

## The Troubled Image of Africa in Shilia Kaaya's Poetry

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### Abstract

This paper examines representations of Africa in Shilia Kaaya's poetry. Kaaya's *The Bleeding Heart and other Poems* (2009) features thirty-eight poems covering diverse themes. This paper focuses on ten poems which are devoted to colonialism, neo-colonialism and political problems besetting contemporary Africa. It argues that Kaaya's poetry interrogates the dynamics of colonialism, neo-colonialism and the political problems in Africa and their effect on the development of Africa. It demonstrates how Kaaya's poems raise salient issues about how Africa's development — economically and politically, is undermined by both the European coloniser and Africans themselves. The Archetypal approach, which describes images found in a variety of poems written by a single poet, is applied to enhance understanding of the core message (s) of the poems.

**Keywords:** Africa, colonialism, image, neo-colonialism, development.

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## L'image troublée de l'Afrique dans la poésie de Shilia Kaaya

### Résumé

Cet article examine les représentations de l'Afrique dans la poésie de Shilia Kaaya. Dans *The Bleeding Heart and Other Poems* (2009), Kaaya présente trente-huit poèmes couvrant divers thèmes. Cet article se focalise sur dix poèmes consacrés au colonialisme, au néo-colonialisme et aux problèmes

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politiques et développementaux qu'éprouve l'Afrique contemporaine. L'article démontre dans quelle mesure les poèmes de Kaaya soulèvent de questions importantes concernant comment le développement de l'Afrique – sur les plans économique et politique, est miné, d'une part, par le colonisateur européen et d'autre part, par les africains eux-mêmes. L'approche archétypale, une approche qui décrit les images identifiées dans divers poèmes écrits par un seul poète, est utilisée pour renforcer la compréhension du message central des poèmes.

## Introduction

Shilia Kaaya may not be a household name in African letters as he is little known outside his Tanzanian home. However, his poetry contributes significantly to understanding the plight of Africa in both the colonial and post-colonial contexts. In particular, the poetry anthology *The Bleeding Heart and other Poems* interrogates issues of colonialism and neo-colonialism as sources of Africa's backwardness in terms of economic development. In fact, in his presentation, Kaaya can be likened to the Nigerian poet, Rome Aboh, whose anthology — *A Torrent of Terror* (2014), presents the social and political problems of the African continent which have retarded its development.

In his poem, "hour of truth" (p. 21), Aboh condemns African leaders who are politically ambitious to the detriment of the development of their own people and the continent at large. In another poem "a letter to the MP" (p. 25), the poet accuses the political class of betraying the people by going contrary to what they promised when they were canvassing for votes from the electorate. The poet, through the many poems which talk about Africa, suggests that the African path to development is so riddled with so many obstacles that it requires urgent corrective measures which are not taken by the respective African governments. There is profundity in the depiction of the African dilemma in his poems, something that he shares with Kaaya, his Tanzanian counterpart. Through Kaaya's poems, this article therefore, interrogates the

dynamics of colonialism, neo-colonialism and the political problems in Africa and their effect on the development of Africa. It demonstrates how Kaaya's poems raise salient issues about Africa's political situation linked with both colonialism and neo-colonialism.

The presentation is in two segments: the first part focuses on the critique that implicates colonial powers in undermining the interests of Africa under both colonialism and neo-colonialism; the second primarily examines how Africa has been complicit in the horrors that give Africa a bad name.

### **Colonialism, Neo-colonialism and Development in Africa**

In the poem "After Berlin now Brussels," the poet offers a complex recital of events that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the colonial European settlers arrived in Africa. It examines the linkages between colonialism, represented by Berlin, and neo-colonialism, represented by Brussels. The poem informs the readers about the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884-1885, which arbitrarily partitioned Africa, and exposes the true motives of the Europeans in this "Scramble for Africa":

Mother Africa, the dream of many  
Africa, awash with riches  
Africa devoured like a carcass then  
Many staring at her  
Like greedy hyenas in the Serengeti! (p.3)

The metaphorical implication in the first two lines of the first stanza is that the continent abounds with riches which the colonisers want at any cost. In the third line, the poet uses "carcass" which is devoured to refer to Africa. Usually, the devouring of the carcass goes with scavengers—in this case Europeans—which are meticulous and merciless in feeding on prey. The hyena is such a scavenger; it is a ravenous eater that is egoistical in pursuit of its prey in the Serengeti, the vast savannah, Tanzania's leading National Park. "Serengeti" is a Maasai word for 'endless plains'. The park, which is endowed with diverse

animals, symbolises Africa, now at the mercy of hyenas. In the poem, the Europeans are compared with the hyenas because of their ravenous appetites.

In the bigger picture, the poem shows that any meaningful understanding of colonialism must begin with the analysis of the reasons which made Europeans come to Africa in the first place. These factors include the struggle for economic power, the spread of Christianity and civilisation, prestige or fame (Ray 1976; Ogunbado 2012), as well as “strategic, political, social and psychological” factors (Koponen 1993: 119). However, the most overriding and debated factor is the economic reason related to the search for wealth in Africa (Hobson 1902). In this regard, colonial governments assumed control of everything, leaving Africans to witness in dismay the resources of their countries being looted and carted to the so called developed countries. Speaking of the colonial economic impact, Nazfiger (1988) argues that colonialism undermined African agricultural development because it confiscated indigenous lands. Nazfiger (1988: 36) asserts that the colonialists opened African countries to trade with their mother countries and mined their minerals for their home countries. This kind of exploitation is a source of the under-development that Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* talks about. Indeed, historians such as Curtin, Feierman, Thompson and Vansina (1978) argue that had Africa not been colonised it would have continued with its colonial trade while making internal innovations.

The second stanza of the poem builds on the partition of Africa by foregrounding a new and pernicious form of colonialism with the European countries still bent on further exploitation of Africa even by brute force. It hints at such a proposition thus:

It happened in Berlin  
It's 1884, to be precise  
Now the shameful balkanization  
Looms again,

With viciousness and stubbornness

With arrogance and muscle (p. 3).

These lines affirm an inextricable link between what the colonialists decided in 1884 and has continued under the veil of neo-colonialism illustrated by the word “balkanization” in the poem. It shows that political independence did not expel colonialism entirely, hence “Looms again.” What is even more worrying is the state of this new domination, which in some quarters is often called imperialism. It uses the word “viciousness” to show how high-handed the colonialists still are. Moreover, the combination of “stubbornness” and “arrogance” shows how insensitive the colonialists are in their subjugation. What makes them go about their business with impunity is the “muscle,” their power that helps to sustain their domination, even in the post-independence period. The third stanza describes the process of this new machination:

Brussels isn't far from Africa

The pack of 'them!' sat again

With determination, resolve and shamelessness

To slice Africa again (p. 3).

“The pack of them” refers to hunting animals that use their collective strength to scatter, corner and kill their splintered prey. The same countries which scrambled for Africa sat in Brussels for the same purpose of dividing Africa.

In 2002, European countries, sitting in Brussels, Belgium, imposed sanctions on Zimbabwe because of Mugabe’s decision to reclaim land from the white settlers—that minority—who owned most of the premium arable lands. This angered Europeans and they acted swiftly to protect their kind. The interpretations of many African leaders, especially the former president of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, who argued that the issue was not Mugabe, but the insensitive Europeans blind to the needs of Africa and wanting instead to continue patronising it (Mwalongo 2002). In the fourth stanza, the poet says:

Thanks, your Excellency, Ben Mkapa  
Awakening the giant of Africa  
Out of a deep slumber  
Mugabe isn't the issue  
Democracy, mere bait  
Africa remains a piece of cake!  
For them, not for Africans! (p. 3).

Mkapa, a former Tanzanian president, exposed the machinations of the West in their deriding and punishing of Zimbabwe. In explicit terms, Mkapa told Africans that they should say no to the Europeans because of the latter's nefarious intentions and designs on Africa that can be traced to the Berlin Scramble for Africa. The significance of Mkapa's speech is calling a spade a spade so that Africa can see the West for what it is: "Mugabe isn't the issue," the West and their diabolical designs were the issue, with the call for democracy being used as a ruse to hide their actual evil intentions for Africa — continued exploitation of its natural resources as Africa continues to be "a piece of cake" to be eaten and enjoyed by the West at the expense of Africans who own those resources.

The theme of standing up against the West recurs in "Finally Victory." The poem salutes Africans for their stand against neo-colonialism. It tells them that the common interest of European countries is to reach "down to the bowels of Africa" and "milk her pale and thin". The exploitation "down to the bowels" refers to the exploitation of the non-renewable resources through mining them to serve as raw materials to feed the industries in the West. The combination of "pale" and "thin" shows the debilitating effect of such exploitation. Thus the poem warns Africans to guard the continent jealously and to be aware of the various manifestations of neo-colonialism as it "manifests itself not only in one dimension" but "in camouflages/In hiding and rhetoric/In scorn and arrogance" (p. 19). The implication is that the West masks their intentions in various techniques that they apply to continue exploiting Africa.

The issue of Zimbabwe further crops up in the poems “Abuja, Not Our Pride” and “Crocodile Tears.” The poem “Abuja, Not our Pride” is based on the Commonwealth Abuja Summit, which was held from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> December 2003. The issue of Zimbabwe was high on the agenda. The poet associates the Abuja meeting with the Berlin Conference of 1884 and the Brussels meeting of 2002. Whereas the former brought European powers together to carve out their spheres of interests in Africa arbitrarily, the latter brought them together for the purpose of imposing sanctions on Zimbabwe, one of the African countries that chose to remedy the wrongs done to the majority of Zimbabweans at the hands of the minority whites. In this poem, the poet stresses how Europeans again want to continue exploiting the African continent:

With the sun never setting  
The empire sprawling afar  
With Zimbabwe towed to dust  
Africa applauding cowardly  
With the white commonwealth  
Just like the famous Apartheid  
With the elderly Mugabe defiant  
And Africa that lame  
Out for grab again (p.1).

The poem juxtaposes two images of triumph and despair. Contrary to expectations, the curtain never falls on the colonial empire, which, regardless of changed circumstances, continues growing in strength. On the other hand, Zimbabwe is presented as the latest victim to be “towed to dust.” “Dust” represents death even as the sun never sets with regard to the Western empire. The paradox is that Africa, which is supposed to sympathise with Zimbabwe, is “applauding cowardly.” The poem appears to treat this cowardice as the reason behind Africa’s seemingly irrational actions. The use of “white commonwealth” evokes an image that underscores who pulls the strings of the Commonwealth, whose decisions are binding to African members of the former British Empire. Ironically, the “defiant” “elderly Mugabe” appears

aloof in a continent that blindly follows the whims of the European powers. Even more demeaning in the poem is that fact that Africa is “lame”—unable to act—as Africa is “out for grab again.” On the whole, the poem paints a negative picture of hapless Africa, too inept even to speak up for one of its own.

The poem, “Crocodile Tears”, exposes the hypocrisy inherent in international justice controlled by the same European powers. It reveals an assortment of issues such as land grabbing, rigged and sham elections, as well as the Commonwealth's decision to stop supporting the people of Zimbabwe just because Mugabe seized the lands owned by white Zimbabweans. In consequence, the eyes of the people are sodden with tears while the water washes away the salty poison and the echoing wailing sounds of pain. In this regard, if “Abuja, Not Our Pride” exposes the limitations of African nation-states even when one of the sons of Africa is being attacked by the West for trying to undo one of the colonial wrongs against Africans, “Crocodile Tears” exposes the bigotry inherent in the international community. In other words, the two poems are complementary.

The impacts of both colonialism and neo-colonialism are recursive themes in many of the poems in Kaaya's collection. “Forgiving Africa”, for example, explores the impact of colonialism and its disruption of African ways of life. The title of the poem is ironically crafted to mean forgiving those who continue the merciless exploitation of the continent under the veil of neo-colonialism. In this poem, the persona laments and complains about the balkanisation and the “Scramble for Africa” by Europeans. It also presents Africa as a conquered land. In the poem, the persona insists that Africans are languishing in thirst “Working for the brutal masters/Colonialists from the west.” These lines suggest that it is difficult for Africans to develop economically since they were working in the colonial farms or plantations for the benefit of the colonial masters. As in the poem “After Berlin now



Brussels,” the poet uses the hyena symbol repeatedly to draw the reader’s attention to how colonialists are hyenas who “roamed to harvest without remorse or guilt” (p. 79). Again, as in “After Berlin now Brussels”, the poet revisits the Europeans’ continued interest in exploiting Africa. In the third stanza, the poet writes: “As a carcass devoured by vultures/With salivating ugly mouths/ That remains as wide today.” These three lines paint an ugly picture of the West whose appetite for exploiting Africa remains as insatiable in the present — under neo-colonialism, as it was in the past under the original colonialism project. The final stanza of the poem “Forgiving Africa” suggests that attaining development in Africa is difficult because the West keeps Africa divided for their own interests:

The masters now in honeymoon  
As the style changes  
The patterns evolving  
Pitying (sic.) African leaders against  
Each other  
As if a bunch of fools  
What a mockery and shame  
The forgiving Africa!  
Now a laughing stock! (p. 79).

The persona is bitter about the treachery in Africa. It uses a strong image of the colonialists now being on “honeymoon,” which alludes to their being married (implying the postcolonial idea about Africa being given a feminine gender while colonial powers are assigned to the masculine gender), as these former colonialists speak the same language of African exploitation. Indeed, after getting what they want of Africa, they can engage in their celebratory mood. In fact, with victory guaranteed, they now use different techniques, hence the use of “style” that alters in accordance with the demands of the time. There is also allusion to the underhand tactics employed in keeping African leaders divided by “Pitting” [Pitying (sic.)] them against each other. Comparing them to a collective, to “bunch of fools”, is fitting since they either

appear blind to the manipulations of the cabal of Western powers or are just too dumb to care. This negative image is reinforced through the use "The forgiving Africa!/Now a laughing stock!" After the chastening colonial experience, the poet appears to expect a response that would make African leaders wary of the West. But as the poem suggests, they are so "forgiving" that they have forgotten what they had experienced. Inevitably, they have ended up as "laughing stock" as their behaviour is irrational and goes contrary to popular expectations. In this regard, one can infer that they are a laughing stock not only to the West but also to their own people.

The global nature of the Europeans' interest in Africa is depicted "Global Apartheid", an international system of minority rule that promotes inequality, disparities and differential access to basic human rights, wealth and power (Mutasa 2004). The poem recalls the history of the industrial revolution in Europe and its domino effect that resulted in Europeans creating empires in Africa and beyond:

The vessels of misery  
Come in colours and style  
Protocol signed in [futility]  
With conditionalit[ies] and ties  
Good governance now the key word... (p.26)

The poem links the "vessels" (ships) which were instrumental in the voyages of discovery with "misery," the aftermath of such discovery that lingers on hundreds of years later. Their coming in "colours and style" alludes to their deceptive nature; the 'discovered' people looked at them with curiosity, oblivious to what is at stake. Although the poem depicts how the industrial revolution became a catalyst for disrupting peace and harmony of the colonised countries to promote European interests, it goes a step further by underscoring the effect in the present day: "with conditionalit[ies] and ties." Since the rules are made by European powers, even the treaties ("protocol") are of no use. As though this is not enough, the poem emphasises how "Good

governance” is now the catchword being used to further undermine the interests of African as well as other countries in furtherance of Western agenda and interests. This becomes clear in the subsequent lines:

With the biggest polluter  
Laughing at a distance!  
The suffering continues  
The patterns ever the same  
Entrenched now by globalization (p. 26).

While talking about “Good governance,” the West remained the “biggest polluters” who muddy the water. They chuckle from afar knowing their medicine has been swallowed and the fallout continues. As the excerpt above demonstrates, there is a continuation of suffering among Africans caused by the West. In this regard, the much touted “globalization” which is supposed to bring about equitable development globally is just another by-word for colonisation. In fact, as the poet suggests, “globalization” simply consolidates the gains made under colonisation, neo-colonisation, imperialism and other isms.

Kaaya’s poetry also exposes the duality of purpose for the West in espousing “good governance” for African countries. On the one hand, developed countries prescribe “good governance” to developing countries to speed up development. On the other hand, the same prescription turns out to be a veiled attempt to further entrench the interests of the West. Indeed, the conditionalities imposed on African countries include embracing democratic principles to foster good governance, openness or transparency and accountability. African countries are required to liberalise and privatise their economies as part of trade or economic liberalisation — conditionalities implemented under the aegis of the Breton Woods institutions in bailout packages, which has turned out to be a precursor to globalisation. One of the key elements under good governance is “the process by which authority is exercised in the management of a country’s economic and social resources for

development" (Santiso 2001:165). However, as "Global Apartheid" reveals, "good governance" is just another vocabulary Europeans have coined to profit even further from the outcome at the expense of Africans (p.26). In the last stanza of this poem, the poet does not see tangible benefits of "good governance" and "globalization" as the ordinary people in Africa continue to suffer even as the West continue to profiteer from the resultant governance system that weakens the local companies as their interests are taken over by transnationals, multinationals and other Western-based conglomerates, which operate in the interests of the parent countries in the West, not in that of the host countries in Africa and other developing countries.

Beneath the struggle, as almost all the poems analysed thus far demonstrate, the continent's prospects for development are shackled as the continent's economy continues to be being "run down" (Stanza four, lines 2-3). The poem "Abuja, Not Our Pride" concludes with an affirmative statement that because the economy of Africa has been robbed by Europeans, Africans will continue to wallow in poverty (p. 1). This scenario, coupled with Africa's lack of concrete action to counter the machinations of the West, appears to be behind the gloomy image of Africa.

### **Africa and the Political Turmoil**

Apart from painting Africa as victims, the poems also paint Africa as complicit in the woes besetting the continent. Dictatorship, authoritarianism and civil strife are the most serious problems facing the continent that Kaaya's poems seek to bring to the fore. These problems also hinder Africa's economic development. For instance, Bienen and Herbst (1986: 146-147) observe that the authoritarian leadership creates weak administrative systems and societal alienation which, in the long run, affect economic development because people fail to co-operate and work together. In this regard, Kaaya's poems testify to the effect of dictatorship, authoritarianism and civil wars on the economic

development of African countries. One poem that brings out these problematic issues at the heart of Africa's suffering is "Crying for Mother Africa."

"Crying for Mother Africa" begins by praising the continent for being the mother of humankind, as the cradle of mankind, and also the crucible of civilization. But it does not take long before the poet vents frustration because the continent bears "the brunt of pain" due to the spilling of blood "out of the brutal massacres" which engulf the continent (p. 13). As the poem suggests, now Africa is no longer the victim but the perpetrator of these atrocities. The poet contrasts the past and the present, with the past revealing greatness and the present representing horror. A number of studies have revealed how Africa is "referred to as the cradle of civilization because the continent influenced the development of humankind" (Hawk 2007: 1). Moreover, the invention of fire in Africa almost seven million years ago gave civilization to the world which, in turn, led to economic development. Thus, "Africa is home of the first tools, astronomy, jewellery, fishing, mathematics, crops, art, use of pigments, cutting and other pointed instruments and animal domestication," giving as it did the world human civilization (*Pan African Perspective* 1).

And yet, this is also the continent which in the present is considered to be the most backward. It is this contrast which makes the persona unhappy with the present state of Africa because of the wars taking place in some parts of Africa. This pathetic condition of Africa induces the poet's lament:

Africa mother of humankind  
But now the mother of all pains  
As the blessed land wrangles with rebellion  
An arena for the arsenals  
The weapons of terror in the hands  
Of the innocent, manipulated child soldiers.  
Africa mother of humankind  
But abused repeatedly both in mantle and muscle  
Her intellect reduced to ridicule

As brethren turn against each other  
Up in arms and machete (p. 13).

The poem focuses on events in Africa with external influence largely absent. The poem appears to blame Africans for condoning such diabolical acts. The contrasts between what was and what is are too damning. It raises the question of what happened. For example, why should the “mother of mankind” become the “mother of all pains”? The use of the passive or failure to name the agent makes one focus on the events on the ground. What this presentation does is to avoid blaming the West, as the poems analysed in the first segment do. No one can dispute the fact that there are civil wars, power struggles, and killings going on in Africa. In this regard, the second and third stanzas of the poem are central because they dwell, in specific and substantive ways, on occurrences in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire), Burundi, Central Africa, and Somalia.

“Crying for Mother Africa” also highlights how Africa’s riches also fuel conflicts. As depicted in stanza four, Africa has been caught at the crossroads, because diamonds in Liberia, Sierra Leone and the Congo are “raped viciously” (p. 14), implying that resources from Africa are taken by force to the West. Kitissou and Yoon (2014: 160), in their insightful study on civil wars and development, note that “the civil wars in Sierra Leone, Angola, Democratic Republic of [the] Congo and Liberia were caused by the struggle for diamonds” because people, including outsiders, wanted to control the mineral wealth.

The first stanza up to the fourth juxtapose Africa’s past and the present to draw attention to the continent’s greatness (past) and horror (present). What this does is to reinforce how this continent has been destructed. In fact, the concluding stanzas depict the suffering of Africans. Unlike in his other poems where sometimes there is a tone of hope, in this poem there is no such hint at hope, hence emphasising how Africans have been complicit in turning a

continent with such great potential (the past) into a hopeless one (the present). Because of the civil wars, the people die as “killing and misery engulf the people” and inter-ethnic internecine clashes claim countless lives (p. 14). In the poem, “Crying for Mother Africa,” the poet does not mention the countries embroiled in civil wars, which possibly suggests the inclusion of all African countries victimised by socio-political instabilities including civil wars. In so doing, the poet strategically gets his readers involved in the poetic process of presenting Africa.

In “What a Shame for Africa! Burundi,” the poet on the other hand specifically mentions that country possibly because of the historical political crises which the country has been facing since its independence. Looking at the history of Burundi, it explains how difficult it has been to reconcile the parties involved in the conflicts. About 350, 000 people died during the 12-year civil war (1993-1995) fought mainly between the Hutu and the Tutsi of Burundi (Saleh 2015: 13). Also, during the 1972 Tutsi-led Burundi “genocide” between 150,000 and 300,000 Hutus were massacred (Kiraranganya 1985). The protracted intrigue between Tutsi and Hutu has been dragging on for years (Kiruku 2015: 8). In the poem, the image of suffering and death of innocent people is made manifest in the first and second stanzas as the poet explains how the seeds of war were planted. It also shows how the seeds left behind foment rebellion among brothers (Stanza one, lines 6-9). Stanza two questions the logicity of this inter-ethnic and internecine animosity:

What a shame for Africa  
Brother devouring brother  
In cold blood and vengeance  
Sisters scheming in earnest  
For the death of own sisters  
Enmity boiling to brim  
The counsel by leader ridiculed  
Sitting to the dead of the nights  
Arbitrating in futil[ity] (p. 114).

Instead of presenting it as a Burundi problem, the poet sees the bigger picture by indicating the fighting between “brothers” and “sisters,” which symbolically suggests enmity among country-men. What happens in Burundi has implication for the whole continent of Africa, hence “a shame for Africa”. The use of “In cold blood” alongside “vengeance” demonstrates that such bloodletting is simply inhuman even when vengeance is the motive. Moreover, the “scheming” of sisters for the killing of “own sisters” shows how deep-rooted the treachery is.

As the title of the poem indicates, the poet also blames Africans for failing to reconcile Burundians. In the third stanza, the poet praises the first President of Tanzania—Julius K. Nyerere—for at least attempting to “reconcile the irreconcilable” (p. 114). Again, this reflects Nyerere’s Pan-Africanist thoughts for he raised “his voice loudly against the genocide in Burundi, Rwanda and the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo” (Campbell 2010). The presidents of Africa—in particular East African leaders—have been blamed for not taking immediate action against the President of Burundi wanting a third term though by so doing he is endangering the survival of his country (Saleh 2015). The poem pre-empted what is happening in Burundi. In April 2015, the Burundian president quest for the third term in office angered the opposition and other Burundians. Opponents claimed that the President was defying the constitution which provides for only two terms. About 18 people were killed in the ensuing violence and many others fled into the neighbouring countries of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania and Rwanda.

In reference to Julius K. Nyerere, the poem alludes to African leaders’ important role in the prevention of violence and in fostering peace and reconciliation. The behaviour of the President of Burundi amounts to dictatorship. In fact, his intention to run for a third term also violates the Arusha Accord that ended the Burundi’s civil war (Kiruku 2015: 13). The President’s persistence and his stranglehold on power signify an inordinate lust



for power, a common feature in African leaders. His clampdown on opponents attests to the repression that tends to erode democracy in many an African country. The poet, therefore, suggests that for democracy to thrive on the continent, democratic principles need to prevail. The democratic principles African leaders should abide by include adherence to the presidential term limits enshrined in their nations' constitutions, even if they feel tempted and have the means to either ignore constitutional provisions with impunity or to change them to suit their personal whims.

The image one draws from the poem is that the continent is still replete with leaders who are unwilling to relinquish power. This is an existentialist "truth." Similarly, Nigerian poet, Rome Aboh, introduced at the beginning of this paper also laments over this grim African reality. In the poem "Evidence from Okija," the poet tells of how:

Having sold our souls  
To tenders of Okija and then Soka,  
They swore with maniacal pomposity:  
'It's do or die-or-die.'  
They swore with zealotry:  
'We will reign for sixty years to come.' (p. 30).

The poem harps on the tendency of many an African leader to cling onto power, even against the will of the people. In so doing, some of these leaders plunge their respective countries into unending civil carnage, making it extremely difficult for the continent to develop in the real sense of the word. The poet appears to allude to the sitting presidents of countries such as Equatorial Guinea, Angola, and Zimbabwe who are not ready to leave office even at the expiration of their tenures.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the poem, "What a Shame for Africa! Burundi," does not only refer to Burundi as the sad story of that

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<sup>1</sup> Mugabe who ruled Zimbabwe, first as prime minister, and then as president lost power in 2017. He was forced by the Military to resign in November 2017. Angola too witnessed a change of leader in 2017.

East African country's experiences appear to be replicated in different parts of the continent. In other words, African leaders should lead by example to uphold democratic principles to stop strife and political instability, which give Africa a bad name, hence "a shame for Africa".

Similarly, the poem "Africa at the Crossroads" also implicitly focuses on these undemocratic tendencies. The poem does not directly detail information on the question of dictatorship in Africa; instead, it highlights the conflicts in Africa that result from dictatorship and civil strife:

The cry of torture  
The cry mingled with agony  
Of the ambush and surrender  
Of the machete or missile  
Of the spear or sword  
Is a cry all the same  
Africa traumatized  
Hacked by treachery  
Disguised in the spread of the 'word'  
Beads and rims of garments (p. 2).

The opening lines reveal suffering occasioned by use of different instruments and weapons—torture, ambush, machete, missile, spear, and sword. The poet suggests that the suffering inflicted on the African people is suffering regardless of the kind of weapon deployed or how the inhuman act has been inflicted. These killings affect innocent and defenceless civilians. In the second stanza of the poem, "Africa at the Crossroads," the poet uses the biblical term "Word" [*logos* in Greek] to reveal how conflicts spread in different parts of the continent in the name of God. In this regard, the poet appears to allude to sectarian violence and religious fundamentalism that extremists are using to wreak havoc on the continent. The violence unleashed by Al-Shabaab in Somalia, Boko Haraam in Nigeria, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, and recently the Islamic State, and Al-Qaida; these are

examples of the terrorists organisations plaguing different African states. Consequently, the poem concludes on a sad tone:

Africa at the crossroads  
As one phase ebbs  
Unfolding the ugliest of scenarios  
Slavery to colonialism  
The pain and shame of Apartheid  
Dictatorship and apathy  
Now technology and globalisation  
All nightmares to mother Africa (p. 2).

In the conclusion, the poem shows that slavery transitioned to colonialism, Apartheid (in South Africa), then dictatorship in different nation-states, and now Western technology and globalisation, all of which varyingly afflict Africa. Whereas colonialism and Apartheid can be described as belonging to the past, though their effects linger on, slavery, dictatorship and apathy as well as globalisation are very much problems of the present. In the case of globalisation, the Breton Woods institutions epitomised by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have engineered economic and political reforms that have become mandatory for African nation-states, which have facilitated the emergence and consolidation of globalisation. The persona presents globalisation as one of the “nightmares” of Africa. Global inequalities, coupled with the technological gulf, means that African countries do not reap the benefits of globalisation (Ibrahim 2013). Akindele, Gidado and Olaopo (2002) claim that globalisation actually retards the development of African nation-states as these are unable to make decisions and the states become controlled by foreign countries and transnational companies backed by Western countries. In fact, the use of the word ‘globalisation’ in the poem could also be a pun on another form of colonisation. Indeed, Jain (2001) argues that globalisation is another form of colonialism or, better still, neo-colonialism whereby developing countries continue to be used as sources of European countries’ economic development just as they were earlier under the

original form of colonialism. In other words, the poet sees Africa trapped at the crossroads—in a state of limbo.

### **Conclusion**

From Kaaya's poems two positions emerge. The first is that Africa has been a victim because of the manipulations of colonial powers both under colonialism and post-colonialism. The second is that Africans—particularly African leaders—have also not been hapless victims. They have let the continent down by being cowardly in dealing with the West, even on issues affecting one of their own, such as Mugabe standing up against the West and then being punished for it, with African leaders rubber-stamping the punitive actions of the West under the veil of the Commonwealth. Moreover, despot rulers have given Africa a bad name as they have forfeited or compromised democratic principles to ensure that they remained in power at any cost. In either case, the people of Africa continue to suffer not only from the resultant under-development fostered by the West's exploitation of Africa but also the mayhem that African leaders have unleashed on their people either through ethnic internecine wars, dictatorship and other horrors. The poet also juxtaposes Africa's greatness in the past and its contemporary inconsequential existence. Furthermore, the poet shows continuity in the suffering of Africans from slavery to colonialism, on to neo-colonialism and eventually to globalisation. On the whole, the poet does not want Africans simply to blame the West for their problems but also to look inwardly through soul-searching for the continent to find answers that would bring about development and free Africa from the shackles that have tied it down thus far.

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