of the Black people in South Africa. Racism seems to pervade this collection. 'Early Days' opens with a romantic tone over the life of this people with the poet keenly witnessing "men stand and fall" (p.14). It is a dedication to the memory of his uncle who had given him much fun and knowledge, who "never seemed to brood / certainly not over his condition" (p.53). The description of his uncle is similar to Mal Oettinger's description of the novelist Vladimir Nobokov[12]. It is a long poem that shows the loss of hope in prayers as in Casey Motsisi's 'The Efficacy

of Prayer'. Sepamla's memory recalls a picture of "Fathers and Mothers rending the sky / weeping / Whether for the dead Christ / or current misfortunes / I never got to know / Oh, they weep so mournfully" (p.54). Through the colours of the Pan Africanist Congress, Sepamla traces signs of liberation theology in the churches. His uncle's prophetic voice harangues the poem although it is the story / Of his own moon's eclipse" (p.53).

The cultural values with which his poetry is spiced saves its contents from being classified as bitter fulmination or overblown literature. 'Zoom the Kwela-Kwela' traces the life of South Africa through traditional myths of Cha-Kijana or Mmutlanyana which is "the Anansy-figure of traditional Southern African folk-lore who excels in tactics of survival" (p.15). The surveillance to which their lives is exposed makes the black people invent various ways of displacing the police - kwela-kwela. The new adaptations equip them with new ways as they discard the clitches that mark them out for easier stereotyping. But the poem has raised strong emotional commentaries over a broken society. This aspect is further carried into 'The Work Song' which poetrays their social life and shows "the anguish of a chant / Heard rising into the air / Like orchestrated screams of a big bang / The harmony of the labourer's voice singing" (p.62). This poem sings a chant of their experiences through the decadence of their values, their

pains, hopes and joys; "Voices bellowing a mighty laughter / Weaved a knot of love and lust" (p.63). Sepamla through his admiration reminds us of his role as a poet in retracing the social life of his people "stirred into a consciousness / To celebrate the unsung man / I've walked away in disbelief / Admiring / Requiring / Enquiring / The balance of nature: / To crown the labourer with such moving harmony" (p.63). As we continue to see people looking for solace in the hostile South African environment, singing seems to be one of the ways. 'Song of a Mother and Child' is also a lamentation over the corrosive social life without freedom.

It is for the man "whose beard grew grey / in search of gold" (p.64). It is a sad and long poem that hopes for the emergence of heroes for the regeneration of the society. It is also a political poem in the sense that it points out acts of vandalism and the conscription of men to work the mines. They are 'the living dead' for whom dirges are composed. The land has no sign of life or zest in living, only "spirits of the dead floating about / in search of fellow-beings" (p.65). The poem gives a contrastive political connotation in the "white fleeting clouds" with those inside the mine with "only the act of gasping". The hope of the poetry is registered in Sepamla's quest for golden moments through the image of a volcano for revolution.

The relationship Sepamla's poetry has with politics

could be seen in the remarkable contrast between the blacks and the whites introduced in the poem 'The Odyssey'. It is a poem that addresses itself to tourists. The poet calls for an exploration of this region so that they shall "discover where the sun shines" and "where shadows linger eternally" (p.66) in the condition of beasts. Sepamla ironically politicises the tourists' excitements. It is similar in message to Neto's 'The grieved land'. The hyperbolic assumption about eternity is a poetic despair that may not necessarily be far-fetched. There seems to be no peace in this abode. The undulating landscape shows the contours marking human life and the hope which rivers bring in fresh waters are part of the poet's creative efforts in giving life some sense of meaning;

> discover the lie of our mountain
> humps where low and where high
> The drakensberg and its inns.
> Where the tegula falls and then
> flows and gives rise to a rich
> promise (p.66).

The poet yet conveys his disappointment over tribal demarcation to rule people "for ours is the land of the sabc / the guardian of modern day twists" (p.67). The poem throws more light on the agonies of a crises ridden society without any meaningful definition of care. Hatred, suspicion and fear govern the activities of the people. It is the picture of a state in war against itself; "discover how people distrust one another in the room / discover how people talk round the point /

discover how people are made to live a lie" (p67). It is a very moving poem that concentizes the imagined sojourner with what he would go through so that he may "discover the hope that lives with despair" (p.68). The struggle of the people is translated into their hopes for political and social change, although these poems do not yet touch on military combat for the extension of these ideas. Such hopes are realised through the apparent cultural values in their environment, the military option may yet be a cultural phenomenon. South Africa is endowed with almost all the beauties nature can provide, yet Sepamla urges the touriests to "discover the land that has gone sulky to a vision" (p.68).

'The Blues Is You In Me', the title poem, is a long one that discusses the blasé of South African life. The genesis of the poet's sadness is traced to the life experienced in South Africa. The blues is translated into every aspect of life, from the click of the tongue to the censorship involved in this region. The poet says "I can trace only those thoughts / that mar the goodness of living with you" (p.69). The poem is written in the style of a song similar to 'Song of The Prisoner'. As a police state, the country is embarking on a raid against the social, economic and political aspects of life, the sadness therefore is found in all the draconian Acts decreed by the regime. The mind suffers through the extortions and the poet only indulges in writing his

thoughts for solace, "the blues is people huddled on a bench / eating of their own thoughts / the blues is those many words said to repair / yesterday's felled again and again by today's promises" (p.70).

The sadness evolves out of the demarcation between what is privilege and what is a right though it may sound pedantic, but the situation of the black man is universalized through this posture. The poet's fulmination here is addressed to the white society "because we are the blues people all / the white man bemoaning his burden / the black man off loading the yoke / the blues is you in me / I never knew the blues until I met you" (p.70).

The depiction of the sadness convincingly draws the sympathy of the people to listen, for instance, to Rythm and Blues, Gospel songs and many such varieties that have come into existence inspired by the social pressures inherent in some societies against the blackman: "This has something to do with the assertion of the black Americans: that to sing blues one must have paid the price first - by suffering"[13].

It is in this way that 'The Ash Urns' is a poem that touches the core of human sentiments with a view to reconciling the human factors that produced the seed of Apartheid, and what the future holds for revolutionaries.

Despite the fact that humiliation is a feature that exists in South Africa, the blacks have been known for the endurance of this phenomenon. This, however, is not to gain-say their active pursuance of political freedom

The literary world has been inundated with reports of the brutality leashed out on the blacks, "the hum of a muffled voice / as i try to silence / the rage of the age" (p.72). It is this choking anger, frustration and bitterness that wield up to form the 'ash urns' at the poet's bosom. Sepamla becomes more and more agitated and calls for a reform to end the suffering. He appeals through reason and urges that his political message is not enveloped in tribal hatred. It is a message that defies time, "I long for the past / but I won't unearth that / because there is a past / I don't want to hustle / there is instead / a future I must embrace" (p.72). In this appeal, his poetry falls a little short of the revolutionary zeal with which the poetry of this generation is marked[14].

The poem is not actually portraying Sepamla's penchant for pathetic metaphors per se, 'The Ash Urns' rather brings out his persipicuity in his effort to relate the socio-political condition under which the blacks thrive in South Africa. His choice of words is most appropriate when we consider the subject matter of his poetry. The word 'hustle' here, for instance, says many things about the moral and social lives of a people who are hurried throughout history. All the shades of meaning which the word presents occur in South Africa due to the breakdown of moral standards which quite exclusively is a Southern African dilemma. The urn reminds one of the burning experience of cremation

suffered culturally and politically by the blacks, reinforced by the daily death toll and casualties of a racial society. Neto's wish to be burnt in the lime kilns is figuratively evoked here.

The poem 'Goddess Of Power' is an examination of the racial situation with a view to debunking the myth of superiority. Sepamla addresses himself to the tension before the Soweto Riots. The development of covert action results from the same apathy suffered within the black community induced by their inability to bring change throughout their struggle. The poet says "They might have seen the wrinkles in my heart / Strained a lifeless white / by an ever-autumn of drooping promises / they would know my loud silences / can clank-clatter jails no more / while muted whispers clamour in their ears" (p.73). The depiction of silence is similar to Soyinka's 'Chimes of Silence[15]. The desire for the total obliteration of the blacks in South Africa has been mused by the white racists. The poet utterly condemns this trial and seeks for change in evoking the 'Goddess of Power'.

Sepamla's ingenuity as a poet is also revealed in 'The Black Girl', a naively romantic poem which is blown up to political dimensions achieved in a rare style. The simplicity of the girl's innocence depicted in her pulchritude takes an aura of significance which is culture bound. The political nature of the poem can be detected in phrases like "and like a submarine / they tend to be subversive" and "I've known her heart / to

sit in the prisoner's corner". There are many other such phrases that bring home to the reader the grim potentialities in this region. She in a nutshell is a metaphor for the social life as it obtains in a repressive society:

> what her brown eyes / have seen of
> Africa / the miner's gold can never
> buy / . . . How she is for ever
> forcing / the eye of heritage to
> stare at me / has made my blushes
> (to) wrinkle / she is the sun /
> she is the daughter / she is
> Africa (p.74).

A study of Sepamla's poetry demands a chronological advancement, because it is a historical experience. 'This Time', for instance, is a poem that pauses to assess the political climate prior to the Soweto Upheaval. The harshness of the present circumstances 'This Time' and what challenges it poses is strongly pronounced in the lines. It is an uneasy period in time that "soaks spirits in intemperate words / and prepares the day for the night's scaffold"; it "eats morrow like sorrow's twin / . . . and serves justice to expedience" (p.87). The poem examines the extent to which Apartheid as a racial policy has been rooted, it "subverts all imagination", for it is a period that defies anything; i.e. it "swallows flames before invited audiences" (p.81). This is one of Sepamla's most refined poems where the free flow of his imagination is unhuddled. Although Apartheid is shown to be uneasy to dismantle,

the poem shows it is a period in history that also "plagues conscience with ambition" (p.81) when an epoch to shake the system is achieved.

The sharpness of Sepamla's poetry is demonstrated in 'Now is the Time'. The poem is considering the hopes and aspirations in a new angle. "Silhouttes of an illusion / Now is the time / To know words / Not shut out their meaning" (p.87). It is best for Africans to countenance the naked truth than to go about approaching hidden and obscure machinations in sceptical ways. It is time for Africans "to drain goblets / of the remains of bitter memories" (p.87). To assert themselves, they should leap out of the darker shadows that have obscured their lives. The poem reflects 'This Time' and agitates the people "To come forward" and "surge onward" to freedom.

'Now is the Time' urges the people to come out of 'The Dilemma' which is a poem that expresses a longing for calmness and stability within the ranks of the struggling people to concentrate on their goals of achieving freedom. The dilemma is created out of the people's experience. The data of the massacred makes it "somewhat enough" for the poet. He confesses that "these are sights I'd rather not see / To see them blunts my feeling of faith / There are cries I'd rather not hear / To hear them steels disbelief in men" (p.82). The terror of racism normally leads to such a cul-de-sac as in the poetry of Neto. To the poet, these are moving

experiences which create a dilemma in his convictions about the life lived by his people. It is the "silence", "hum and grind" of the society "That make of people street posts / on which robots are hung to peer at us" that makes the poet "wonder / which people to embrace / The death living or the memorable dead" (p.82). As the poet sits in his study, he realises his acute dilemma over loyalty. The role of the poet who sits in a 'cosy' chair is not an easy one.

The debate over passivity and active engagement is carried into the poem 'I Tried To Say . . .'. The noise and confusion that mark the people's lives are emphasised to show how people age quickly. Familiar images that bring the sight of death; "brown paper parcel" etc are shown. These are images that turn "the songs of living / into palpitations of the heart" (p.83).

One of the most choking experiences in killing the human spirit is addressed to in the poem 'Silence'. This is done through solitary confinement. To the poet, hunger, starvation and beating do not carry the hardship caused by silence: "whip my wickedness with a strap / . . . That the red weals make you want to cry / . . . Deny my hunger pangs bread / yeasted for life / That I wither like an autumn leaf / But don't kill me with silence" (p.85).

The cadences of the song depict a sadness which is common to their lives and in the poem 'To Makana and Nongawuse', the life of every adult male South African

is shown to be that of a soldier of circumstance; "but listen to the sounds of my sleep / there you'll hear the mutterings of a soldier" (p.86).

The poetry gives us a hint that at certain moments, it is not quite the struggle to overthrow the system that is more demanding as it is the struggle to survive: "We've seen the wars of the day / demand brief cases and cotton ties" (p.86). It is a poem that commemorates the struggle in all fronts and captures the raging tension. The evocative verses reveal the despair that engulfs their futile trials to live: "eased by a dying faith / patience oozing in our daily works . . . / am felled as many times as I listen / give me the silence of your graves" (p.86). The poem tries to link up with their ancestral spirits and finally evokes metaphysical intervention to end the system. This poem is similar to Neto's 'The Hoisting Of The Flag' in its dedication to freedom fighters.

Poetry, as already been explained, is a vehicle for social change in South Africa. Sepamla's 'I'll Come to You' is based on the strength of this argument. It aspires for change in a bright and positive language. It is also an anthem that sings to the future of a free South Africa: "I'll beam broadly / basking in the strength of triumph" (p.88). It depicts the memories of the struggle, of painful deaths by bullets as the people "strain forward on impossibilities / and again strain" (p.88). But despite the bloody nature of things and

confusion in "Faith and hope / on inconsequential intrigues" (p.88), it is a poem giving glad tidings and hope to the future of South Africa. The poet counts on this change of tide for the revolutionary struggle defying the sophistication of Apartheid. The poem in its appeal is similar to Serote's 'Hell Well Heaven', when Sepamla says: "I'll come to you / I won't wring hands / I might drag feet / wading through the bloodied dust . . . / Oh, don't you worry / . . . I've got it all figured out / that I'll come to you" (p.88).

The most important event that gave prominence to Sipho Sepamla's poetry was the Soweto Uprising of June 16, 1976 captured in The Soweto I Love.

The uprising was a protest against the introduction of the Bantu Education policy designed by the Republic of South Africa to produce low cadre citizens for the complete subjugation of the majority. Instead of improving on the condition of the existing schools, and easing such problems as congestion, lack of materials etc., the government came up with what is apparently a diversionary way of introducing an education for servitude.

In the township of Soweto, students and other concerned citizens have been organising themselves in various ways to write petitions against the policy, and when these failed the students came out into the streets and demonstrated on the 16th of June, 1976.

Revolts and strikes have become an institutionalised phenomenon in the racist republic because of the culture

of repression and white supremacy; Baaskup. It was during the Soweto crises that a record number of workers, about 90%[16] were mobilized. The Students' Representative Council; students in allieance with community leaders and black workers, in defiance of racist laws, seized and ruled Soweto for two weeks. They were together with some progressive whites also, though there is a serious indictment of their role in the poem 'For A Laugh':

> but came the riots / they shot
> us down with violent bullets /
> they baton-charged my coloured
> brother rioter / then warned
> off their own riotous kids[17]
> (p.13).

The poems cover the whole spectrum of South African life and depict the revolutionary situation. Sepamla conjures up images of death to protest against apartheid. poems like 'I Saw This Morning' testify to this notion where children are caught up in a morbid environment. 'A Child Dies' and 'HOW A Brother Died' also capture the emotional experience of witnessing death:

> he was a mere kid / consumed by
> curiosity . . . / to a burning
> scene . . . / because a monster
> was known to stalk the streets /
> . . . he just ran and ran / . . .
> into the hands of a towering
> giant . . . / he was hurled to
> the ground / like grain / he was
> pounded and pounded / with a gun-
> bout / we buried the mess /
> another day (p.2).

The poet here is sapped of all emotions. But the

poem 'How A Brother Died' gives a picture of death with the poet's emotional attachment. In a seemingly peaceful situation, there is a sudden uproar of death in the most choking way an observer can endure:

> Knees buckled with the loss of strength...
> I want to remember these things
> because I had never known such hate before...
> I looked at his covered face
> feeling the crush of pain as he was being
> felled by that bullet (p.11).

People in the townships are made to dread the police because of these killings. But it is in defiance of death that the children protest because they would not succumb to the idea of death. The death scene is dominant in Sepamla's poetry as it is a day-to-day affair in South Africa and he tries to give us an account of how the blacks die.

The political situation in South Africa has not changed in a significant way for the black people. Their security is at stake. About 4000 Zulus were believed to have been massacred in 1906 during the 'Bambata Rebellion'. This had only been the result of their refusal to pay taxes.

Through poetry, Sepamla gives us the notion that prison and 'normal' life are not of any significant difference in South Africa. The poet does not want to have the luxury to dream of material possessions but rather **be** confined to the **prison** life which the illustrative poem 'In My Name' comes up to suggest.

This poem is reflective of Neto's 'succession of

shadows' which describes the blackman under Portuguese colonialism as perturbed by "a world / which dazzles him / with the false glitter of its fake gold"[18].

The genius of poetry is achieved through the appeal and creation of different meanings for the different cultures through their prejudices. The new generation of poets in South Africa are channelling their creativity towards this achievement.

'Words, Words, Words' is a poem that rejects the gradual progression to freedom being suggested by many pacifists in South Africa. Through the metaphor of tribal nations, Sepamla raises the Influx Control act for rejection. The tone of this poem is sarcastic which is an art Sepamla takes delight in.

Sepamla uses the euphemism traded by the South African government for describing black locations against her. The word 'multinational' carries an array of meanings which not only depict the economic control through multinational corporations but also debunk the notion of tribal settlements where victims of the Influx Control are sent. In order to divert the minds of the black people from the real issues governing their lives, the regime also creates faction fights to stay in power. Sepamla through his sarcasm says "We don't speak of tribal wars any more / We say simply faction fights" (p.104). It is through such glaring understanding of the new racial policies that the poet redirects their tactical ploys:

> We are talking of words / words
> tossed around as if / denied
> location by the wind / We mean
> those words some spit / others
> grab / dress them up for the
> occasion / fling them on the lap
> of an audience / We are talking
> of those words / that stalk our
> lives like policemen / . . .
> words that change sonner than
> seasons (p.104).

There is also an attempt to look at the institutionalization of violence through poetic devices. The poems 'Like A Hippo', 'Bullets' and 'The Island' show the poet's concern over violence and repression. Hippo describes a tank with its potential to destroy and its power to mow down people like grass. 'The Island' gives a picture of how strong the republic of South Africa is as a violent nation "I am strong / no one nears me without a tremble / I have for many years dared the sea / to swallow me" (p.102). But it is not an unchallenged strength which the racist republic exhibits. Sepamla through his poetry shows not only the sapping of this strength through defiance:

> I am strong / I have broken the
> backs of many men / I've even
> tempered with their sanity / but
> as many have left me defiant...
> Mandela & Sisulu have grown grey /
> but their spirits still defy me
> (p.102).

Sepamla in an effort to stay in his sobre mind, praises the courage of the killed students and workers by 'stray bullets'. He is choked by brutality when he

says "I have known cruelty / the kind that makes me cry without tears". Amidst such defiance, protest and seemingly too strong and malevolent forces of oppression, there is a sense of hope and triumph as the poem 'At The Dawn Of Another Day' shows:

> It is on that day children /
> excused the past / deploring
> the present / their fists
> clenched full of the future[19].

There is hope for the blackman in these alliterative allusions to future freedom. Like 'Song Of The Prisoner', poetry elevates the spirits of hope for freedom. Dawn: signifies the breaking in of a new day and the poetry clads in this image so that nothing could stop the breaking of new grounds to achieve freedom. In all the three poets, poetry has been used as an instrument to expose and fight injustice. 'Tell Me News' is a poem that refutes the double standards of the regime. The poem has a resurging staccato of rhetorical questions that raises the activities of the police with new exposure:

> Tell me of a brother / who hanged
> himself in jail / with a piece of
> his torn pair of jeans / Was he
> hiding a pair of scissors in the
> cell (p.101).

Both within and outside of prison, the blacks are killed, but most of those killed in prison are reported to have committed suicide. Sepamla in this and other subsequent poems rejects the ideas sold to the public. It is in this poem . . . that he is convinced with the aparthy

of the regime and those that perpetrate atrocities:

> Tell me, tell me Sir / has the
> gruesome sight / of a mangled
> corpse / not begun to sit on
> your conscience (p.101).

Throughout the period of the riots, fear of death has held them spellbound. 'On Fear' captures this phenomenon when they feared of their fates:

> Those were the days / when we
> walked through dense suspense /
> fearing the rustle of trees
> even / for leaves have been
> known to be ears / those days
> (p.93).

It is a gruesome picture of a community terrorised by Apartheid, "each footfall in the yard / was a cold treading on our souls / each knock on the door / a hammering on our spirits". The poet urges that "as we swear to loathe fear / it is our belief / we'll triumph over all fear" (p.93). This signifies that in a facist state, only violence could counter violence as an appraisal of Nelson Mandela's famous defence speech:

> We first broke the law in a way which
> avoided any recourse to violence;
> when this form was legislated against,
> and the government resorted to a show
> of force to crush opposition to its
> policies, only then did we decide to
> answer violence with violence[20].

Through the magic of poetry, Sepamla redefines his society. The poem 'Civilization Aha' tries to assess the Bantu Education policy and its designs. The poet places it

within the context of Western civilization. Neto too had written a poem 'Western Civilization' which indicts the housing policies of the Portuguese to register his disillusionment. The images of Providence and the devil are shown as absurd mystification to negate African cultures. The issue of civilization has been promoted by social anthropologists which Okot p'Bitek succeeds in debunking in Song Of Lawino.

'Civilization Aha' also begins to develop the theme of liberalism and the stand of the African. In other subsequent poems, the poet succeeds in exposing the machinations involved in liberalism and paternalism. But it is in 'Progress Aha' that Sepamla shows liberalism as a weapon for the subjugation of the blacks. The government boasts of improving black settlements which is propagated through the champions of liberalism: "White-washed cottages dot empty spaces / factories around spit forth so much billows / the law now speaks of built-up areas" (p.119). This is the process of making Apartheid adopt another facade of benevolence which the poet shows as a bitter pill in sugar coating. The image of the so-called new and improved settlements could be seen in the light of the polution they emit and the allusion to the perpetuation of the proletariat culture through black labour.

Sepamla wishes white people are as frank to their policies as in Angola so that one would know one's political stand. He shows that flattery is an identifi-

cation mark with liberals. His poetry takes a certain form of dignity through the language and a certain condescending attitude to Apartheid as he continues in the poem 'Civilization Aha'. His condemnation is similar to Fanon and Rodney. "Some may call the process progress / but I am not too sure of it" because to accept this is to distort reality when his people live in "little stuffy nooks / trapped / like a caged beast" (p.107). It is a situation that creates an atmosphere of impossibility to struggle out of such stuffiness. It is a simple poem that points out the areas of disagreement in a very plain yet bitter language. It is a condition that affects the psyche "and I am sure cannot be progress" (p.107).

In Black poets in South Africa[21], Oswald Mtsali and Pascal Gwala attempt to expose liberalism in a similar fashion. In the poem 'Detribalized', Mtsali gives a picture of a blackman and his 'sophisticated wife' who are not concerned with politics as they are getting their material wants. This separation of the individual from politics is one of the different 'benevolent' facades of liberalism.

Politics, therefore, is reduced to governmental function. But this is also a style employed by the new generation of poets and writers to show the impossibility of achieving white standards in South Africa. In this way, the poet creates a force to drive home his abhorence of Apartheid. This then allows the poetry to

thrive without evoking the wrath of the authorities who are not appealed to:

> He knows / he must carry a pass. /
> He don't care for politics / He
> don't go to church / He knows
> Sobukwe / he knows Mandela / They're
> in Robben Island. / 'So what? That's
> not my business'.

The quest for a revolution is magnified in the poetry in such poems as 'At Sunset' and 'At The Dawn of Another Day' which show the routine of suffering as the sun goes "to rest in the West / escaping the role of scavenger"[22] like the sentries in the image of the brutal police guarding over their lives and the traces of new tragedies and atrocities are "signalled / until the dawn of another day". But amidst such arrangement "our hearts stood like lumps in our throats" no more the sponge that drinks and "swore to pay the debt with defiance". The poet shows the incacertation of the blackman, but the structural arrangement of the poem 'At The Dawn of Another Day' itself shows that image of defiance in the manner in which the following words conspicuously stand out from the rest:

> give
> me
> this
> day
> myself[23].

The poem 'All That Gold' reflects the standard of living of the whites and the hopes and aspirations of

the blacks on the discovery of this precious metal until they "remain this day with a joy choked midair". So it is possible to agree with John Haynes when he says:

> Sepamla's poetry is close to what we might call 'hand-to-hand' politics. This is so in two ways: as a matter of the situation of writing, and as a matter of what is written about[24].

It is, however, in the poem 'For W.T.' that we have an assessment of the day of the riots, where the poet vows that "spirits can never be hanged / with torn blankets or shirts or Whathaveyou" (p.1) with a declamatory tone. The poet grieves over the idea of writing the "so-called confession" notes of people killed by the state. Sepamla shows in this poem how the state puts words into people's mouths. This poem is similar to Neto's 'In exhausion he thus clamoured' which depicts the pathetic condition of people forced to confess a crime they did not commit, "I will say nothing / I know nothing . . . / even if they offer me freedom[25].

Despite the language of lamentation which Sepamla adopts in some of the poems, the tone of defiance comes up again as in the highly evocative metaphors used in the poem 'Talk To The Peach Tree'. He wants to open up dialogue and tell the world, 'peach tree' how the blacks suffer and inquire how it shall last. The peach tree represents the lives of the blacks also, through their strong cultural attachment, "the sentinel of my acclaimed

urbanity". A poem with this title appears in Sepamla's The Blues Is You In Me where the response of the tree to the seasons is taken up as a metaphor of how the blacks respond to their society. In a way it is a commemoration of something in their neighbourhood that gives them a sense of hope:

> and so the summer rains fall / the ashen ground drinking merrily / quenching the sulking roots of my peach tree / favoured for its long-suffering make-up / redeemer of my forlorn greenish hideout (p.60).

Sepamla also gives a picture of class distinction when he says "I might be excused for owning no rose buds" (p.6) which is a mark of white sense of beauty, "but wow! I would have no ground for a yard / not statued with a wild peach tree" (p.6). But even here, the home of the blacks remind one of their impotence and poverty as the poem 'Home' suggests. The lamentation is quite reminiscent of Kofi Awoonor's This Earth My Brother . . .; "Home is my desolation, home is my anguish, home is my drink of hyssop and tears, where is home?"[26].

The poetry generally dwells on exposing the events in Soweto. The defiance of the students was taken to the shops where its success is shown when a white lady broke down and cried. The new cultural value trying to consolidate its position through Black Consciousness is gaining ground. But even in the love poems, we feel the i[illegible]usion of the authorities and other aspects of

South African life, like the separation of families and their return in the weekends from the men's hostels. 'A Lover's Diary' exposes these grim aspects:

> Friday we clasped hands over our hearts for the / return of our fathers / . . . but that was before the law took over our love-life / now we must make love in our minds / we must look for the future in dreams / our hearts have been exiled from each other (p.98).

The poet is not using any euphemism to colour his intention here and through this realist medium, Sepamla records the cruelty of racial separation. The poem not only traces the agonies, but raises the question of love and exile to shed more light on the bans: "those that have banned me from living / cannot banish love that easily". The diary then records an optimism when Sepamla says "but our love must never bear the marks of the unjust".

It is yet through the pathetic pictures of rape and castration as found in 'The Outrage' that Sepamla argues about the inhuman conditions experienced by men in the men's hostels which result in the development of beastial tendencies:

> When brother was slotted / in a rough-hewn hostel / to masturbate / no-one spoke of the animal breeding (p.96).

The poem is a moving picture of incest as a result of insane psychic developments in the men's hostels.

It registers a sense of a broken community "the outrage pierced the night / broken windows shattered its silence / . . . I've tried to piece together / fragments of the night's act / but the mind's searing pain refuses" (p.96). It is a night which Sepamla does not register in a diary; "I want to cancel off this night from / the calendar of our deeds / but the seeds have germinated" (p.96).

Sepamla's 'The Exile' is a dedication to the freedom fighters, those who refused to conform to racist laws and as such fled the country. Through the charm of poetic symbolism, the poet registers his hope for their 'home coming'.

> Father of my thoughts / Sinew of my being / I relate to you as the moon to the sun . . . / in those distant places / where my voice may not reach / know that I'm tanning a melody for you (p.103).

Sepamla tries to comprehend through poetry, the experiences of the exiled. He produces rhetorical questions which serve to buttress the South African experience. The seasons are again brought to sharper poetic focus as determinant of age. But through an evocative phrase he wishes them success in their clandestine activities to bring freedom. This Sepamla acknowledges comes only through struggle which is the only alternative:

> I remember once / you spoke of
> man's will power / for me all
> that remains / some highfalutin
> balderdash / my life offers no
> alternatives / as I stand on
> shifting sands (p.103).

Life in the township pushes the visionary to the shores where he could reduce the tension mounting in him. But even at the shores, the political message is clear, "Scanning the horizon for your return". The efficacy of dedication could be sensed here as in Neto's 'We Must Return'.

The poem 'In Search Of Roots' is an assessment of African culture and tradition. Issues dealing with African aesthetics are treated here as in p'Bitek's protest against alien and novel ways adopted by Africans as in Song of Lawino. Although many issues have been raised over the values of the Africa National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress, Sepamla as a Black Consciousness poet seems to merge the two values, thus creating an essence in their struggle. His picturesque placement of the A.N.C. flag through his interpretation of the colours gives us a hint; "We will have to seek out / black, green and golden flowers". It is, therefore, pertinent to assert that

> The revolution is also a matter
> of small details of every day life,
> which comprise the many minute
> stitches and threads of a culture
> (p.106).

Sepamla also shows the success of the blacks and

the government's second thoughts through her trials to readjust the mechanism of Apartheid: "they are doing their damnest / to repair the damage done". The racist republic had premonition over the social chaos that would bring conflagration to the nation, "I've seen their arrogance / tease the fibre of my courage / it's as if they knew always / it will come to this someday" (p.105). The repetition of Sharpville has been witnessed in Soweto. This is a serious observation from the poet regarding the future of South Africa with the continued tension between the two races. The bitterness of segregation is generally reflected by Sepamla when he writes: "When I came to understand this act / which served notice for many more like it / separating me from other human beings / my chest would fill up with bitterness" (p.108). But the change in the course of events has placed some courage in his life. The poems, inspite of their exposition as in Neto and p'Bitek, generally are representations of the psychological issues dealing with fear, love, violence, murder and all mental aberrations imparted by Apartheid culture. There is a compassionate psychological exposé of this turn in events in Sepamla's poetry.

The 'Soweto' poem deals with the general concern of Black South Africa and is an assessment not only of June 16, 1976, but of the hopes of the people tailored in the form of protest, defiance and revolution. Sepamla's strong attachment to black settlements is yet apparent

in this poem: "the myths attending your name / have been spooks in the minds of many" (p.109). It is a sad, as well as an optimistic poem, "you were born an after-thought... / you have been a huge quite cemetry... / I love you Soweto / I've done so long before" (p.110). The poet inspite of the loss at Soweto, tries to reflect Sharpville and becomes content with their achievements: "on your neck was placed a yoke of laws / which have tried to strangle your life / and once you strained muscles / to shake off the restraints". The poet's attachment is so strong and vivid that his description of Soweto goes further than mere exposition, "I love you Soweto / I've done so long before / the summer swallow deserted you" (p.110). In this way, the conscience of the tourists are 'gnawed'.

The poems close full of hope and honour for the youths who seized history and decided to hold the charging bull by the horns. The courage of their actions show the unsurmountable force within the black community:

> I am an atlas in my own right /
> I defy distance reducing it to a
> point / as little as my hand
> (p.111).

In this way, the poet traverses all aspects of South African life in search of peace because he writes, "but a wish of mine remains / peace at all times with all men" (p.111). This collection of poems is a cynosure to show more vividly 'than any photograph'

the life of Black South Africa and the events surrounding the protests. It transcends these events to show the policies of Apartheid in all its ramifications.

Whereas Children Of The Earth is the reassessment of the failures and achievements of the South African people after the Soweto Riots. The poetry exposes the boiling issues of the day with strong references to Egypt, Isreal and Lebanon. The poem 'sketches of a continent' is highly metaphorical in giving cues of the struggle within the mystical forces in nature, as in the case of the Nile "fighting famine with fertility". The poem further shows a level of disappointment with 'civilization' but hope in struggle. Even though there is a stain on the West African state of Nigeria because of the scars of Biafra, the tone seems to argue, "mighty Nigeria remains the promise of things / . . . grows as our haven" (p.115). The poet feels it is left for Africans to decide the survival of their continent "let live! Let live Africa / even at the horn of your spear / where men writhe in agony" (p.115). Whatever struggle carried in the name of the people would not be in vain, even if it were a failure, "for Mau Mau was not an oath / in vain" (p.115). The defeat of the Mau Mau is not a defeat for the visionary, but rather a provocation. The poetry of Neto and p'Bitek could be seen in the light of the struggle they promote and the South African people have succeeded in pushing their grievances to a relative degree and have shown their stand with fascism.

"O! Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe! / it was said / you lisp arrogant declarations of independence / now you sniff over liberty / now you explode myths / while I wait in the corridors of time" (p.116). The poetry is laced with the power of hope in time for the acquisition of freedom. It is in this way that the Soweto Riots could be seen as an overt reaction and expression of the people's freedom struggle against the bondage of cultural imperialism and racial segregation.

The poet's conviction over freedom is accompanied by sacrifice: "For Angola the aroma of flavoured coffee / lingers in the air / above the dust of embattlement" (p.116). The struggle of the South African people is honoured by the poet through these metaphors and commends the rank and file of the revolutionaries. It is not enough to dismiss these constant clashes as mere social fracas. The poem assesses the troubles faced by Africans from the Angolan struggles, and the Zimbabwean independence and indeed the issues that culminate into the assassination of Patrice Lumumba in Zaire. The projection of these issues echoes, "Everything rolls and rolls". In this way, we see poems like 'Words, Words, Words' and 'Talk, Talk, Talk' connoting the monotonous drag in life due to social stagnation within the racist enclave. The poem becomes a beautiful anthem when it says "Azania, My Azania / of green gold and black mountains / virgin

soils / undulating wilderness / . . . Spew forth the thing / like your gold / and let's be damned!" (p.117). It is reminiscent of Diop's Africa and the mountains and the wilderness give a sense of mystique hope, but above all, it is revolutionary in the conclusion.

The poet's tone in this collection is often ironic. It is an anger that chokes yet it is suppressed. It is a song that sings of the beauty of the land yet calls for its damnation. It is a tribute to the liberators projected through the paradox of social life: "Azania! / expands the limits of my fibres / wash off gold-dust with tears of the dead / but it doesn't matter any more / I've begun to dip / feet / in cold muddy waters" (p.117). The poet, however, resolves some of the dilemmas suffered earlier. His disillusionment with pacifism is registered as he tries to keep in pace with militant Black Consciousness.

There are poems in this collection that discuss the importance of death. 'Rockfall' features unnecessary deaths that occur within black circles as "the world teetered on the brink of collaps / fear paralysing the neighbourhood" (p.118). The poem digs up more images of death as in the shells that destroy their dwelling places. There is an ominous reflection that the reality of the blacks' existence is a threat to the authorities. Death in violent forms becomes the feature of their daily life. "We walk this earth with death" (p.118). The poem is an intellectual argument that sets the psychology of the people towards 'triumphant affirmation'

of the social acceptance of death. The poet cultivates the concept of the Japanese Harakiri, so that one should die honourable, in the suicide squad or any how, in the course of freeing one's society and become a martyr, "So we must die / but there must be a better reason / than to make some richer / others cast in the gloom of premature orphanage" (p.118).

The dehumanising sense of the newly acquired technology could be traced in Sepamla's poetry, "hey boy don't sleep on the job / touch button four touch button five". The complete restlessness and psychological terror boil up to protestation against the new culture; "Come the end of the day / bang bang bang / the sound of the bullet / yanks the worker / into the yawn of prison cells". The poem 'sounds' therefore, brings the image of the proletariat class loudly, with its attendant poverty, restlessness and frustration, and above all the torture they suffer in the hands of the authorities. The prison cells become torture schools as seen in Neto's poems and in P'Bitek. People are forced to accept subservience which is reminiscent of George Owell's 1984. The operations and maintenance implements are used for the torture, "they are killing me / metal on flesh". pliers are used on their most sensitive parts to extort confessions. In this way, the

inventors subjugate the Africans. "Joys of childhood / have given way / to sorrows of aging / sounds grow grey by the day" (p.121). The colour grey recurs in Sepamla which always suggests lack of freedom.

With the disillusionment of Soweto, the strength of the people's unity is foregrounded in the poetry. 'Ai Madoda!' with exclamation marks is suggestive of that notion of protest. Exclamations recur and this poem is an oath of continuity that dares all forms of change and development. It is a proclamation that shall not change until the freedom vowed is achieved. It is not the cosmetic change of the fortress in the figure of the Union parliament so that "wild flowers begin to grow where houses of / parliament stand", but rather the change of the laws for genuine freedom no matter how far technology has been advanced; "When A Space flights begin to shuttle to parts on outer / planets" (p.122). Sepamla's anger can be felt when he argues: "our daily cries cease to fall on ears that serve futility . . . / our patience is no longer cuddled by hurt of a soured life" (p.122). It is a vow inspired by the sum total of experiences acquired as a black South African. It is therefore a pledge that exonerates any act in the form of patriotism for majority rule.

Sepamla's disgust for racial anthropologists could

be seen when he writes: "I know my history damn well / I'd need to have you stand back so I tell it / by God you've breathed down my neck for too long / your ominous shadow cast over all my events blurring details of it / this same history of bloody wars and bitter tears / whose pain sears through the body of our nation" (p.123). The distortion of African history is rejected by Sepamla, because the history of Africa does not start with colonialism "1652".

Children of the Earth contains poems that address the people on matters of society that call for a revolution. Although Sepamla's poetry, as a matter of rule is generally in the mainfold of protest literature, there are exceptions to this rule. 'Clean up the mess' carries a revolutionary zeal in its lines: "it has to be a sunny s.a. morning / not like at nyanga, cape town / on a wet cold bleeding day where / people were loaded on buses / as so many bags of maize, potatoes and coal / to be dumped in scrawny lands / clean up the mess I say / tear up the statutory book / it is a terrible mess" (p.124). Human life is depicted as fragile and easy to bundle as bags of potatoes. Although the poem, and those exceptions of his poetry, does not give clear guide lines on how a revolution is to be staged, Sepamla calls for an overthrow of the system without ceremonies. "Don't just want to scrap the infamous laws . . . / start a new age man . . . / let us stop the lie of change by degree" (p.124). The poet longs for the day when he

would wake up on a bright morning when the mess of life is cleaned. In this poem we also realise the short-comings of poetry, but the poets can, however, succeed in producing volatile documents that would threaten the system. This is apparent in Neto, P'Bitek and most South African poets. The reins of poetry can pull the societal beliefs to inspire people for their own liberation.

Sepamla's poetry has a contrastive style which gives the reader an added advantage of distinguishing what the two societies in South Africa go through in their artificiality, because one is "made to wilt like a leaf / amidst summer rains / made to wear cramps / in place of polished shoes / forced to curse the gods / praised earlier in the day" (p.125). It is a way of breaking the human spirit. 'A Mole in the Hole' is an ironic poem that cajoles the contradictions of the white-man. It is not a racial war of words, but the poet shows that malnutrition is apparent in the black society while obesity is rampant in the white enclave. In this way the poet gives gory pictures of their decaying society in a realistic form. The society above all is lived through "protective detention" like "a mole / in a six-foot square hole". The system then condemns the living and kills the vigour and vibrance of life to grave-like confinement. Humour and ridicule are used

to convey the contradictions to give the poetry some life; "made to watch ants build / & envy the common fly / lord it over one's prescribed area" (p.125). But beneath such humour, there is a serious examination of Apartheid as a whirlwind that blows South Africa very badly.

Sepamla gradually demystifies the moral issues raised in his poetry. He censors the information given by the South African government to the world over the condition of the blacks. Children of the Earth achieves this feat through hyperbolic language especially in the poem 'Stop the Lie'. "I want you to stop the lie / don't tell me how much you feed the poor / because you made hunger / when you dropped those of my blood into the hole of gold" (p.124). This is also a poem that strives to achieve a balance urging the regime to come down to the level of human beings who inhabit the Earth. The moral question regarding truth is put to discourse for further comprehension of the word. Sepamla considers what is concealed in the whiteman's truth with a contempt and disparaging tone. Such disappointments raise the temper to a boiling degree. Anger, therefore, mounts so high in his poetry as to reach the very brim of despair, he however provides solutions too:

> I should write no more poems but
> tributes / read at night vigils
> and funerals . . . / Sing dirges
> for those whose dances / have
> ended in bloody pods / for our
> life is a commentary of wasted
> moments (p.132).

The despair is borne out of his own practical experience over the inertia of their conditions. This is one of the few poems that come face to face with Sepamla's revolutionary intentions, as they do not come out as frequently as others may wish: "why should I go on bleating / when others feed me bullets" (p.132). The poet charges that the mosaics collected through his past may recur in stronger forms. It is then true to assert that :

> Sepamla's close encounter with racial violence during Sharpville and again in Soweto confirmed him in his conviction that, . . . we would not be able to avert a vast conflagration (p.16)

unless a meaningful inter-racial reconciliation is effected in South Africa.

The people's stoicism is carried further as Sepamla achieves a composure in his receding anger; "bullets can turn to water / . . . especially as night falls / it did over Angola, Mozambique and Zimbabwe" (p.133). The poet, therefore, acknowledges that what they are going through is the sacrificial lap in their struggle for liberating themselves. Anger is a pitch exhibited by Neto and p'Bitek but such anger is always ephemeral so that there is an easy flow of their emotions.

The serious crises and unprecedented turmoil that would usher in freedom is expected strongly in the poem 'Children of the Earth' which is the title poem:

> Children of the earth / the earth
> of gods / gods of the lost, the
> forsaken and the down trodden /
> it is with humility / these words
> are spoken (p.133).

Racial categorisation and the resultant tension is shown to continue in this address after Soweto 1976. The poet's voice identifies with the majority and extols the valour of those who fought "the yield of years bears witness of you / you with hands that clawed the ground one night / you with hands that hurled stones at bullets" (p.134). The unmatched fight between stones and bullets is suggestive of faith and unflagging conviction which the people are determined to show. The title poem suggests a number of variables in this respect:

> you gave us a revised bantu
> education / of nice looking
> double-storeyed buildings / of
> teachers scrambling for matric
> certificates / certificates
> talk / shit talk that is" (p.134).

The poet assesses the revised education policy for the blacks producing teachers without a curriculum for the society. Straight forward indictment of the authorities whose "bullets split brains" (p.134) for refusing to be stuffed with white values are found in the poetry:

> you gave us ebullient community
> councillors / with long black
> flowing gowns / pussy-footing
> councillors who raise rents for
> match-boxes / match boxes are a
> lie / the lie of being houses
> that is / shit bricks and
> asbestos / that suck in colds

> and disease that is / . . . with
> orange lighting that makes us
> ghosts / ghosts that inhabit
> concentration camps (pp.134-135).

The community councillors, more or less puppets, are shown as worthless as the housing policy for the blacks which has no meaning.

The reconstruction does not take into consideration the people's culture, because camps continue the culture of "dirt, rape and murders" that are perilous to the people's existence. This collection of poems, therefore, attributes the faltering and subsequent disintegration of the heritage of the blacks to the policies imposed by the South African government.

Sepamla's grim assessment, however, ends with a bright note through the depiction of some revolutionary movements that have achieved independence and freedom; "You opened the way to Angola / You opened the way to Tanzania / You opened the way to Cuba" (p.135). They too achieved this through the difficult ways. His hope is seen in his idea that people "talk of your return in Soweto / . . . Mamelodi / . . . Kwa-Mashu / . . . Pretoria / . . . Cape Town / . . . Durban" (p.135) and all black townships because they have started showing the way for a long time. Sepamla then resolves by seeking solution through historical analogies of events in human history by urging for revolution as the only means for cultural emancipation. All human societies in such similar situations, according to him, had never

succeeded otherwise, at least in the examples apparent in his poetry.

The chapter has considered the new techniques of poetry emanating from the New Generation Poets in South Africa. The poetry of Sepamla is observed as initially euphemistic as in the case of Neto. But violence and the stringent social condition for existence within the Apartheid enclave forces him to change[27]. There are persistent images of death used as an indictment of apartheid. Bantu Education Policy is seen as a ploy to enslave the blacks like liberalism. The dehumanization of individuals is captured in the poetry and the poet tries to console the grieved. The style in Sepamla is seen in how he strives for oral myths and the contrastive nature of the poetry is seen always orbiting within the confines of the Black Consciousness Movement. Inspite of the institutionalization of violence, the poetry is observed to sail in hope and triumph.

The integration of politics and culture in the poetry of Neto, p'Bitek and Sepamla is, therefore, perceived in the challenges and non-chalance demonstrated by these poets in face of the challenges. It is then obvious to go to the concluding chapter to focus on the three poets and their success.

FOOTNOTES

1. "The A.N.C. was formed in 1912 as the South African Native National Congress, and changed its name in 1922" - Rob Davies, et al, ed, The Struggle For South Africa: A Reference Guide To Movements, Organisations And Institutions Vol.2; (Zed Books, London, 1984) p.285

2. Rob Davies et al, ed, The Struggle For South Africa..., p.283. "In 1961 it adopted the armed struggle as its principal strategic method of struggle. Its military wing Umkonto We Sizwe (The Spear of the Nation" was formed that year with Nelson Mandela as Commander-in-Chief.

3. Gail M. Gerhart, Black Power in South Africa: Evaluation of an Ideology (University of California, Berkely, 1978) p.257.

4. Ezekiel Mphahlele, Voices in the Whirlwind And Other Essays, (Hill and Wang, New York, 1972) p.205.

5. Ibid, p.174.

6. Jacob Drachler, ed., African Heritage (Collier, London, 1970) pp.122-123.

7. T.J. Couzens, 'Early South African Writing', in A Celebration of Black and African Writing ed., King & Ogungbesan (ABU Press, Zaria, 1975).

8. Lewis Nkosi, Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature, (Longman Group, Essex, 1981).

9. Nadine Gordimer, 'Writers in South Africa: The New Black Poets' in Exile and Tradition, (Longman, London, 1976) p.135.

10. Mbulelo Mzamane, The Children of Soweto (Longman, London, 1982) p.40.

11. All subsequent quotations with page numbers are from Mbulelo Mzamane, ed., Sipho Sepamla: Selected Poems (AD Donker Ltd., Craighall, 1984).

12. Nathan Glick, ed., Diologue Vol.II No.1, 1978, p.84.

13. Ezekiel Mphahlele, Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays (Hill & Wang, New York, 1972) p.25.

14. John Haynes, 'Africa Was Never Discovered...' ABU Media Conference 1984 - 'This is characteristic of many South African poems in which the sense of the oral tradition and the ancestors is given a projection into the future, and in this way shown to be manifestly enlisted into the struggle for change' (pp.11-12).

15. Wole Soyinka, A Shuttle in the Crypt (Rex Collins, London, 1972).

16. Mbulelo Mzamane, The Children of Soweto (Longman, London, 1982) p.223.

17. All subsequent quotations are from Sipho Sepamla, The Soweto I Love (Rex Collins, London, 1977).

18. Agostinho Neto, Sacred Hope (Tanzania Publishing House, Dar-es-Salam, 1974) p.22.

19. Sipho Sepamla, The Soweto I Love (Rex Collins, London, 1977) p.6.

20. Nelson Mandela, I Am Prepared To Die (Canon-Collins House, London, 1979) p.29.

21. Robert Royston, ed., Black Poets in South Africa (Heinemann, London, 1973) p.84.

22. Sipho Sepamla, The Soweto I Love, (Rex Collins, London, 1979) p.6.

23. Ibid; p.6.

24. John Haynes, 'Africa Was Never Discovered: A Reading of 'In Search Of Roots' by Sipho Sepamla', ABU Media Conference, 1984.

25. Agostinho Neto, Sacred Hope.

26. Kofi Awoonor, This Earth My Brother... (Heinemann, London, 1981) p.29.

27. It is then true that 'literature compliments the struggle', Tanimu Abubakar, 'Black South African Fiction and the National Liberation Struggle (1969 - 1984): A Problem of Criticism'. Work in Progress No.4; (ABU Press, Zaria) p.57.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be established that the political and cultural inspiration of the poets under study have been as a result of their sensibilities to the colonial and neo-colonial policies suffered by Africa. Their dreams are purely based on freeing their societies which tie them stronger to their people.

The relation poetry has with the values, beliefs and ideologies can be perceived in a revolutionary context; Neto had lived under "constant threats of assassination by the portuguese 'hit men'"[1], p'Bitek had experienced expulsion from his country and Sepamla lives under the might of Apartheid South Africa banned as a poet. Their poetry could thus be described as revolutionary nationalism.

In all the three poets, there is an established background of intense political and cultural activities, but in Neto we have poetry as an autobiographical commitment, he lives his poetry as Lee Roi Jones. This cannot only be seen in his lines, but is evidenced in the manner in which his commitment to his people's freedom has been interpreted by the world.

Neto was once regarded as "pursuing alien ideology"[2] in comparison to Jonas Savimbi who was regarded an African nationalist. Nyerere admits that "Tanzania gave Savimbi enough arms to equip ten thousand soldiers at a

time when UNITA was fighting MPLA"[3]. History proved them wrong as Neto had pointed out because Savimbi, to their disappointment, later sided with South Africa.

Hope is the greatest binding factor that links the three poets inspite of some momentary loss of hope recorded. Neto's hope through the culture of the Angolan people has been realised after the revolution. p'Bitek in neo-colonial Uganda registers his overwhelming hope for liberation while Sepamla shows the unflinching hope for freedom as South Africa "waits in the corridors of time". Neto and Sepamla exhibit similarities in the gradual progression of their poetry. The initial pre-occupation of their poetry is full of lamentation and despair and both poets are forced to change by realistic circumstances i.e. prison and violence. p'Bitek's cultural nationalism manifests at an initial stage in 'Song Of Lawino' which develops into revolutionary zeal which is equally influenced by reality i.e. neo-colonial threat on indigenous culture.

The poets also succeed in debunking the interpretation of history by social Anthropologists. In this way, the poets expose the repression suffered by Africans and encourage those engaged in the process of freeing their nations.

It is evident in the study that there is a domestication of the European languages. Neto has demonstrated his command, taming the language to distill his ideas

through vivid, picturesque and passionate African imagery. Okot p'Bitek's language remains as an accolade of African literary critics and poets. Although Lewis Nkosi in Tasks and Masks considers Lawino as an unsuccessfully contrived character, he does not find any fault with the language. Similarly, O.R. Dathorne indicts the dramatic method of presentation in The Black Mind. This remains as one of the few exceptions recorded on the question of p'Bitek's oral traditionalism. Even here, it is the assumption of the communal voice that is criticized not the composition itself.

A trend has been set to consider p'Bitek's poetry as a classic material and his language as the standard in East African poetry. This can clearly be seen in Elizabeth Knight's 'Popular Literature in East Africa' where she judges D.G. Maillu and Maina Allan as disappointments being far removed from the work of the master craftsman.

In Sipho Sepamla, we have not only a domesticated language but a localized variety too. The tootsital variety or street dialect has been put to poetic practice with a measure of success. The success is not only in the composition, but in his cultural mission of representing the voice of the people at all possible levels. When one judges by the unliberated condition of the blacks in South Africa today with a series of bans and banishments of Sepamla's predecessors and the restrictions experienced, the cultural attachment

his poetry exhibits is profound.

Poetry coming after the bans of the late 1960s is seen as a necrudescence by the South African authorities that is further subjected to new bans, while lifting earlier bans on certain literary texts whose periods of tension might have disappeared. This sort of reaction to art shall for ever witness the black people and all oppressed people engaging in new schemes and devices which is a viscious circle. People would always respond to their societies and poetry has been shown in the study as an art that cannot only displace the forces against its political nature, but survive and continue the challenge until freedom is achieved.

The study also establishes a strong link of these poets to the cultural nationalism inspired by political ideologies as each poet has a station in the popular views of his society. Their view is initially based on protest through poetry which, however, pushed Neto to enlist for active political confrontation. The disgust in p'Bitek, however, is out of parodying western culture by Africans who have rich and inspiring traditions which are more meaningful.

From the axioma-medium of the Soviet revolution, F.R. Selden succumbs to Tzara's view that "the odd thing about revolution is that the further left you go politically, the more bourgeois they like their art".[4]

The reality of the form adopted by the poets

under study may not be wholly bourgeois here. They have a strong attachment to their peasant backgrounds which models and blends them into acquiring modest and humble lives. In this way, they remain sensible to their societies and the symbolism of their language captures their station in society evoking the pathos of others in showing their plight. Moreover, they demonstrate a sense of iconoclasm as a response to colonial experiences that saw the establishment of new societies which subverts their heritage. Their trials in improvising ways to free their societies is clear.

The poets have indisputably shown that poetry as a political or cultural tool can create tension. It is not an unnecessary tension, but that which can exacerbate the situation for a return to sanity. In Neto, this has been carried further into the forests, while p'Bitek tries to show how tradition could be made more integral to modern cultural acquisitions by discarding the so-called western solutions to Africa's predicament. Sepamla and the Black Consciousness poets further carry the banner of exposing the brutalities of Apartheid, evoking the horror of the world for its condemnation. The precarious riots and defiance embarked upon by progressive South Africans through their poetry shows the determination to dismantle Apartheid.

The poetry have the mark of simplicity which guide the reader to comprehend the significance of their plights and experience it. The essence of their poetry cannot be established over the non-socialistic appeals of Song of Lawino as stated by John Haynes[5] or through the lack of embellishment of episodes with ideological jargons and cliches. Neither could the essence be established in following such ideologies which had earned for Neto skepticism and suspicion from fellow Africans. It is, therefore, important to notice that their poetry takes as its referent; the down-trodden of the people. It raises the values of the majority and registers its voice with the African course within the confines of poetry. It is in this way that one could agree with Khouri when he says:

> poetry is one of the most limited of arts. It can never become new in the way painting, sculpture and music can. For if the poet could revolutionize his medium as the artists can their materials, and produce a verbal art totally devoid of prose meanings and external associations, and approaching painting or music, then his art would become (as Dadaism) not merely divorced from life but from language itself.6

Poetry as an art remains through the cultural values of a people to promote social awareness and as an instrument to assess the political education which influences and breaks new grounds for new trends

and policies. It is, therefore, an active tool for the cultural and political emancipation of the society as demonstrated by the poets.

FOOTNOTES

1. Abdilatif Abdalla, 'The Visionary Neto', Africa Events; August 1988, Dar-es-Salam, p.32.

2. Ibid, p.32.

3. Ibid, p.32.

4. R. Selden, Contemporary Literary Theory

5. John Haynes, ed., Daiwa: Journal of Communication Issue 3 (English Dept., A.B.U., Zaria) p.59.

6. Mounah Khouri, Poetry and the Making of Modern Egypt: 1882 - 1922; (E.J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1971) p. 43.

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