

Ruthless Capitalism and Alienation and in Ben Okri's *Stars of the New Curfew*

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Abstract

Capitalism, Alienation and lamentation have been thematized in a plethora of African novels. However, Ben Okri has succinctly depicted the themes via careful characterization and narrative technique. That is, the themes of lamentation and alienation have been woven into the tapestry of the narrative such that a dichotomization and evaluation of the aforementioned themes amounts to the explication of the author's worldview and narrative technique. To this end, this paper explicates the concepts of alienation and lamentation and their manifestation in Okri's *Stars of a New Curfew* and concludes that Okri explicitly depicts the chaotic landscape and mindscape of the world of his short story and has graphically portrayed the decay and squalor which characterized life in Lagos in the 80s. Using the tenets of critical realism in the interpretation of the text, it is concluded that the writer succeeds in adumbrating the ills ravaging the slums of Lagos and Nigeria but fails to proffer lasting panacea to the conundrum.

Alienation, lamentation, capitalism, critical realism,

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Introduction

Lamentation is a theme which is as old as the African novel. Many scholars view Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* as the precursor to the African novel. The novel itself initiated the theme of lamentation. It captures the dissolution of traditional African society in the face of colonialism. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O's first novel: *Weep Not, Child* is also a novel of lamentation. It laments the wreckage that characterized the contact between Africa and the West. Two strains of weeping can be perceived from these novels of lamentation: the writers bemoan the loss of traditional societies and cultures to the invading imperialist on one hand and the characters lament the state of things in a new dispensation on the other hand. Chinyere Nwahunanya in his paper: "The Lachrymal Consciousness in the Literature of the Delta: Its Implication for Conflict Resolution" observes that:

As a primary legacy from imperialism and colonialism, protest literature has been a feature of African literature from the beginning. African protest literature started as a lament for a fallen, prelapsarian world couched in a language that reminds Africans where the rain began to beat them....Protest literature....arises when the socio-political conditions in a particular community are found to be oppressive by certain members of that community, when a people's welfare has been compromised, and when the prevailing conditions are inimical to the meaningful socio-economic and political growth of the people. (37)

The tradition of lamentation as authenticated by Nwahunanya is a vestige of colonialism. However, the prevailing socio-political condition of a given society warrants lamentation if it is on the negative side. Thus, lamentation could be seen as mourning or weeping. It is the expression of grief or sorrow or the expression of anger and annoyance. Alienation on the other hand is the feeling of being cut off, isolated, or excluded from the evolution of society. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels have scholarly investigated into the nature of alienation in their investigation on capitalism.

The collapse of feudalism gave way to the emergence of bourgeois capitalism. George Sabin and Thomas Thorson observed in *A History of Political Theory* see capitalism

As an institution that had produced and was continually enlarging a class of men who must live wholly from wages and who were therefore related to their employers only by a cash-nexus. Their power to work is a commodity, the only economically valuable commodity they have; which must be sold in a competitive market. (682)

Capitalism's emergence in Europe led to the dichotomization of society into classes. Albeit the classification started in the feudal world, it suffices to say that the dichotomization of people into classes which is defined by the "ownership of the means of production and motivated chiefly by the necessity of creating profit" (683) is a creation of capitalism.

The start itself is a creation of capitalism. Aja Akpuru in his *Theory and Practice of Marxism in a World in Transition* observes that the interpretation of history in Marx's purview is the interpretation of class struggle. The state emerges as a reaction to class struggle and moderates between the warring classes. He observes that

In order that these opposites antagonistic classes might not consume themselves and even society in a fruitless struggle, it became necessary to have a power seemingly above society to create order by mediating the opposing classes. (37 – 38)

The state from the above exists as an extension of bourgeois world to ensure the subjugation and domination of the peasantry and the proletariat. The domination of the subaltern classes is done via strings of ideas manufactured by the ruling bourgeois class to maintain its hegemony. This domination, exploitation, and oppression of the proletariat by the dominant class lead to the political and economic alienation of the subaltern classes.

Karl Marx's interpretation of alienation is done from the economic and sociological perspectives. The rise of industrialization supplanted human labour with machines, thus, division of labour led to the segmentation of the working force and the alienation of the proletariat from wealth generated from capitalist firms. The wealth generated by the sweat of the peasantry and proletariat is masked away from them by a layer of bureaucracies and a cumbersome commercial structure. Thus, products generated by a group of technocrats are taken from them and handed over to marketers who toil from dusk to dawn selling and marketing the products to the end users. The profit generated is channeled back to the capitalist who is impotent in the actual generation and marketing of products and services. Out of the wealth generated, peanuts are handed over to the workers as wages while the capitalists go home with the chunk of the wealth generated.

The living of condition of the peasantry and the proletariat in a capitalist setting is by no measure palatable as the capitalists' major drive is the accumulation of wealth through any means available. The state official who are to control the treasury and law and order and to distribute the wealth of the state also concentrate on looting and plundering the wealth of the nation to the detriment of the ruled. Thus, the alienation of the people from politics and political processes and from the wealth and economy of the state induce a sense of alienation in the people and this is expressed in a plethora of literary works.

The writer in a capitalist state functions as the voice of the voiceless and the eyes of the eyeless. In a society where oppression and exploitation of the subaltern classes is prominent and pronounced, most often, writers, especially those hampering after Marxist or leftist aesthetics pull the weights behind the oppressed class and helped in the class struggle. Chinyere Nwahunanya in an introduction to *From Doom to Boom: Protest and Conflict in the Literature of the Niger Delta*, observes succinctly that: "The pen is often regarded as a tool for incitement, used to instigate reactionary attitudes aimed at pulling down governments." (xix)

Capitalism in Stars of the New Curfew

Ben Okri is not primarily concerned with pointing out "the failings of governments, or corruption and other social vices" (xix) but exposes the sources of the plight of the people, and the source is capitalism. He exposes "the machinations of the Nigerian capitalist bourgeoisie whose greed for primitive accumulation reproduced millions of rural and urban poor." (Darah 13).

G. G. Darah in a paper titled "Revolutionary Pressures in Niger Delta Literatures" surmises the historiography of Ben Okri's literary life in the following words:

Ben okri's eleven books of fiction, two of essays and two collections of poetry offer a rich mine of knowledge and experience about the embattled life of the Niger Delta. His *The Famished Road* (1991) won the prestigious Booker Prize of that year. The title

itself proclaims the dilemmas of a people famished but determined in their struggle to have fulfilled life in a hostile environment of poverty and disillusionment. Notwithstanding the density of his mythopoetic diction which reaches its most challenging form in his *Starbook: A Magical Tale of Love and Regeneration* (2007) Okri compels our admiration primarily because his works celebrate humanity in its relentless quest for freedom and rebirth. (14)

Darah has succeeded in capturing aptly the thematic thrust of most of Okri's works in the citation above. In *Stars of the New Curfew*, the drive for survival in a harsh socio-economic condition makes the central character to begin experimenting means by which wealth could be generated. The central character Arthur is the centre of attraction in the story. He attended primary school and after graduation, there is no job awaiting workers or labourers of his cadre. So, he decides making a living "byselling rather dubious locally made medicines at various markets and on the molue buses that career all over Lagos" (83). The medicines he sells to the disease populace of the Lagos underworld have not been used by the seller: "I did not believe in the medicines and most certainly did not use them myself" (83). He thus, makes a living by selling what he doesn't use. Therefore, the medicines, instead of curing the people of their already complex mental and health conditions, compounded their health and generated a myriad of other health conditions.

The society has no place for him and his kind, so, he begins selling the fake drugs "with a special vengeance" (84). Arthur works for a variety of fake medical companies and contemplates setting up his own production plant at home: "I began to contemplate opening my own business, manufacturing my own medicines at home, and keeping the profits for myself." (86) A cursory look into the motive of Arthur reveals that the motivation behind his the primitive accumulation of wealth. He has been selling drugs for other companies and the monies go into the pockets of the local capitalists, thus, he aspires having his own company where he will keep the "profit" to himself.

Profit generation is portrayed as a form of rat-race in the story where the capitalists and their foreign intelligentsia device mean of exploiting the masses by capitalizing of their fears and insecurities. Most of the victims of his social vengeance are the wretched of the earth. He sells medicines for "ringworm, yellow fever, malaria" (87). He discovers that "The suffers were all poor. What stunned me however was that I had been selling fake ringworm medicines which actually multiplied ringworm. (87).

The most ruthless of these capitalists is the founder of CURES UNLIMITED situated "in a patch of land between the Ajegunle ghetto and the Apapa suburbs" (89). In the spirit of ruthless capitalism, Arthur describes his boss as a "man of our time. He understood the spirit of the city business." (90) His boss has little or no knowledge in pharmacy or pharmaceuticals. However, "He began from nothing. He too had patent medicines and graduated to manufacturing new tablets for headaches by mixing existing ones in the business." (90). The CEO of CURES UNLIMITED manufactures a drug called koboko and on the label, it is inscribed that it cures: "ringworm, eczema, stomach upset, malaria, yellow fever, headache pimples, it preserves youth, increased sexual virility, and provided continuous energy through the hot and bustling Lagos days. It was an all-purpose drug..." (91).

The drug created by a team of Nigerian and Indian scientists which on the day of its presentation to the public and caused pandemonium and death is POWER-DRUG. The drug according to the leaflet in it has the power to cure virtually all ailments on earth. However, marijuana jell and other contraband substance were used in the manufacturing of the drug and this leads to intoxication and drunkenness and drowsiness in the end users. Many died as a result of the intake of the drug.

On the national level, the city of W. is a city ravaged and dichotomized into camps by the two powerful houses: The Odeh House and Assi House. These are powerful capitalists who made their wealth from unknown sources. They dominated the city, subdued it and bought the people with currencies thrown at them.

Ruthless Capitalism and Alienation in Stars of the New Curfew

The rise of materialistic philosophy: capitalism in Nigeria following the oil boom of 70s brought about the dichotomization of the Nigerian social and political hemispheres. The euphoria of independence

was cut shut in postcolonial Nigeria by “the discovery of the economic and political hollowness of independence. This discovery ushered in the age of disillusionment.” (Bamidele, 40)

Bribery and corruption, wanton looting and plundering of the wealth of the state were institutionalized in the postcolonial age and these prompted the lamentation of the Nigerian writers. Two things facilitated the sense of disillusionment and alienation: bad governance/capitalism and neocolonialism. The feeling of alienation caused Nigerian writers of the 70s to adopt socialist or radical worldview in their creative enterprises. This sentiment is authenticated by Bamidele when he says that

The socio-economic climate under which radicalism bloomed is that of a tradition of disillusionment caused by the monumental corruption....also, the cultural imperialist policy of our erstwhile colonial masters coupled with the disenchantment and disgust of the Nigerian people with the fruits of indolence (218- 19)

There are particular and noticeable instances and situations that called for the alienation of the hoi polloi and the subaltern class from the politics and economical processes of the Nigeria. Nigeria as a country was created by English capitalists without consulting the peoples of the land. Thus, after independence, a plethora of conflicts began to steer their head up which cumulatively constitute what could be termed Nigerian conundrum. Chinua Achebe in his book: *The Trouble with Nigeria* identified bad leadership as the bane of Nigeria’s backwardness. He further explicates the thesis expound in the aforementioned book in his last work; *There was a Country*. He traces the decline of Nigerian nationalism shortly after independence. To him, apart from “political corruption” amongst others, “power struggle among the ethnic groups,” (51) constitute the bane of Nigeria’s malaises.

Tribalism, religious extremism and the Niger Delta tragedy have been identified by many Nigerian writers and scholars as constituting the problem facing the contemporary Nigeria. Activists like Ken Saro Wiwa and the eight Ogonis lost their lives in the fight for a better life for the Niger Deltans. The oil wealth extracted from the region helps in the deterioration of the aquatic and environmental wellbeing of the Niger Delta. “The boiling anger of the people further increased by the day as the succeeding governments paid insignificant attention to the living conditions of the people of the region which has culminated into a series of crimes” (Chinaka, 28) and alienation of the people from the economy and the political processes.

Arthur lost his parents in the civil war that ravaged Nigeria from 1967 – 1970. He is socially and economically impotent since he is not affiliated to the bourgeois class or the ruling political class. His dejection is seen in his determination to hurt the society that has rejected him. However, he doled out his frustration on the members of his own class, the plebs, because the whole society is caught in a rat – race where everyman is after the jugulars of his neighbour. The importance placed on wealth makes it pertinent for all and sundry to seek for means by which their purses are replenished by any means or by the sweat of others. To this end, Arthur and his kind become parasites who although they are being fed upon by Nigerian and international capitalists, they also feed upon the plebs, the common herd by unleashing waves of terror upon them. The landscape and mindscape are caught in a web of nightmares. This is seen in the subheadings of the story. We have headings like: *The Nightmare of Salesmen, The Salesman of Nightmares, The Children of Curfew-Makers, Nightmare, the Preparation for Ritual, The manufacturers of Reality, The Crude Mythology of Survival*, etc.

Alienation is seen in the detachment of the people from politics as they are engaged in the struggle for survival. Arthur in a bid to survive hires some accomplices who give out fake testimonies to the efficacy of his fake drugs. He uses theatricalities to woo the interest of his victims to his drugs. However, his accomplices turned out to be pickpockets. The sick and the diseased who patronized him and other sellers of fake drugs are the plebs and the extremely deprived: “The sufferers were all poor” and the medicine sold to them “multiplied” (87) their plights and diseases. There are many fake drug companies that produce and sell fake drugs to the commoners. Arthur keeps changing “dubious companies” (87) who concentrate on stealing the little the masses have to “spend on feeding” (88).

To show how detached the characters are from society itself, it suffices to say that, aside from the fact that his parents died in the civil war, we know little or nothing about the background and history of the central character. He has no past and no future and the present he has been shrouded in hardship, adverse poverty and shady dealings. The society portrayed by the writer lacks law and order and above all the law enforcement agents are also victims of the jejune social system.

Women are among those caught in the web of exploitation. Their malnourished children become victims also and life turns miserable for both parents and children. The drugs they buy for their wades aggravate their plights and facilitate the lamentation of their parents. "The children were covered in welts so big and red, so obscene, that I couldn't possibly believe it was ringworm. It seemed more like ringsnake." (88) The people lack the resources to take their children to hospital, so they rely on the fake drug sellers for the healing of their children's diseases which have been caused by poverty and negligence.

A deep sense of detachment and hopelessness is recorded via the stream of consciousness. The novelist explores the psychic realms of the central character as well his mind. The sense of hopelessness in the characters is a reflection of their abandonment by the state and the division of society into classes. The upper class live in mansions, eat good food, and they are financially, socially, and politically secured. But the lower class lives in slums, eats from hand to mouth and is poverty-stricken. The gulf between social classes is wide however, within the lower class, the alienated one, there is a fierce battle raging between the emergent pro-capitalist elements that make use of their misfortune and that of others to amass ill-gotten wealth.

The wasteland where the hoi polloi inhabited is aptly captured in the story. It is noisome, dirty and plagued with diseases and sicknesses.

We got onto the first molue bus that came along. It was as crowded as ever. We were like refugees escaping from a bombed city. It was boiling hot on the bus and everyone sweated on everyone else. Children strapped to their mother's backs were crushed and they kept wailing. The passengers bore the overcrowding with bad-tempered noisiness. The bus stank of sweat and dried fish. It is impossible to escape the undernourishment of the children... The smell of excrement wafted in through the window and one of the passengers said we had just passed the area of the lagoon where they emptied some of the nightsoil of the city. (101)

The absence of social amenities and the drive to survive and to succeed necessitated the characters to manufacture means by which they can exploit members of their class. The drive to amass wealth alienated Arthur spiritually and morally which compounds his woes and throes. He becomes disillusioned, spiritually prodigal and lost and this caused him a lot of nightmares and traumas. His nightmares are reflections of the jejuneness of life under capitalism. In some instances, he sees himself being auctioned in a free market system.

Parts of my body were being sold off. When someone bought a part of me the auctioneer would bang on the table. Odeh bought my arms. Assi inspected my feet and finally acquired them. The Rastafarian bought my ears. Takwa bought my eyes, and Amukpe my mouth. The auctioneer opened the floor for offers on a certain part of my anatomy. I screamed. (123)

The core national capitalists and their international partners domicile in a region removed from the realm of the plebs. These are the auctioneers; they have auctioned the state to their Western friends and have turned their attention on the land and the people, devouring their strength and vitality. The looters and plunderers of the wealth of the country are from the four corners of the earth, therefore, their actions: exploitation of the subaltern class increases the woes of that class. The medicine they manufactured and sold are poisonous to the flesh and spirits of the people but source of wealth to them.

Everywhere I turned I saw children drinking medicines as they played on the roadsides..... I would see children clutching my bottles of medicines, dying on the roads. The smell of burning tar, and charred flesh, came from them, as if the medicines were acids that dissolved their insides, I saw children hallucinating and going mad in the forests. I saw bodies piled on the backs of trucks. Everywhere I went, regarded me with strange eyes. (92)

The strangeness of his nightmares are a function of the strangeness of his source of wealth. He is also a victim of the international capitalism as he feels himself detached from humanity, society and God. His wealth accrues from the death and ignorance of the poor and the wretched of the earth, thus his life become shallow and full of nightmares. Human life has been reduced to a commodity:

I would be in the corner of a nameless constellation, a lunar landscape where the dead sang and provided music. The stars in the sky were the objects of the auctioneer's block. One after another the stars were sold off. When a star is bought its light would go out. The singing would increase in sweetness. The auctioneers would sometimes be my boss - ... sometimes the auctioneer would be an old woman whom I had sold my medicines to on a molue bus. And other times the auctioneer would be a white man with a bent telescope. (92 – 93)

Natural and human resources have been ruthlessly exploited by both the bourgeois and the subaltern classes. The families of Odeh and Assi have been engaged in a fierce battle of supremacy and this is manifested in their desires to dominate, the economy and polity of W. city. They are intellectually handicapped but made their wealth through financing and godfathering of corrupt political chieftains and hijacking of the economy of the country. They compete in the display of immorality, affluence and influence and this is aggravated by the plebses who find joy in being thrilled by the displays.

If one of them imported a Citroen Special the other would import the same, but with more ostentatious gadgets... Women were often seduced from one household to the other. Wives were sometimes snatched. (116)

The military regime under the humanity of the people have been battered is seen as a curfew. Curfew is a season in which officially, people's movements are restricted and are advised to stay indoors. Here, the country is caught in the jaws of ruthless capitalists who force it to its knees and the people made shadows of all ideals they had prior to independence. The capitalists become "manufacturers of terror" (127). The manufacturers of terror include: "...powerful people, our politicians, our governors, who had their cults as a way of maintaining and spreading their influence" (127). These bourgeois politicians who pride themselves as public servants create false reality and "encircle themselves with dread" (127). These dreads manifest themselves in the hallucinations and torments of the psyche of Arthur who is the melting pot of the calamities bedeviling his generation. In his nightmares and hallucinations, he peers into the anatomy of capitalism and it is expressed in his deep sense of lost and spiritual bereavement.

When I look around she had disappeared. I began to hallucinate. I saw the secret of the town dancing in the street: young men with diseases that melted their faces, beautiful girls with snakes coming out of their ears. I saw skeleton dancing with fat women. I passed the town's graveyard and saw the dead rising and screaming for children. It seems as if the unleashing of ritual forces had released trapped spirits. Nightmares... (129)

The dissolution of communalism and other forms of socialism by the advent of capitalism displaces nature from its points of equilibrium. Capitalism came like a ruthless tsunami and washed away man's humanity, nature's livery and overhauled the sanctity of the family, nationhood and civility. The god of money is enthroned and worshipped. The exposition of the wiles of capitalism is expressed through the consciousness of Arthur:

Then I was a terrible flood-tide rolling down the street, as if a great dam had broken and the tarmac itself had become unleashed. Odeh's father, a crown of money on his head, sat on the crest of water, as if on an invisible barge. His scepter was of silver. His face stiffened, as if he were in an advanced stage of demonic possession. Servants, carrying his litter, shouted his praises around him. His cult members, wild and relentless, carried the trophies of the day's victories, the bodies and the spoils of the defeated. (130 – 31)

The victims of capitalism are the foot soldiers of the capitalists. They are the thugs, political assassins and demi-vampires. The victims are also parts of the grand design of capitalism. The church is also entangled in the webs of exploitation as this is registered in one of the nightmares of Arthur:

The nightmare became so unbearable that it was necessary to do something about them. I went to the Celestial Church near where I lived and I had the priest pray over me; but the nightmares merely went on to include the priests, the members of the congregation, and biblical personages amongst the auctioneers. (95)

Arthur leaves Lagos city after selling a multi-purpose drug: power-drug, which in his presence caused the death of seven people:

I was responsible for the accident and the deaths of seven people. As I left the city I carried with me not only the world of jostling market-women, teeming undernourished children, the short tempered unemployed, the brusque faces of pickpockets...(109)

He becomes a ghost lost in his nightmares. But amidst the nightmares and *daymares* bedeviling him, the capitalists keep manufacturing “perfect money-making medicines” (97) and “machine for making money” (94). To survive in Lagos and W. city, and the world under the grips of capitalism, therefore, “the secret was to join the strongest side and pour your blood into the basin,” this is because, “the forces that rule the country were a kind impossible to imagine.” (134). The bourgeois and political classes rule and amass wealth by the use of “fear” (134) and when they grow old, they replace themselves with their children who continue the hegemony of oppression and exploitation: “New stars are growing every day. They grow from the same powers, the same rituals.” (134).

The subaltern class is alienated from the state and this necessitated their lamentation: “We were the garbage carried away on the waves of the mud. The rain brushed us against one another, crowded us past the cemetery, past the market place and the cinema.” (140) The class of the exploited takes whatever is thrown at it. Odeh’s father and Assi’s in the competition to be crowned by the oppressed the most influential in the city of W., Odeh’s father bought a new “Rolls Royce” and he “stored money” (137) in a fridge to cool off while the diseased class, “...Market women from the creeks of the dark rivers, the clerks from remote bureaucracies deep in the delta villages...were all hungry...” (136). Odeh’s acolytes open the fridge “and stack of notes were unloosened from their bindings and thrown at the crowd.” (138). The money thrown at them is the one stolen from them by the capitalists and their cronies. They bare their fangs at each other in a bid to fetch crumbs of notes thrown at them:

We fought, we climbed on one another, and the crowd became an area of war. We sat upon one another in our attempt to collect enough money... (138)

Assi’s father came with a helicopter: “the helicopter hovered over us. Then a door opened and bags of coins were emptied over us” (138) This bizarre display of affluence indicates the crudity of capitalism, a system where a few lord it over the teeming population of the wretched of the earth. The coins thrown from the helicopter fall on the people “hurting” (138) them and they hurt each other in attempts to gather more money. However, the whole adventure was a fraud.

Everywhere we went that night we saw that the naira notes had fallen over the graves of the dead, over market stalls, on the huts of the poor, on stationary cars, on heaps of garbages. It was only when I began to pick up the notes on my way to the hotel that I realized we had been the victims of a cruel prank. When I turned the notes, wet in my hands, the ink began to run. Then I that one side of the currencies was authentic, but the other side washed away and became blank. We had been fighting for joke currencies. (140)

In the face of economic meltdown, starvation, exploitation of subaltern class by the bourgeois and political classes, the spirits of the characters in the story have been crushed, and pummeled into submission, thus lack revolutionary impulses to overhaul the status quo. The sociopolitical and economic condition of the people remains as it was without change. The writer graphically portrays the horrendous condition of the plebes, he identifies the malady distressing the society, we see Arthur

moving from a naive exploiter to a man fully conscious of the forces of national and local exploitation which unleashed terror upon society as a function of capitalism.

Then, slowly, I began to tease out an understanding of my nightmares. I had to choose if I wanted to be on the block or a buyer, to be protected by the power or to be naked, to laugh or to weep. There are few consolations for an honest man, and no one is really sure if this isn't the only chance a poor man has on this planet (143)

City of W. where Arthur runs to in a bid to find shelter for his Lagos-battered soul becomes more cannibalistic than the Lagos atmosphere. His nightmares haunt him the more, so he returns to Lagos, a jobless prodigal. He returns to his former boss, and the boss explains to him the content of the famous Power-Drug: "one of our chemists... mistakenly put too much marijuana oil, chloroform, and alcohol into the drug" (142). Arthur returns to his former boss, at this juncture, the drug Power drug has created a plethora of other cataclysmic health conditions; it becomes imperative for his Boss to start manufacturing other drugs that will clear the mess the existing drugs have caused.

My boss began to contemplate making medicines to cure the problems that POWER-DRUG created. Where will it end? Like most of our leaders, he creates a problem, then creates another problem to deal with the first one – on and on, endlessly fertile, always creatively spiraling to greater chaos. (143)

Nightmare is the sense of hopelessness that plagued the psyche of the conscious masses. This is because the people are aware that "African leaders [have] ignored the sufferings of their own people. [...] Heads of States had illegally enriched themselves and their supporters while the people died for lack of basic amenities." (104) The people, alienated from the state and its economy lack the revolutionary force to displace the existing sociopolitical and economic condition of the state. Arthur who is the embodiment of the plight of the masses, the consciousness of the oppressed ends gives up hope of transformation or revolution when he decides to work for his former boss. He is concerned with the present and has not clear-cut vision of the future. To this end, he gets himself buried deeper in the abyss of capitalism and capitalists as he returns to them to be used as a tool for the exploitation and oppression and domination of the subaltern class. Instead of thinking of changing the status quo, Arthur becomes a drunk, and a weapon of mass destruction in the hands of his former boss.

And it was with some sadness that I would turn in the opposite direction and head for the nearest bar. I would order large calabash of palm-wine and drink to the difficulties of our days. I would drink to the young man who threw himself into the lagoon blaming his suicide on the government. It was the beginning of the rainy season. My own nightmares have ceased. But I had begun to see our lives as a bit of a nightmare. I think I prefer my former condition. (143)

Conclusion

Colonialism is a product of Western capitalism. Capitalist powers in search of new markets and natural resources divided Africa between them, conquered it and subdued it. However, when they were being expunged, they left behind their stooges who now help them in the political and economic colonization of Africa. African independence is a "mere treacherous exchange of batons between the outgoing masters and his few trusted heirs" (Bamidele 68). The few heirs have allowed the former access to the well of Africa which is being siphoned by the foreign and indigenous collaborators.

In *Stars of the New Curfew*, Ben Okri has successfully captured the plight of the peasants and the proletariat, and the irregularities which characterized the postcolonial phase of Nigeria as it is being ravaged by neocolonialists. Writers like Ngugi Wa Thing'O, Festus Iyayi, Niyi Osundare Sembene Ousmane, writing actively in this historical phase of Africa hamper after a socialist revolution where the neocolonialists and all agents of internal and external capitalists would be wiped out ushering in the African nirvana. The created socialist realist novels where the proletariat is empowered with a view to

seizing the apparatuses of the state, destroying the bourgeois class and building a new society on the principles of equality of man, justice, fairness, and equity.

Okri succinctly captures the traumatic experiences of the subaltern classes under capitalism, adumbrated the ills ravaging them but fails to proffer lasting panaceas. Thus, the story fits into critical realist form. However, it suffices to conclude by saying that, Okri builds a gigantic edifice but fails to cap it up with a magnificent roof. In other words, he killed a snake but failed to cut off its head. The plunging of Arthur into further hopelessness and his consolation in alcohol will never bring to Nigeria the needed change. The writer endorses the existing social order when the story ends without the characters fighting against the forces holding them down and this is more cataclysmic than the forces of capitalism that have ravaged and still ravages the humanity, wealth and glory of Nigeria, making the people aliens to the state.

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