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REVIEW ARTICLE

VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN POLITICAL GOVERNANCE IN ALOBWED' EPIE'S THE DEATH CERTIFICATE AND GORGUI DIENG'S A LEAP OUT OF THE DARK

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ABSTRACT

While scrutinizing African political governance issue, it gives the feeling to be in an eternal nightmare in which African populations have no possibility to escape from political violence and social inequality. Indeed, after African countries' independences, violence and social inequality have soared up in the political arena. This article aims at revealing the issue of political deviance in Africa in order to awake Africans to put an end to it. In Alobwed' Epie's *The Death Certificate* and Gorgui Dieng's *A Leap out of the Dark*, the two authors criticize political mismanagement. The results of this research paper are displayed in two points. First, the division of African social organisation as a direct negative consequence of bad governance and then the embezzlement or their countries' wealth by politicians, two main obstacles to Africa's economic, political and social take off. Some literary theories such as Post-colonialism, Narratology, socio-criticism and New Historicism help to scrutinize the specific aspects of the article.

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INTRODUCTION

Political governance in Africa especially in African countries has turned critical these years. It has become a burning topicality because of the daily information, national and international media carry out. This research work deals with some important terms such as "violence" and "inequality" which need to be conceptualized for a better understanding. In fact, political violence is the deliberate use of power and force to achieve political goals. As outlined by the World Health Organization (2002), "political violence is characterized by both physical and psychological acts aimed at injuring or intimidating populations" (WHO 07). So, the objective of a political power by using violence is to set fear among the populations. Examples of act of violence include "shootings or aerial bombardment; detentions; arrests and torture; and home demolitions" as written (Basoglu et al 32) in "Psychiatric and Cognitive Effects of War in Former Yugoslavia" (2005). Broadly speaking, political violence includes insurgency, terrorism, rebellion, revolution, rioting and civil war. All these social matters are the consequences of some political decisions and unequal sharing of countries' resources. We can understand by political inequality, any political decision or matter that subsequently affects the social cohesion of citizens in a country. According to Joshua Kjerulf Durbrow in "Political Inequality is International, Interdisciplinary, and Intersectional" (2015),

"political inequality refers to the unequal influence over decisions made by political bodies and unequal outcomes of those decisions. Political inequality is a subtype of power inequality, visible within the political structures". Dubrow's definition rather stresses decisions making by political bodies as the basic of any political problem. This research work is carried out in the context of African political governance after the independence. Indeed, in some African countries, political governance after the independence gaining is accentuated by great violence due to inequitable sharing of countries' wealth. Consequently, resurgence of violence is noticed in many African countries. That accounts for the choice to carry out this research work. However, a great number of scholars have published researches on "violence and social inequality". They have pointed out how political violence inevitably hinders economic development and social progress in political governance. Rothstein in his article "Corruption, Social trust, and inequality in international perspective" (2011), has shown how low-governance quality has negative effects on societies. Rothstein lets understand the unequal sharing of countries' wealth between political leaders and their population. Another scholar like Gudrun in the International Area Studies Review (IASR) has published relevant results about political violence and inequality through his article entitled: "Inequality and political violence: A review of the literature" (2013). The research work aims at sensitizing Africans about political issues especially, violence and inequality in political governance.

It points out how some social facts have turned rampant in many African countries. It has also the objective to unveil political abuse on African countries' resources sharing. Definitely, the actual reason which has led to the present study is the worrying increase of social inequalities in African societies these years and how politicians resort to violence to make citizens reluctant in case of popular demonstrations. In order to reach the goal of this research work, the research design is descriptive and involves qualitative method. The research takes into account African countries. Gorgui and Alobwed's fictional works have adequately been targeted in order to shed light on all the shortcomings in political governance in African countries. The work analyses the unfair sharing of African countries' resources and then discuss the use of violence by politicians as a deterrent means to make populations reluctant.

Inequitable Sharing of African Countries' Resources: This part of the research work focuses more on the unfair sharing of African wealth and sheds light on African politicians' attitudes towards their population. Indeed, the very first African intellectuals who have claimed to be so much in a hurry to develop their countries have instantly turned their respective countries' resources into their advantages. This accounts for writers' concerns to redress these political cheating and social injustice. It is exactly the objective of Gorgui Dieng and Alobwed' Epie in their respective work A Leap out of the Dark (2004) and The Death Certificate (2004). African politicians use their position to overuse their countries' wealth to the detriment of the poor grassroots Politicians are the only ones who deserve better living conditions whereas their people fall under the unbearable weight of poverty. As a fictional work, A Leap out of the Dark helps to portray African fictional society. Moodu the protagonist of the narrative has appeared critical to President Fojo's government. His decision to put an end to Fojo's unfair political management is due to his disappointment about the political party in office. After Moodu has noticed President Fojo's wrongdoings, that has created shocking emotions on him as the narrator explains:

But if the larger sections of the community saw nothing wrong about it the situation had produced enormous frustration amongst some intellectuals. How could someone, who has spent five long years at university, accept to live a harder life than any other one with only a lower secondary school degree, especially when they share the same employer? And the hardest pill of all for those intellectuals to swallow was the blatant open display of all the ill-gotten gains of the nouveaux riches: bran-new cars, posh houses in posh residential areas, holiday homes in France, Spain, Britain, and Florida, expensive garments, won by themselves and their sophisticated wives and children. No same person would accept such a humiliation and injustice; that is to say, the reign of brainless, of the do-nothing.... (...) openly encouraged the situation (Dieng 40).

This quotation of the omniscient narrator appears humiliating and frustrating for Moodu who is regarded as a genuine intellectual. A careful examination of the quotation reveals that Kensegan political management is not based on equal sharing of the country's wealth. In fact, politicians have a perfect control of their countries' wealth with their respective families. Through the above quotation, a contrastive living condition is portrayed to amplify the huge gap that exists among the citizens of the country. At the beginning of the story, precisely in the very first chapter, the narrative has sounded much critical about Moodu. In fact, Moodu's wife Faatu has found their living condition unbearable due to the low income of her husband. The truth revealed by Faatu about their living condition has psychologically shocked Moodu. His social conditions have made him worthless as his wife always says. Faatu verbally attacks her husband insinuating that he is useless: "You are a man like the others, aren't you? Are their dangling things heavier than yours? (...). I have saved nearly half a million francs with a building society; we will soon have a house of our own, but we have to be more patient", (Dieng 05). It comes out from this passage that Faatu is upset by their living conditions and has become rude to her husband who has no possibility to escape from Faatu's criticism. In other words, she has

mercilessly exposed her husband's financial incapacity to have a house of his own. Regarding Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Born* (1968), there is a perfect similarity between Faatu and Oyo the Man's wife. As a matter of fact, the latter advises her husband to take bribe in order to better their living conditions. Oyo is very fond of money and luxurious things. For her, the true salvation is the fact of possessing: "blinding gleam of beautiful new houses and the shine of powerful new Mercedes cars. It is also the scent of expensive perfumes and the mass of new wigs" (Armah 56) as her husband bitterly remarks. However, politicians live in abundance. They have more than they need. To justify this unfair social inequality, the narrator bitterly sheds light on the dishonest Kensegan politicians:

The teachers, actually the sour intellectuals, who had had no opportunity to reach for the advantages their own fellow civil servants enjoyed, resorted to harsh criticism. Well, that was how people generally saw it (...) but also keeping the superfluous amount of money away from the country into Swiss banks (Dieng 40).

Quite understandably, politicians have monopolized the country's wealth while their countrymen face difficulties in their daily life. As if this fact were not sufficient, Moodu, the protagonist's home village has faced a disastrous natural disaster which obliges the surrounding villagers to feed on leaves. The narrator pathetically points out: "(...) Uncle Abdu gave Moodu all the devastating details about the tragic situation prevailing in Ngemeyaayjama and in all the neighboring villages of Séesu, Paaraar, Jamaytat, Xalaléen, Njéensirax, Ndukura, etc. Some families had already resorted to feeding on wild leaves" (Dieng 135). The passage explains absence of political will to improve the population's living conditions. Through the examining of the quotation above, Fojo's government has failed their political duty. On the contrary, their long-lasting advantages by holding the power forever has provoked serious health degradation in almost all the surrounding villages in Moodu's region. The lack of social infrastructures is visibly noticed. Some remote villages do not have some vital social infrastructures such as "water", "school", "dispensary", "market" which are essential for them. The need of those elements is claimed by Moodu. His voice appears more critical and convincing: "Now it is the other way round; they have everything a modern town has: a school, running water, a dispensary and an ambulance, a post-office, (...) those people have wrenched their share" (Dieng 91). All these fundamental elements cited above are unquestionably important for villagers in their daily life. In Anthills of the Savannah (1987), Achebe has raised exactly the same issue of water as populations' existential need. In fact, the people of Abazon have been prevented from the water bore-holes because they have said no to President Sam's plan of ruling Kangan forever. The implementation of President Sam's decision has severe effects on the people of Abazon as declares one of the villagers: "I don't know whether the people we have come to see will listen to our cry for water or not. Sometimes ago we were told that the Big Chief himself was planning to visit our villages and see our suffering" (Achebe 127). While political leaders themselves have their hands laid on the wealth of their respective countries, their fellow citizens starve of food and water.

Surprisingly, only politicians have the privilege to build their personal roads they can use in order not to have their cars damaged. Taking into account this problem raised by Alobwed' Epie in his novel, many African countries face the same problem. Occasionally, when Ndjock has gone to Meka's house during his burial, he has been confused and does not know the road leading to the mortuary house. In fact, the road is not tarred and is impracticable. But, Mongo Meka has resurfaced a small part of the road leading to his living place. One of the main characters named Mula opines: "This is not Mongo's road. Only the road leading to his house from the main road is re-surfaced. That is it, and you should have known that in a government that serves individuals rather the public, only private roads are re-surfaced for private occasions made national" (Epie 108). While politicians peacefully enjoy public properties due to their political position, citizens face critical situations. The taxi driver who has brought the

four protagonists to Mongo's burial has had his taxi nearly broken down because of the awful state of the road. In fact, the public road used by the population in the inner city is not surfaced. While witnessing such a scene, Mula the narrator-character has found the case unbearable. He has criticized the scene in a way that can draw Dande's political leaders' attention:

(...) The vehicle took a sudden noise-dive into a crater. The absent-minded driver, throwing venomous glances at me took the full force of the jolt and in that panic, accelerated hard. The vehicle growled, leaped and bashed its badly rusted bumper against the opposite 90% sharp vertical embankment of the crater. It rolled backward with a growl and settled in the pothole like a duck. "Is this a road in the capital city of an oil producing country?" (Epie 108).

While exploring the quotation, readers understand that Dande's political party in office has failed its objective by leaving the population in unfair living conditions. While, it is clear that lowquality government institutions have tremendous negative effects on the health and wealth of societies, the criteria for good governance remain far from clear. Obviously, when the quality of governance is not appropriate to the need of the population, it cannot but lead to catastrophic results on citizens. Regarding A Leap out of the Dark, a similar case is perceptible. As a matter of fact, when it happens to receive donations from European countries, politicians prefer to keep it and watch the grassroots dying of hunger. In the story, it has been the role of Moodu, the protagonist, to claim for good governance. Moodu has tried hard to make his villagers understand that their own political leaders are guilty of the populations' misfortune. He brandishes arguments to convince his villagers as the omniscient narrator explains: "Instead they deposited every single penny that landed on their callous hand in Swiss Bank and keep asking for more money. Do you know that it is the same politicians who starved their own people to death who are still in power?" (Dieng 101). This revelation is nothing but evil practices adopted by politicians to create economic crises in their countries. Their love for money and power has no limit. While analyzing politicians' love for money and power from A Leap out of the Dark, a parallel can be drawn between Koomson and Estella on the one hand and the population on the other. Both Koomson and his wife give big interests to political power and money. For them, acquiring all those things gives them power over the poor grassroots.

In the different novels under study in this research work, many characters have shown their discontent towards the unfair sharing of African countries' resources. The four protagonists in The Death Certificate namely, Ndjock, Mussa, Mula and Nchinda have strongly protested against the unethical behaviour of Mongo Meka, one of the major characters in the story. As the treasurer of the Dande's country, Meka has provoked an economic crisis in the country by embezzling the country's money and saving it in a bank account abroad. This situation has put the country in an economic crisis. The social aspect of the country has become rather worrying because some civil servants like teachers cannot get their wages. They have many times tried in vain. Unfortunately, all the financial institutions have been deprived by politicians. Talking about the vulnerability of African financial institutions, Koomson's declaration is regarded as one of the causes leading to economic crisis. In a conversation about a fishing boat's project, the latter has said: "After all, the commercial bank is ours" (Armah 136). It emerges from Koomson's words that he is ready for any political malpractice to get money. In The Death Certificate, after the treasury and some national banks have been deprived by dishonest politicians, consequences have systematically followed. For example, Ndjock has stayed in a line by expecting to get his uncle's wage; he feels desperate and says: "They pay a few people and close, saying the money is finished. They talk of world economic crisis and all bullshit. These are poor primary school teachers whose salaries are not up to 80,000 Frs. They try all the treasuries in the Provinces and finally come here and are told the same old story" (Epie 134).

In the trend of idea, the population of Dande seriously needs medical cares, that is to say, the building of medical centres to take care of the population. Oddly enough, it comes into sight that African politicians prefer to use their ill-gotten wealth to build beautiful houses abroad but not in their own countries for their countrymen. Through their investigations, the four major characters have discovered that the Treasurer Mongo Meka has used their country's wealth to run his businesses abroad. A minor character exalts Mongo's wealth: "Money? Mongo was money. He had houses all over; in France, in Britain, in America. See here, he lived in his house. He had transport vehicles; that gave him money" (Epie 37). This passage clearly shows that politicians deprive their country's financial institutions. While Dande's population is badly in need of medical care and some succumb because of the great absence of it, politicians insensitively embezzle money for their personal objectives. It is important to raise this aspect of African governance today because it has unbelievably become gangrenous all over the black continent. Obviously, when money is not ready to take care of one's health, it cannot but lead to malnutrition as it is mentioned in A Leap out of Dark with Moodu's wife Faatu. The narrator has desperately shed light on the difficult living conditions in which Moodu's family is embedded. The narrator portrays the physical state of Faatu as a women affected by miserable living conditions due to the government's unrealistic development project.

That day, when Uncle Abdu arrived at Moodu's, the first thing his nephew's wife Faatu did was to rush to a nearby bread-shop to buy him CFA 50 loaf bread. She was dazed at the color of his skin, which had turned from brown to yellowish through malnutrition. He thanked Faatu profusely when she brought him the bread and milk, but ate just enough to stay alive. He argued that he could not eat to his fill while his household was near death from hunger hundreds of miles away (Dieng 132).

Taking into account the significant quotation above, one can clearly understand that a better social life depends on the quality of governance adopted by political leaders. In Gorgui Dieng's creative work, politicians' wrongdoings have unpleasant effects on the population's daily life. In this passage quoted; the narrative voice points out the physical aspect of Faatu's suffering. In fact, some households where almost all the financial tasks are the charges of the husband; it is fair to witness the effect of low income. Regarding Moodu's profession which is supposed to be well paid, it is purely a utopia. He cannot make both ends meet. In fact, President Fojo's government has no political project to improve civil servants' condition and that has negatively impacted every household in the country. The monthly visit paid by Moodu to his villagers has finally revealed the critical aspect of his enterprise to make them leap out of the dark political moment in Kensega. As a matter of fact, the narrator has depicted the appalling condition that has affected Moodu's people: "(...) despite the desperate poverty that afflicted every family in his home village. Moodu was surrounded by a multitude of bowls full of cere or laaxa at meal times. Each compound managed to send him his due share. The expected quality was not there" (Dieng 76). The quotation reveals a problem of malnutrition caused by politicians' unfair management of the power. In fact, while the grassroots is starving, politicians in high positions and with their amazing wages live a good life. It is exactly what Armah denounces while portraying Koomson's house in the Residential area on the one hand and the one of the fisherman on the other hand. In fact, there is a stark contrast between Koomson's quality of life and the one of the fisherman and it is the results in a country when politicians unlawful serve themselves than serving their populations.

Violence: A deterrent means to make populations reluctant: It is a common fact that the steps of African countries political freedom achievement have obliged some Africans to go through violence. The postcolonial period has placed Africans in a position of owner of their destiny. Realizing that their freedom depends on their capacity to wrench it from European powers; many African States have more or less resorted to violence. One can exactly discover this relationship between the current African political leaders and their populations.

This article stresses on the method of governance such as violence as a deterrent mean to dissuade people to go through popular demonstrations. In African fiction, literature has portrayed a number of such cases that place African politics and democracy in great doubt. The narrative books relate about a few fictional characters with their opinions on African governance. Considering the hard way President Fojo has ruled his people, it cannot but lead to citizens' anger. Inevitably, to prevent the population and some dissident voices that can be a real hindrance to his unfair ruling, Fojo merely resorts to military forces. Casting an overall look over the whole African continent, the use of military forces against civilians has become the common strategy for political leaders to make their people reluctant. For instance, when analyzing Gorgui Dieng's A Leap out of the Dark, military forces have been ordered by Fojo to frighten and traumatize civilians. Their simple presence in streets creates panic among the defenseless population. In this regard, a fearful scene is described by the narrator:

At this juncture, a police lorry screeched to a halt in front of Moodu's house, raising clouds of dust over everything and everybody. Twenty stalwarts, armed to the teeth, shot out of it and rushed toward the party under the *nin* tree. Immediately, the boys go to their feet and, in the twinkling of an eye, each of them was in possession of a brand-new automatic weapon (Dieng181).

This quotation clarifies well the catastrophic political situations some African countries are confronted to. Definitely, it comes into sight that, the use of violence becomes a common practice for African's politicians. To deeply scrutinize the problem of violence in political governance, it is compulsory to search for the causes of such horrible practices that have gained ground in almost all African countries. Firstly, it is paramount to underline the political leaders' bad will to hold the power forever. They reject all political alternatives for better political governance. That perfectly illustrates the narrator's words in A Leap out of The Dark (2004): "Though almost every citizen acknowledged that the situation in the country was extremely bad, the same party, PNP, had been in power since Uhuru, thirty years before. The PNP had always found ways and means at every election to be returned 'by the masses', as the party proudly boasted" (Dieng 131). Politicians do not mind whether there are better hands to take over the power and improve the poor grassroots' condition. Staying in office for more than two terms is a violation of the country's constitution. It is there the opportunity for unscrupulous politicians to organize elections that they know they will win. The same example has been carried out in the *New Internationalist¹* (1990), a British Newspaper which has stressed African political leaders' voracity and their excessive love for power and money: "Black Africa has more dictatorships (...) since 1957 only six out of 153 African heads of state have relinquished power voluntarily. Most of the rest were a disgraceful lot who looted and mismanaged their economies until someone booted them out of office or shot them in the head" (NI 9). Quite understandably, any country in which the ruling party does not use dialogue, national sitting and communication to try and solve political problems, it is a big political failure for the nation. The story in the novel under study has shown how the absence of those crucial elements in the management of a country is a political regression. Furthermore, becoming aware of the state of emergency about the political situation in his country, Moodu has decided to write to the president through his daily The New Beginning because of the violence that is expending in the country.

You have ruled the country for decades with shameless lies and now you are resorting to violence. But note: there is no greater violence than the violence in the hand of the people! And there will be no escaping for you. Go with the tide; or you will be gone with it! Slavery came left; colonization came and left; dictatorship will also leave, and make way for African democracy (Dieng 163). This message addressed to President Fojo has turned the situation rather catastrophic than ever. It has been a great occasion of the party in office to chase Moodu and assassinate him. For the ruling party, Moodu is critical vis-à-vis Fojo's political management and must be arrested. Moreover, when another private newspaper has incautiously published the political realities concerning President Fojo's unfair management of the country's resources, it has unfortunately led to a violent reaction of Fojo. On the spot, military attacks have been launched against the independent newspaper in Kaada city.

The authorities did not lose time in fighting back: numerous battalions of troops were deployed throughout the capital city with the other to seize all unsold copies of the day's newspapers. But they had actually stirred the world for nothing. More than 80 per cent of the total number of copies printed had been wrenched from newspaper boys before 10 p.m. At mid-day, certainly because their first attempt had been a sheer failure: the headquarters of all six newspapers were stormed, their valuable and hard-earned equipment destroyed or stolen, and all the personnel, including the editor, found on the premises, were arrested. The aim was to cut the people off their only unfailing sources of information (Dieng 195).

By scrutinizing the above quotation, the same political masquerade of African populations by European colonizers during the colonial period has been perpetrated. In this context, African political leaders appear as the centre of those massive criminalities. The most concerned are the presidents who have been ruling their countries as their private properties. This creates great discount among the civilians. But they are most of the time reluctant in their enterprise to go against the ruling party. This is due to the presence of military forces in every corner of the country. In *A Leap out of the Dark*, when all the negotiations have failed, it comes to the military forces to use violence to satisfy their President Fojo. While seeking for Moodu, they realize the serious complicity that exists between the population and that gives them no opportunity to lay their hands on him. They merely resort to violence forcing them to state the truth. The narrator explains:

As his men hesitated, fumbling with their triggers, the police chief, without any warning, emptied his gun into the crowd. An elderly woman with a one-month-old baby on her back, a young girl of twenty and two boys of her age fell to the ground dead and a score of other people were badly wounded. This atrocity maddened the crowd further, strengthening their determination, and fierce fighting broke out between the policemen and the civilians (Dieng 185).

The quotation describes a horrible scene of violence perpetrated by the power of President Fojo to prevent eventual coup d'état. This appears as a deterrent means to frighten people and make them completely reluctant act as freedom fighters. It is crucial to mention that the population uprising against the power is due to the unbearable oppression perpetrated by the militaries ordered by Fojo. Through a critical analysis, there is no possibility to escape from such massive massacres because both militaries and the civilians are heavily armed. That is the real political images of African political ruling classes.

CONCLUSION

It emerges from the analysis that, political governance in African countries has rather violent aspects than peaceful ones. As politicians are aware of their impotency and their unethical practices, they prefer to use violence through military oppression to prevent populations' uprising. Through this research work, it has been discovered that in most of African countries, only a handful of people benefits from their countries wealth whereas the majority starves. We have demonstrated that, when politicians are ready to donate, a process which can be profitable for the poor grassroots; it unfortunately turns to regionalism.

¹ New Internationalist will be referred to as IN followed by page numbers.

The research work has shown that regionalism is to some extents the root of African political decadence and obviously leads to serious uprising. Through the analysis of the corpus novels, we have also demonstrated that to prevent population from fighting for their human right, politicians use soldiers to dissuade them. This procedure shows that there is a total absence of freedom of speech in African countries and human rights are visibly violated. For any other researches related to this one, it is better that researchers emphasize on the implication of populations as human resources in the development of African countries. Our research work is also written in order to give significant perspectives to solve African problems of development and the implementation of a true democracy. The aim of this work is also to help other scholars to find adequate solutions to African political problems. Moreover, the impacts of the study are numerous and enable people to emphasize on the recurrent problems of violence and social inequality in further researches.

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