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Scatology as an aesthetic in Alain Mabanckou's *African Psycho and Broken Glass*

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Abstract

This paper takes a close inspection on the use of scatology in the writings of Alain Mabanckou. The article argues that scatology is an aesthetic deployed by Mabanckou in his novels to depict moral decadence, degradation and abuse of position that oozes in every part of the country. Focusing on *African Psycho* (2003) and *Broken Glass* (2005), it demonstrates that the two novels are deliberately crafted to sound very vulgar, provoking and shocking for the purpose of awakening the readers into the high levels of moral decadence, corruption and abuse of power by the political elite in the society. Following narratological theory as espoused by Genette Gerard (1980), this paper argues that scatology is an appropriate technique that can expose false gentility masquerading as civilization and hedonism. Moreover, narratology as a study of narratives entails the study of those structures and traits that constitute a narrative. Narratology aims at describing the constants, variables and combinations typical of narrative and to clarify how these characteristics of narrative texts connect within the framework of theoretical models. The language – words, phrases and metaphors – in *African Psycho* and *Broken Glass* is deliberately mobilized to highlight the mangled dreams of a people in whose nation things are falling apart. The stories eloquently testify to the fractured humanity and a bold statement on the dysfunctional leadership in many African countries. The lewd language is used as an electroconvulsive tool to deliberately alarm the reader and draw his or her attention to the decadence and immorality that Mabanckou exposes and condemns in his novels.

Keywords: degradation, dysfunctional, narratology, scatology, vulgarity

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Public Interest Statement

Aesthetic is present in all media, there is aesthetics in arts, music, performing arts, literature; it exists in the sciences – information technology, electronics, video games, mathematics, neurasthenics, industrial design, urban life, landscape design, architectural and industrial design. The centrality of artistic creation and aesthetics experience to human evolution transcends the limitations of any particular culture and age, works of art reveal the social practices and dominant values of various ancient cultures and historical periods, as well as contemporary practices, it shapes technology, societies and cultivates the human psyche. Consequently, this article investigates the aesthetics of dirt in the novels of Alain Mabanckou.

1 Introduction

Several African writers have used filth and dirt as metaphors of exposing moral degradation as well as corruption in the African continent. All of these have been captured by different writers and critical approaches have been conducted in reference to that. Though most readings on dirt gesture towards presenting the continent as dirty, few offer a regenerative vision of these dirt-related artistic works. In this essay, I follow in the works of the most readings owing to the fact that the regenerated vision of the African nations is far from realities. Kayode (2004) reads Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) as a scatological writing and Rono (2021) looks into impacts of dialoguing between African letters and focuses on ways in which dirt is interconnected in Ngugi's *Wizard of the Crow* (2006) and Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). In the two readings, dirt is discussed as an image of the continent marked by different kinds of disorders with Rono arguing that "the recurrence of the images related to putrescence, filth and feces is intertwined in the two texts to develop the themes of corruption and squalor" (210). However, in any discussion on scatology in African writing, Armah's classic novel has become an epitome in the description of postcolonial disgust as I will show shortly. It is the interest of this paper to examine how the same disgust has been presented differently by Mabanckou, a French citizen born in the Republic of Congo. By and large, Mabanckou joins the league of scatological writers particularly how he deploys the trope in his two known novels *African Psycho* (2003) and *Broken Glass* (2005) to make social, economic and political commentary on postcolonial African nations.

Broken Glass (2005) tells the story of the Credit Gone West bar that Broken Glass frequents which is owned by Stubborn Snail who has given Broken Glass a notebook to jot down comings and goings. The former teacher's thirst for alcohol is matched by several distressed and disgraced patrons of the bar. The novel creates a microcosm of post-colonial African experiences through the vulgar and bawdy tales of sodden bar patrons who highlight more corrupt and inept governments symbolized by narrators failed lives. The text is primarily a tale of madness and sexual humiliation, physical collapse and moral degradation. *African Psycho* (2003) grants the readers insights into the mind of inept murderers as well as the nation's social and political norms through Mabanckou's scatological humour and first-hand experience. The novel is a journey into the macabre, the funny, the sad, the desperate and the disturbing.

Mabanckou's novels are suffused with images of scatology that border on overt explanation of sexual activities without compromising explicitly what euphemistic language normally favours. According to Obiechina (1976, 13), writers use scatology, "in order to prick the bubble of false respectability held by a vast majority the African elite. Dirt and filth become dialectical instruments for attacking false gentility, philistinism masquerading as civilization and hedonism disguised as good living". Recent studies on scatology like Kim (2023) observe that scatology should not be relegated to the realm of humour and juvenile but argues for feces as a figure of radical equality- a literary object and reflection of literature itself- without which literary studies is impoverished and sterile. Kim turns excrement into a force for democracy. Fecality becomes a site of a more durable emancipation by exploiting fecality's capability to enable the assimilation of the inassimilable fact of mortality. By

scatology, I mean the various ways in which the novels invoke sexual activities and sometimes the body parts in away one may find repugnant. However, the stylistic choices that the author employs to deliver this scatological images add aesthetic quality to his works echoing to what Mbembe call “aesthetics of vulgarity”. Focusing on the lewd language, this paper demonstrates how this aesthetics of vulgarity is artistically and deliberately crafted to serve as an electroconvulsive tool intending to shock the reader and draw his or her attention to repulsive issues like moral decadence and abuse of power in the society so as to affect change. The vulgar language therefore serves an artistic purpose and helps in the interpretation of decadence in Congo and among diaspora immigrants.

1.2 Scatology in African writing: A critical overview

Scatology is the interest in or treatment of obscene matters especially in literature. The ‘Excremental writing’ to use Esty’s (1999) words has been in existence since time of foundational African writers like Ayi Kwei Armah, the acclaimed post-colonial African writer, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Meja Mwangi, Okot P’Bitek and Labou Tansi, among others. In his *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), Armah uses scatological to describe the complex landscapes of depravity, complicity and moral corruption that unites both the elites and the masses. In the novel, members of the political elite like the lecherous Joseph Koomson are represented through the imagery and metaphors of odours that are signs of postcolonial decadence. The city and its inhabitants are presented as irredeemably rotten.

Meja Mwangi’s *Going Down River Road* (1976) revolves around the experiences of urban life. It vividly portrays both the physical and the psychological anguishes that the characters undergo in their quest for survival. As such, the author employs scatological and thus treats ‘serious’ subjects in a trivial and humorous manner. The author goes full throttle to present the reader details of individuals and immediate environment. The reader is made to suffocate from stench emanating from Baby’s urine-sodden bed. Winny’s naked body is described graphically. By presenting us to images that communicate to all our senses, Mwangi does not violate social codes and norms that stipulate we coat words and experiences with ‘appropriate’ terms. He captures for us the real situation of how urban individuals struggle with the vagaries of urban squalor. For instance, in order for Ben to satisfy his carnal desires, the stench from Baby’s bed and the noise from Max’s music rank as collateral damage. Apart from revisiting the concept of sex as a basic, raw and primitive act of man which should be embraced in its totality, the author uses descriptive images such as Winny’s naked body to enable the reader understand the circumstances which force characters to be who they are.

P’Bitek Okot in *Song of Malaya* (1988) is scatological in its presentation of the activities of Malaya, the prostitute. Everywhere, the prostitute is often openly despised and condemned as a nuisance to society but ironically, she is patronized by the very people that brazenly decry her activities. The Malaya in the text ridicules house wives for “eating lizard’s eggs (pills) to prevent pregnancy” (p152) and wonders if “wild screams and childish sobs” are in any way sweet music to the ears of men. The Malaya invites the men to “a ride on the mad mule, up and down the steep hillside and a taste of the wild honey that cannot be gotten at home” (p.159). Here, the Malaya aims to show the folly of official morality by proving that no one actually follows it and reveals the secrets of her clients. Labou Tansi in *The AntiPeople* (1987) narrates the tribulations of Nitu Dadou who is falsely accused by Yavelde for impregnating her and forcing her to commit abortion. In the text, women sell their sexual favours to official ‘Bigshots’ in exchange for safety and the right identification papers. The author uses scatological technique by describing intense eroticism, for instance, “the strong, thick, delivering thighs” and “the essential bewitching ass of girls in bringing orgasms of leaders” to give an illuminating glimpse of a contemporary African society in upheaval. The profusion of excrement in literary texts merely reflects the overcrowding and filthy in African cities and streets. Soni Tansi (1987) used it to denote the endless grabbing of property by the ruling class. This overconsumption is manifested primarily by the amount of waste they reject. Also, talk of defecation of President is a way of belittling them and an opportunity

for their subjects to laugh at them and see them for what they are: beings, like others; thus, going against the almost divine image that many African leaders want to give themselves. Using the above-mentioned texts as a foundation to my discussion, I therefore delve into the deployment of scatology in Mabanckou's novels *African Psycho* and *Broken Glass*.

Set in the Congo, *African Psycho* grants the readers insight into the minds of inept murderers as well as the nation's social and political norms through Mabanckou's scatological humour and first-hand experience. As much as *African Psycho* is a journey into the macabre, the funny, the sad, the desperate and the disturbing, there is at the same time great vistas of the absurd in which the filth that characterizes the neighborhood that Gregory lives in is an expression of failure of government economic policy of his country. Hundred-Franc-Only-Street has a mountain of garbage at the edge of the plots while at Fat -Head -Street negroes defecate everywhere day and night. I relate this filth to the political dispensation owing to the narratological ways that Mabanckou adopts. For instance, amidst these images of filth, the author blames the leaders who have failed to manage the state machinery efficiently to allow citizens to live in a health environment. This hence disposes me to conceive dirt as cumbersome and a symbol of the decay of conscience especially those of politicians and bureaucrats who are responsible for the operation of the state machine that was to fulfill the promise of equal development held in the aftermath of independence and national discourse. Instead of equality, people who expected improved living conditions see worse than expected situations that can only be equated to the images of decay as presented in Mabanckou's novels. Scatology, therefore, becomes a narratological strategy for Mabanckou to tell the disillusionment that followed independence. Shit has a political vocation; it draws focus to the failure of development, to the un-kept promises not only during colonial regimes but also in modern times. Interestingly, the initial name of 'Hundred –Franc –Only-Street' was 'Six-Hundred – Franc-Only-Street' but the name changed because girls from the neighbouring country have "dropped the price of ejaculation" (37). This vulgar language depicts the contemptuous attitude the natives of Congo have towards prostitutes from the neighbouring country (Zaire) who are viewed to mess up with business by offering sexual services at a very low cost. Gregory lives in a neighbourhood where alcohol and sex have become the last refuge of a population abandoned to itself without a present or a future.

In his analysis of scatological imagery in postcolonial fiction, Esty (1999) observes that the use of excremental language is an index of moral and political outrage in the newly independent African states bedeviled by greed and bureaucratic corruption. The images of fecal and dirt are used to develop the themes of corruption and squalor. Esty stresses that in excremental writing there exists a possibility that victims are blamed for their misfortune. That is, the victims have a share of responsibility for the tragedy that happens to them. In *Broken Glass*, for example, Pampers and Broken Glass, the two main characters associated with excrement, participated in their own predicament. Pampers left his wife to rejoin prostitutes (smalls) and in revenge, the wife accused him of raping their daughter (Amelia) ending up being convicted on trump-up charges. For this, he is jailed and later sodomised in Makala prison. Broken Glass on the other hand lands into trouble because of his alcoholism and being an irritant to the State. Therefore, had Broken Glass and Pampers retained a little more, bridled their drives for sex and alcohol, perhaps their fates would be different.

Rono (2021) reads the interconnection between Armah's reference to 'shit', 'latrines' and 'lavatories' in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and Kamiti's obsession with shit in *Wizard of the Crow* and demonstrates how characters in these texts are indeed veering into different excesses and disproportions in a manner that conjures up excesses of bad leadership in Africa (p208). He points out that in *Wizard of the Crow*, the Ruler undergoes self-induced expansion soon after the Global Bank releases information to media in New York and not directly to the Ruler himself that it cannot fund Marching to Heaven Project. The Ruler's ballooning physical body then becomes a manifestation of the excesses of corruption in independent African States. Rono argues that both Armah's and Ngugi's

texts use shit as a corporeal familiar for obscene but while Armah takes a physical trajectory where he links the odour to fart, Ngugi bloats and re-directs it ‘beyond the cognitively feasible flatulence’ (MacDonald’s 2014:139). Following Esty (1999), Rono (2021) says, “scatology in literary texts has been used to critique the political order in neo-colonial contexts” (210) and concludes that the authors use visual imagery to depict corruption, with Ngugi taking “the reality to another level by combining narrative strategies that appeal to both sight and smell senses” (p.209).

Recent studies on the politics of dirt, such as that by Newell *et al* (2018), depart from the traditional understanding of the aesthetics of dirt and unhook the political knots long attached to it and other associated terms in African contexts. They observe that the attitudes towards dirt have diverse histories in different parts of the continent. For his part, Kayode (2004) analyses scatology in Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and notes that scatology is used as a device to depict that every part of Ghana oozes out corruption of various forms and dimensions. Armah uses these corrupt practices to portray his disgust and hatred of state of affairs in Ghana at the time of writing the novel. In *On the Postcolony* (2001) specifically on the chapter titled “Aesthetics of Vulgarity”, Mbembe discusses the banality of power. Focusing his study on Cameroon, Mbembe discusses grotesque and the obscene as the “two essential characteristics that identify postcolonial regimes of domination” (4) and his mission is to show the centrality of the scatology in trivializing those in power.

Mbembe performs a review on Bakhtinian’s modification of carnival concept by applying it to the way of working of African States. Bakhtin (1984) argues that in the grotesque body emphasis is placed in the open, the penetrative and the lower stratum. The open (the anus, the vagina etcetera) and the penetrative (the penis) allow exchange between the body and the world (through sex and eating) but also to produce degrading material (urine, feces). The lower stratum (belly) is the place where renewal happens, where new life is forged, thus connecting degradation and renewal. The grotesque body is one of unashamed excess, anathema to authority and pious austerity. Bakhtin’s views are fundamental in this reading which focuses on scatology in Mabanckou’s *African Psycho* and *Broken Glass* as it allows perception of vulgarity and can lead to a nuanced understanding of issues addressed in the novels. At home, the carnival is not only localized in the lower class but is directed to the same principle of operation of the all-powerful state machinery. In other words, the African State is obscene, grotesque and vulgar. Mbembe suggests that Bakhtin’s typology be extended to include the African politician who employs obscenity and excesses routinely as a confirmation the State’s legitimacy. If we are to believe the analysis of Mbembe which draws his analysis from lived reality, the exaggeration which Mabanckou uses to make its fabulous characters is the same technique that is used by leaders in Africa to invent fables to make them remain in power. Mbembe explains: the work of power is also to go into a trance in order to produce fables. The fables play an integral role in the functioning of the government because it is a way to lull the people, to distract them, to prevent them from asking the right questions, they are monopolized already nicely packaged by mystifying trivialities.

1.3 Sexual Scenes and Political Obscenity in *African Psycho*

Mabanckou describes sexual intercourse using graphic language which would be considered obscene in the family situation or when an audience is made up of people of different age groups. These obscene contexts are politically motivated in the sense that there is socio-economic and political relation that the present essay discusses. One of Germaine’s clients in *African Psycho* suffers from erectile dysfunction. Mabanckou calls this situation “a break-down that can only be corrected by using saliva or watching skeletal dogs fornicate” (31). The erectile dysfunction of the client is a metaphor for the dysfunctional political leadership in post-colonial African nations. The political system has always never worked correctly or properly in most African nations so that the citizens are always left lamenting about the ineptitude of those in power. This situation was summed up by one political commentator thus, “The tragedy with Africa is that those in power have no idea and those with ideas have no power”. For the

aspect of using saliva or watching skeletal dogs fornicate to correct the erectile dysfunction, it emerges that the governance in most postcolonial African nations is rather dysfunctional and political leaders are busy devising improvised political methods to deal with the non-functional situation. Sadly, the methods are not sustainable for they only fix the problem temporarily and the dysfunction is certain to recur. Mabanckou terms prostitution as 'paid for ejaculation' (p33). This can be inferred to mean that the residents have to pay for every service provided for by the government even those that are supposed to be provided free of charge like issuance of national identity cards or birth certificates. It intimates that corruption pervades in every government department. Angoulima is fond of raping woman and at one point sedated a family, raped the wife and burnt her cunt with cigar.

The raping of women implies the use of force on unwilling partner. This could signify that political leaders force citizens to enjoy their leadership. It could also be interpreted to mean that political leaders force their ideas down the throats of the citizens without due consultation and subsequent consent. In some African nations, the political class force housing or medical schemes on the populace that in the end benefit only a select few. In some other situations, unpopular education system is enforced on the hoi polloi while the ruling elite have their children pursue a different and more enlightening education system. Notably, Angoulima is fond of raping his victims. This rape could be interpreted to mean the wanton plundering of resources by those in power and the continual destruction of functioning institutions and thereafter go to the extreme of brutalizing the core organs of government by using excessive force. During sex, the railway worker forces a girl to bark like a bulldog. Gregoire masturbates at the thought of a girl. A certain prostitute is said to have had sex with a man endowed with a big penile shaft that "left the strategic spot gaping for months because the natural fibres were wrecked" (p 47). The unfortunate and precarious situation that the prostitute finds herself in is equated to when leaders penetrate the socio-political and economic space of the citizens that leaves the citizens in economic doldrums and quagmire. The economic ruin is akin to being shafted with a big penile shaft. Economic meltdown is not a new phenomenon in African nations. A few years ago, the inflation in Zimbabwe soared to unimaginable levels such that the country's currency literally became valueless.

Another instance that depicts vulgarity is the moment Gregoire met Germaine in the streets of town. "I met the woman whom I took to be a prostitute to fuck. In fact she was not one; it felt well, shit. So I had to kill her because I had to kill somebody that night" (p 104). The words, 'fuck' and 'shit' are bawdy and expressed without the benefit of euphemism. They suggest lack of intimacy and attraction but casual engagement in sexual intercourse. The urgency that comes from the last sentence indicates that Gregory is attacking prostitutes for convenience, they are easy scapegoats. What primarily interests him is to kill. The uncontrollable urge to murder can be viewed as a displacement of the deep seethed anger Gregory has towards other people because of the difficult childhood he was subjected to. At the same time, he desires to kill Germaine and other prostitutes in order to restore the image and honour of He – Who – Drinks – Water – Is – An – Idiot. In a typical case of voyeurism, Gregoire Nakobamayo inspects Germaine's handbag and finds high heeled shoes, wigs, vaseline lubricant, artificial nails, dildoes and other tools for her trade (prostitution). The fact that Gregoire peeks at Germaine's handbag, suggests that the citizens privacy is rudely infiltrated. The people are spied on fulltime so that they cannot hide anything from the State and its security apparatus. In some African nations, the State through its security agencies engages in espionage so that the citizens' space is not private enough. The people are always being monitored and their activities always on the radar. In recent days, for example, the activities of Queer groups have been monitored closely and in some cases activists for LGBTQ groups have found themselves in difficult situation with the State. Mabanckou has a particular fondness for scatological images that meshes well with his chosen message.

The conditions of Left Bank emblematic of the majority of Congo are not what the narrator likes to identify with as part of his identity or heritage much as they are an inseparable aspect of his realities. The rudimentary conditions do not inspire much hope about the inhabitants, nor do they hold a promise

of giving human dignity to their lives. To express his aversion to the oddities, therefore, he uses the scatology and the grotesque to present the panoramic view of the undignified life, the injustice in the society. The overall dominant leitmotif in the text is the use of feces in describing the street (country) and the horrific experiences in Left Bank that point to the unfortunate conditions of poverty. Scatology and the grotesque are the predominant metaphors used to represent the crisis and disillusionment of the people of this failed postcolonial state, submitting to Mbembe's observation that the emphasis on orifices and protuberances is to show that "the postcolony has a marked taste for lecherous living" (p.6).

The apparent act of violence and attempted sodomy which Gregoire is a victim metaphorises how meaningless life has become in this postcolonial country bereft of human decency and morality. Amid want, deprivation and injustice come survival relative to the dissonant social incongruities which themselves accentuate the marginal life of the people and the troubled lives of the characters in the novel. Also reinforcing these social anomalies in the narrative, consistent with the scatological significations above is the motif of feces, filth and the repulsive and obscene which are the strings that hold up the abject conditions. Through the conscious piling up of scatological imagery, we are repelled from the system that exudes such decay. Therefore, Mabanckou uses scatological devices to bring to light ills in the society such as poverty, prostitution, xenophobia, inequality and also reveals his dissatisfaction against his people.

In *African Psycho*, excrement and filth, therefore, communicate a meaning that is both political and social beyond the unhygienic conditions that are literally described with scatological aesthetics. Esty (1999) posits that excrement in literature has a political interpretation as it represents underdevelopment, "excessive consumption" and "wasted energies" (p.34). It is a symbolic medium for questioning the place of the autonomous individual in new postcolonial societies. For Gregoire and other characters in the text, their place has been compromised by injustice, political instability and economic meltdown, dispossessions et cetera manifesting in the debilitating conditions in this country.

1.4 Alcoholism, Prison and Excrement in *Broken Glass*

Broken Glass, the protagonist in the novel *Broken Glass* has been elected to record ribald tales by unsavory regulars for posterity. This former teacher's thirst for alcohol is matched by several distressed and disgraced patrons of the bar. Each person wants to make sure that his story is written that will reflect their exciting and dynamic lives. Broken Glass drowns his sorrows in red wine and riffs on the great books of Africa and the West. At the beginning of the novel, Mabanckou attacks the grotesque and destructive absurdity of rulers and takes the opportunity of the opening of bar (Credit Gone West) to dismantle the mechanisms by which the rulers seized power and engaged exclusively for their own benefit. *Broken Glass* creates a microcosm of postcolonial African experiences through the tales of sodden bar patrons who highlight more on the corrupt and inept governments symbolized by the narrators failed lives. That is, the bar and its events is a representation of the larger society. All the secondary narratives are versions of the same story- men brought down by women and booze. The text is primarily a tale of madness and sexual humiliation, physical collapse and moral degradation. The bar and the drinking stupor or carousal by regular bar patrons is a synonym or representation of the drunken nation where citizens engage in non-essential activities as a way of running away from the realities of everyday life. The populace who are symbolized by the drunkards immerse themselves in a drunken delirium as a form of escapism.

The guy in pampers in *Broken Glass* is jailed in Makala prison after being falsely accused by his wife for paedophilia. During the two year incarceration, he is tortured through sodomy to the extent that two hands can enter his anus. "These people have screwed me up in Makala, I swear. I can show you my backside even two hands gathered can enter without problem , I do not lie to you, I do not have right to trial in this country of shit." (p50). He is therefore forced to wear four pampers at any one time. Even with the pampers, flies are always oozing around him. Broken Glass describes him as "a rag

oozing buttocks”. The loss of bodily control means Pampers cannot control his destiny. He is powerless before the flies that stigmatizes him as a social waste and has to beg for food.

The scatology employed in the tribulations of Pampers expose subtly and in detail the abuse of power by the injudicious system who imprison him without tight evidence. Mabanckou wants to expose the scandal of injustice that prevails at all levels in the judicial system in many African countries. The tale becomes a metaphor for corrupt and inept government systems. The sodomy inflicted on Pampers could mean the pain that the government inflicts on its people daily. The challenges facing Pampers as a result of the sodomy tells of the difficult situation the citizens have found themselves in as a result of the political system’s brutal actions. The stories that portray failed lives are an allusion to the failure by the government. The story of Pampers reflects the disorder of a society where law enforcement officers, justice and the entire administrative machinery as well those who are in charge of moral conduct in the society never consider the public interests and do not bother with questions of ethics or professional conduct.

Broken Glass at one point approached a mango tree to defecate but was accosted by a local resident who asked him to pick up his droppings. So Broken Glass dipped his hands into his feces. Even when he later travelled to Credit Gone West, he still stank of shit and flies followed him. As with the guy in pampers, Mabanckou uses feces as a ground to say about the disintegration of individuals. What degeneration can be greater for a father to be forced to pick shit or to be forced to wear pampers permanently! The fact that Broken Glass was spotted by a local resident when he wanted to defecate implies that the government or its agents are always watching. This means the peoples’ right to privacy is compromised or is non-existent. Vulgarity is evident by the pissing contest between bar patrons Casimir and Robinette. Robinette can urinate for ten minutes and the urine flows as if someone had opened a public fountain. As the pissing contest began, Casimir is said to have an “elementary particle” (a small penis) while Robinette is endowed by Mother Nature. His small penis make the audience laugh convinced that Robinette would win but the farts and burps set in. Watchers were kept in suspense as they lean forward in a positive and expected gesture that it will be Robinette who will be the winner as usual. This is punctuated by Robinette’s heavy weight pissing manner, “Casimir High-Life was liberating the contents of his bladder but Robinette’s stream was heavier, hotter, more majestic” (p.62).

Interestingly, as Casimir peed, his “insignificant thing”, ‘the paltry member’ tripled in size. The expansion of the little penis was laughingly considered by the patrons “a miracle that deserved the papal beatification.” Robinette’s physical appearance is described thus: “...her huge plump thighs, her calves like the bottles of primus beer. She wore no panties, and then she parted the twin towers of her buttocks. We saw her sex which at once elicited huge erections”. Upon losing the urinal combat, Robinette promised to allow Casimir “shag” her at no cost, anywhere, anytime. Through the description, Mabanckou portrays a society whose moral fibre is completely eroded and moral decadence is pervasive and consuming. The writer uses the obscene words to offend the readers’ sense of decay thereby drawing his attention to the very thing he satirically and strongly condemns in the society. Robinette and ilk have been forced by the harsh conditions of life to expose her nudity without feeling guilty or embarrassment. Life’s challenges have made her lose taste for humanity. The vivid description of Robinette’s pissing contests with Casimir may appear disgusting or embarrassing but the action indicates that when people are forced by circumstances to live in this degradation, nothing seems to be left of their humanity. It could also mean that the postcolonial nations are busy engaging in vulgar contests or those in power competing on who corrupts more. Ngugi wa Thiongo in *Devil on the Cross* explains this as thieves engaged in a thieving contest. Mabanckou uses vulgar language to capture ugliness in the society. The regulars of the bar laughed at Casimir at the beginning but at the end they had nothing but admiration for him. Robinette and Casimir had pee contest but it is enough to say that the people laughing in public or in their sleeves in the marquis of privacy are not necessarily trying to belittle the powers to turn into derision or resist against the state willingness to ignore or blur its origins. It is simply trying to attest,

sometimes without realizing it.

In *Broken Glass*, the State and its agents themselves erect the grotesque and obscene power management technique and make the questioning of individual rights administrative principle. The novel reflects the mismanagement of the post-colonial State, disappointment and ‘zombification’ of populations; that inaction always grows a little more to forfeiture. In the text, Mabanckou shows the ugliness of tragicomic oppression. Although in the novel he refuses to take a stand and is limited to an exhibition of “what it is” behind the squeaky laugh it causes in the reader already an aspiration to see “what it should be”. Printer’s ex-wife, Celine flings and is at one time caught in bed having sex with Printer’s estranged son whom he sired with a Caribbean woman. This unusual relationship between Celine and Printer’s son borders on vulgarity as it is akin to father and son sharing the same woman. Amusingly, when a large condom is found, Printer claims that his penile shaft is equally large. The contrary being the truth creates dark humour.

1.5: Conclusion

Mabanckou’s language is vulgar, lewd, provoking and shocking for a purpose. In the novels, excrement is a leitmotif, a metaphor that signifies the dehumanization and repugnant conditions in postcolonial Congo. His vulgarity becomes a perfect weapon to induce the seizures for the best therapeutic effect to cure the society of the despair and disillusionment it is conditioned to. The use of what would ordinary be offensive language in Mabanckou’s novels is meant to shock the readers out of the deceptive slumber of normalcy. The vulgar language is an overwhelming indignation towards the repugnant behaviors of the people in the society he wrote about. Mabanckou’s use of obscene language in his novels is aimed at revolutionarily transforming a society that is so decadent. He uses the bawdy language to supplement content particularly to criticize moral decadence and abuse of power. Through the use of vulgar language seen to be a scatological device, Mabanckou has been able to expose and condemn the ills prevalent in the society. Evidently, it is possible to understand society by simply analyzing the way dirt and filth is handled. As a matter of fact, dirt becomes a site laden with layers upon layers of meanings.

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