The centre replies the empire: Post-postcolonial perspectives on the historicity of post-independence Malawian leadership in Paul Theroux's *The Lower River* (2012)

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Abstract

Until recently, the enduring postcolonial discourses in Africa have been based on the binaries whose arrows pointed towards the West as that which bears the exclusive agency in Africa's postcolonial woes. In line with the 're-practices' that have, for a long time, characterised most humanistic discourses, some scholars have realised the imperative of revisiting and rereading the postcolonial theory and its East-West dialectics as motivated by the deconstructionist exegesis and praxis. The results have been, in most cases, a complete reversal of the postcolonial argument to the effect that Africa has long assumed agency in most of their conditions and that the West has little or no case to answer in terms of direct culpability. This paper utilises these deconstructive notions in the critique of Paul Theroux's *The Lower River* as a Westerner's response to the existing postcolonial hermeneutics as embodied in the troika's work, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature.* The research analysis, which is anchored on the post-postcolonial approach to literary interpretation, upholds the emerging view that, going by recent events in post-independence Africa as exemplified in the Malawian context, African leadership has assumed Selfhood and thus should be the subject of direct postcolonial interrogation, rather than the West.

Keywords: historicity, leadership in literature, Malawian literature, post-postcolonialism

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Public Interest Statement

Many postulations have been offered as panaceas for Africa's postcolonial condition. Most of the current discourses are based on the Periphery-Centre binary structure, with the accusing finger being pointed towards the West as the sole culprit in most of the problems that beset Africa today. In this paper, we argue that emerging realities should force us to consider revisiting the question of who should actually be held accountable for the current state of Africa. We perceive African leadership as the new transcendental signified in African postcolonial discourse and set out to decenter it through the critical interrogation of Paul Theroux's novel, *The Lower River*. Our theorisation also aims to contribute to the ongoing conversations on how to birth Africa-centred and Africa-conscious theoretical frameworks instead of depending solely on the ones propounded by the West. We believe that this paper will help in bringing about the much needed renaissance in African leadership, which we see as pivoting to the growth and development of the continent.

Introduction

This study is undertaken against the background of the ongoing attempts by intellectuals to find lasting solutions to Africa's many challenges. Africa has always been perceived by all who have ever had contact with her as a site of multiple maladies that must be cured. The colonial project of bringing civilisation to Africa was based on the eurocentric assumption that Africa was primitive and barbaric, devoid of history, education and religion, among other indices that make for a civilised human race. The deliberate attempt at exterminating African history and culture by the colonialist intellectuals and replacing the same with those concocted by the Europeans has resulted in destiny-altering consequences for the continent. Nzongola-Ntalaja (2008) sees colonialism as "a system of economic exploitation, political repression and cultural oppression that not only denied Africans their citizenship rights, but also dehumanized them through and through" (p. 53). Indeed, the current obsession with colonialism in the critique of African literature could be understood mostly within the context of the debilitating effects colonialism had and continues to have on the continent. Africa's postcolonial discourse, itself motivated by the unfortunate incident of colonisation, is deliberately practical and utilitarian in its quest to, not only rid Africa of the residual colonial influences (a process that has come to be known as de-colonisation), but also in its attempt at regaining the cerebral wholeness of the African continent.

That Africa is at the moment a site of contesting surgical procedures aimed at rectifying centuries of malignant defects is evident in the avalanche of theories and

ideological correctives advanced by scholars and intellectuals within and outside her borders. In the colonial period, African intellectuals and elites were mostly concerned with the physical eviction of the colonial masters from Africa's power space; with the credulous hope that the consequent and subsequent shift of power would translate into a more meaningful existence for the generality of the African peoples. The ideologies of Négritude and Pan-Africanism were devised to aid the nationalist movements in Africa. The philosophy of Nègritude was advanced to enable Africans regain the lost faith and pride in their cultural heritage, and this could be seen in Irele's (2007) definition of Négritude as "the literary and ideological movement of French-speaking black intellectuals, which took form as a distinctive and significant aspect of the comprehensive reaction of the black man to the colonial situation" (p. 203). On the other hand, Pan-Africanism was to emphasise the fact that the African peoples had a common destiny, experience and history, and therefore should unite in the struggle against colonial domination (Kuryla, 2017, Par1).

With the mounting palpable sense of disillusionment that greeted the post-independence era, African ideologues soon found themselves caught-up in critical multi-tasking, as they battle to keep the decolonisation project on course while scrambling to defend Africa's political and economic forts against the encroaching monster: Neocolonialism. It is easier to begin to see how the conflict gets more complex after each seeming victory. From this point onwards, the battle for the soul of Africa branches into many fronts: literary, linguistic, cultural, political and economic, among others. In the neocolonial African state, not only are the writers and critics up against the sad legacies of colonisation, they also find themselves pitched against fellow black leaders bent on lording it over their subjects, the same way the colonial masters had done. The failings of African leadership have been identified as one of the factors that hinder Africa's rapid development. However, the actual interrogation of African leadership has not gathered the much needed momentum in relation to the weight it possesses in shifting the balance of Africa's destiny. This problem could be linked to, not only the multiple challenges that cropped up immediately after independence, but also to the nature of the post-colonial theory itself, which has been noted for the overarching idea of writing back to the Centre and in the process ignoring the possibility of writing to itself. There is no doubt that the ongoing decolonisation project in Africa has yielded many positive gains and will continue to do so if pursued to its logical conclusions (Osha, 2002, p.17). However, the stark reality is that Africa continues to stagnate in the rut of poverty and underdevelopment. This explains why it has become imperative for African intellectuals to take a second look at the postcolonial theory with a view to making it more realistic in accounting for the

current realities in contemporary Africa. It is against this background that the study proposes "post-postcolonialism" to serve as a leadership-interrogating framework in African literature because the researchers identify leadership as an indispensable factor in the development of Africa.

A Brief Critique of the Postcolonial Theory

The postcolonial theory has come under intense attack and questioning in recent times. It has been criticised for depending too much on literary data, giving power too much attention and making resistance to subjugation seem impossible (E-Notes, 2015). Critics have also made a case for the postcolonial theory to become more empirical and historically foregrounded field of study. This research, however, is of the view that the charge of the postcolonial theory being overly dependent on the literary text is mitigated by the deployment of history in the interpretation of literary works, especially history as conceived in New Historical hermeneutics. This is because, in many ways, history factualises fiction. This explains why this study is endeared to New Historicism as a theoretical framework in critiquing the historicity detained in the selected primary texts.

Again, postcolonialism is usually guilty of what it claims to repudiate, which are mystification and moralism. Postcolonialism's over-preoccupation with colonialism is, perhaps, its major weakness. This can be seen, especially, in the light of the fact that countries like Malaysia and Singapore have since joined the league of developed nations (economically viable) while African countries which gained independence at about the same time with these countries continue to bemoan their fate by blaming the West for all their problems. McClintock (2007), as already quoted, insists that the only way out of colonialism is forward. Many critics have noted the lacklustre texture of the postcolonial theory and critique. Nnolim, for instance, says it has reached a point of mild exhaustion or despair and is, thus, in dire need of rejuvenation.

In addition to the above, a lot of critics have quarrelled over the "post" in postcolonialism. As reported by Narasingha (2014), "while some scholars put emphasis on the 'post' of postcolonialism and consider it as a temporal marker of the decolonization process, others question the chronological separation between colonialism and its aftermath claiming that postcoloniality (or the postcolonial condition) had begun with colonization rather than after decolonization" (p. 22). It should be added that this controversy is what lies at the heart of the weakness of the postcolonial theory. This is because it creates room for lack of direction, focus and dips the theory in fatal ambiguity and ambivalence. This inquest insists that the "post" in postcolonialism is already overloaded and, thus, needs a second "post" as a stylistic,

ideological and critical gesture in a bid to create and negotiate a new discourse in African criticism, as theorised in Etim (2016). Apart from this, postmodernism which gave an ideological motivation for the postcolonial discourse has already been exceeded by post-postmodernism as theorised by Kirby (2006), Iggers (2009) and Baya (2013), among others. It is apparent then that postcolonialism also requires restructuring and repositioning to accommodate and match emerging realities and discourses. It should be noted, however, that in this thesis, ideas on post-postcolonialism are offered as a rereading of the postcolonial theory, and not as a way of exceeding it.

Appiah (2007) sees the postcolonial theory as a commodity, a cultural product through which a group of Africans and Western intelligentsia sell Africa to Europe and Europe to Africa. Many critics believe that Africans should begin to fashion theories that account for the realities in Africa of contemporary times, as most of the theories which are being bandied in Africa's critique-scape and cultural space have European marks on them. It should be noted that as at 2008, postcolonial critics like San Juan had begun deploying terms or phrases such as "after postcolonialism" and "beyond postcolonialism". Young (2003) is of the view that the "colonial discourse analysis as a general method has reached a stage when it is in danger of becoming oddly stagnated" (p. 199). He also notes that the postcolonial theory has got to a dilemma on what exactly to question in the postcolonial discourse and this has led to lethargy in the problems and methods developed. In other words, for Young (2003), the postcolonial critics have left off questioning the scope and limitations of their propositions.

In considering what might come after postcolonialism, Dauner and Foo (2018) call for an examination of the limits of post-colonial theory with an effort geared towards answering queries such as: "Where does the postcolonial theory cease to function as a mode of analysis or thinking about the world? How and why are these limits created? What lies beyond these limits and how does it influence our current understanding of identity and place?" (2). In fashioning the ideals of a revitalised postcolonial framework, the study stresses the fluidity that characterises the Centre/Periphery binary structure. At the same time, it rejects the idea by some postcolonial critics that what lies beyond the postcolonial theory is transnationalism, multiculturalism and globalisation. Recent sociopolitical developments in different parts of the world attest to the failure of these lofty concepts. This is because Brexit in the UK, the far right Movement across Europe with its attendant anti-immigration stance, and the gradual rise of Trumpism in the United States imply that the process of re-nationalism is on course and that Africans are no longer welcomed in these places.

The available option is for Africans to return home and interrogate their leadership until Africa (re)gains her pride of place in the world.

Post-postcolonialism

At the fourth Postcolonial Narrations Conference held in Munich, Germany, in October 2016, Eyoh Etim read a paper entitled 'Post-postcolonialism: Theorising on the Shifting Postcolonial Paradigms in African Fiction'. Post-postcolonialism denotes "after postcolonialism"; it is a term that is suggestive of both the temporal and ideological shifts in the postcolonial African discourse. At the core of the post-postcolonial argument is the imperative of re-arranging the binaries of the postcolonial theory to reflect the changing realities of the African condition.

Postcolonialism's preoccupation with confronting the Centre has ignored the dominant selves that have been emerging in the realm of the "Other". Post-postcolonialism then advocates the jettisoning of Europe from Africa's postcolonial discourse so that attention can be paid to the "Other" which has since assumed dominant selfhood. Post-postcolonialism, therefore, is a periphery-searching and margin-centering theory. In centering the margin, the theory hopes to call out the oppressors who are disguised as the oppressed. It is a theory that creates a centre out of the Otherness of Africa. Such a re-Othering and re-Centering is based on the deconstruct-able self-posturing of the previous binary structures which, from all indications, can no longer sustain our postcolonial realities. In this, one refers to Appiah's (2007) assertion that ". . . the first and the last mistake is to judge the Other on one's own terms" (p. 656). The constant flux in the binary relations of Centre/Other is what the mechanics of post-postcolonialism emphasises.

Post-postcolonialism is technically deployed to infer "pastcolonialism". *Pastcolonialism* does not mean that the influences or effects of colonialism cannot still be felt in Africa, but rather it is used to aver that colonialism did pass, and that, at least, political independence was achieved. The framework also holds that political independence was/is a veritable tool to deploy in achieving or having the other independences – especially economic and cultural independences. That this has not been possible is attributable to the faulty nature of the political independence itself and the inability of succeeding African leadership to turn itself around. In post-postcolonialism, the terms "suspension of belief" and "belief of doubt" are deployed simultaneously to assume, even for a moment, that the western colonial influence has ceased, however seemingly escapist, delusionary and illusionary such a belief might appear. Such a suspension of dominant belief would give way for a new semantic horizon on the possibility of Africa being held largely responsible for her many

postcolonial woes.

Post-postcolonialism urges criticism to look beyond the race and the bourgeoisie-proletariat relationship between Africans and the western nations to the ethnicity, corruption, inept leadership and the various oppressive class structures within the African continent, which are more immediate and directly impacting. It is only after these societal foes have been defeated that Africa can then unite to face their external oppressors; for we cannot engaget the West from a disadvantaged vantage, that is, if we have to fight them at all. Thus, what post-postcolonialism says in a nutshell is that Africa needs to put her house in order before presenting her case at the international scene. Post-postcolonial literature and criticism are deeply political because they see a direct relationship between Africa as a failed state and the failed leadership on the continent.

In post-postcolonialism, the term "decolonisation" assumes a new and significant and paradigmatic visage. It connotes the idea that Africa should look beyond the pains, shadows, ghosts and scars of colonialism, because it is only by doing so that she can begin to heal. Holding on to a mentality oppressed by colonialism can only aggravate Africa's problems. Rather, it is time Africa picked herself up and began to take responsibility for her contemporary troubles. Decolonisation also implies disencumbering Africa of its internal colonialist elements, which have, over the years, structured themselves along points of power on the continent. The researcher can boldly assert that most of the problems that Africa is grappling with at the moment are not caused by Europe. The few ones which imperialism can be held responsible are made possible by African collaborators, who, unfortunately, are mostly in leadership positions.

Post-postcolonialism is organised around time and power binaries whose Dominant Self is a previous Other. Here, the Other is a *dialecticality* that has been problematised. Dobie (2009), having stressed the need of examining the Other in any given discourse, maintains that "dominance creates opposition that makes social change inevitable" (p. 183). In post-postcolonislism, however, one sees the marginal as the dominant. This means that in the Self/Other, Centre/Periphery binary, the Self and the Centre are jettisoned so that the focus can be on the Other and the Periphery which, of course, are synonymous with Africa. When the Other is accorded a "Poetic Gaze", it splits into *it-Self* and another Other. If the new Other is given a Poetic gaze, it too will split into itself and another Other. Indeed, there are many Selves and Others among the Other and there is no fathoming the end to these poetic splits.

Thus, in the first split, Africa as the Other divides into Leadership and Followership, where Leadership is the Self and Followership is the Other. In keeping

with the tenets of cultural poetics, the attention of the study is always on the Other, in this case Followership, since the Self (Leadership) is dominant enough to warrant more attention. When accorded a Poetic Gaze, the Followership splits into many binary structures such as: rich/poor, educated (informed)/uneducated (uniformed), men/women, adults/children; where women are the Earth (ecology) and children are the Future (Africa Tomorrow). Followership can, therefore, be seen as a Super Other because it is from it that the other "Selves" and "Others" emerge. All the binary elements are deeply problematised and should be examined closely if Africa must make progress.

So much has been said in this paper already about the state of leadership in Africa which does not require belabouring, even as it is ideal not to stress that which is already dominant. Thus, attention should be focused on followership. African followership is an important factor in the transformation of Africa, and until the followership decides that it is time for change, nothing will change on the continent. But then there is need to interrogate the followership so as to understand how it has been manipulated by and disempowered by the leadership with the aim of maintaining the status quo. The devices used in weakening the followership must be exposed and dismantled so that followership can be alive to its duties of enthroning people-conscious leadership in Africa. To achieve this requires that each of the binary structures drawn from the followership should be critically examined. For instance, Africa should deal decisively with the extreme poverty that is ravaging the continent at the moment. The ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor should be bridged because, for one, it creates severe class disparity that precludes collective action and, secondly, poverty weakens the people's position of power.

To tackle poverty and the resultant people's power deficiency, it becomes necessary to eradicate illiteracy (lack of information and proper socialisation) in Africa. This is where the educated/uneducated binary is critiqued. The current leadership in Africa appears to be profiting from the mass illiteracy that has been recorded on the continent. Apart from this, the education system in Africa is in such a lamentable state. A sound education system in Africa will contribute to the enthronement of leaders with the needed competence, temperament and integrity, all which are needed if Africa must attain her destiny. The current situation where politics is being played with education in Africa can no longer be accepted.

The men-women binary structure indicates the relationship between post-postcolonialism and gender. The liberation of the woman is central to the liberation of Africa as far as the post-postcolonial theory is concerned. In the post-postcolonial era of African literary criticism, the role of the woman in aiding the liberation of Africa

cannot be trifled with. Concerted efforts must be made to remove all sub-binaries and strictures which tend to subordinate the African woman. African Motherhood represents the Earth. This is where the ecological issues in African literary criticism come in. The relationship between human beings and the environment cannot be ignored by any framework in the 21st century. The situation in Africa is peculiar, especially for a continent whose landscapes, physical, social and mental, have been subjected to all manner of abuses in the course of over four hundred years. Africa is the Mother of the Earth which has to be sustained and nurtured if all must survive. Post-postcolonial ecology urges that Africans should aspire to have control over how their environment and the resources in it, human and material, are utilised.

The adults/children binary structure is the most interesting in the post-postcolonial discourse of African literature. For one, children have hardly featured in postcolonial discourses, having already been assigned their department in the College of Literature – Children's literature. Thus, with the growing attention paid to children in newly published postcolonial African texts, there seems to be no existing theories to account for issues affecting children. This is one critical lacuna that African critics should aspire to fill. It is only after all the aforementioned issues have been addressed that Africa can rejoin the global postcolonial discourse, but this time not as an inferior Other but rather as a benign dominant Self. It is also at this point that African writers can begin to utopianise their reality as Nnolim (2006) desires (p. 4). Now to the concept of historicity and how it relates to the discourse in this paper.

Historicity is a term deployed in philosophy, literature and the arts to infer the fidelity of a work of art to the facts of history. It is the interpretive barometer by which the critic determines the extent to which a text has stayed faithful to the extra-literary history. It should be noted that despite the recent encroachment of what this research terms elsewhere as "postcolonial formalism", in which attempts are being made to checkmate the dominance of history and politics in postcolonial criticism by placing more emphasis on aesthetics (J. Su, 2011; J. McLeod, 2001; and D. Granger, 2003), Lewis (2014:15) maintains that ". . . histories of the political content of these former colonies and their former European colonising power are very relevant to any study in this field". Historicity is then the study of how history operates in a literary text, as well as the critique of that history. The nature and texture of fiction in a neo-modernist postcolonial era must have necessitated the conceptualisation of historicity so as to formalise a science of retrieving the history in a fictionalised narrative. Historicity then is a science of history, a method through which the extra-literary could be extracted from the literary. It is based on the age-long but later formalist-despised assumption that literature is ever conscious of its zeitgeist. However, literature is always rendered

with the overriding belief that its world is removed from reality, from history and that the inhabitants of this dreamy and far-away world are mere fictional parsonages. Against this dominant belief, historicity is that which is relied upon when accounting for the historical actuality of events, persons and setting in the art works.

In a postcolonial discourse, historicity is more or less an indispensable tool, especially when understood within the context of the colonialists and neocolonialists' penchant for distortion and manipulation of the colonised's history to their advantage. Ocay (2008:47) warns that, ". . . Historicity . . . should not be reduced to mere history as a science", adding that "as that which defines history, which is commonly understood as the telling of a particular story or a narration of events that happened in a specific time and place . . . historicity is the underlying principle of an event." The paper in the section following applies the post-postcolonial theory to Theroux's *The Lower River,* with the purpose of interrogating the repressive nature leadership and the rich/poor binary structure against the agency of evil leadership.

Post-postcolonial Perspectives on the Historicity of Malawian Leadership in Theroux's *The Lower River*

Kebonang and Kebonang (2014) stress the importance of leadership to the development of any nation. They maintain that there is a difference between governance and leadership because while governance is more about the indices for the proper operation of a state's political machinery, leadership involves individual's influences in a given political setting. We are of the view that leadership determines the state of governance in a polity because it is the players and the sum of their actions that constitute governance. When leadership breaks down, there is likely to be a corresponding breakdown in governance which would be reflected in the living conditions of the citizenry. This explains why this paper attempts to link the desperate poverty in Malawi to the nature of the leadership in that country by analysing the experiences detained in Theroux's *The Lower River.* It should be noted that Paul Theroux is an American writer who is popular for his expatriate works mostly set in Africa. Having spent many years in Malawi himself, Theroux is not unfamiliar with the burning sociopolitical issues in the country. These he has depicted in *The Lower River*, which is read in this paper as the Centre's retort to the Empire years since the official end to colonialism.

Theroux's *The Lower River* documents the traumatic experiences of Ellis Hock, once a colonial agent in Africa but now managing a menswear store in Massachusetts, in the most rural and inaccessible parts of Malawi which he returns to after a failed marriage with Deena in the hope that he could relive the romanticised memories he

created there shortly before independence. To his chagrin and dread, however, Hock returns to find a post-independence Malawi in a state of disrepair, neglect and wretchedness – a post-independence Malawi that is dependent on foreign aids and charity for existence. Against all pieces of advice, Hock heads to Malabo, a village in Nsanje, near Boma, a place the narrator fondly refers to as the Lower River – "the southernmost part of the southern province, the poorest part of a poor country" (Theroux, 2012, p. 30). But if the country was poor when Hock served as a teacher in the pre-independence days of missionary schools, the post-independence Malabo that Hock returns to is shown to be desperately poor. Already the Sena people are described as not readily predisposed to western civilisation owing to the nature of their culture and values. The narrator notes that "the Sena people were mocked for holding to their traditions of child marriage, polygamy, and witchcraft" and that even though there was a school which served the entire district, ". . . fees kept most students away", even as most of the children were needed in the farms (Theroux, 2012, p. 31).

But all these happened in the pre-independence era. The Malabo that Hock returns to is decrepit both in human values and in quantifiable wealth. The fact that development continues to elude Africa (Malawi) is captured in Hock's observation that "from the air, the place looked just as he had left it forty years before" (Theroux, 2012, p. 43). Yet it is this underdeveloped or, perhaps uncivilised, part or aspect of Africa that Hock and other tourists long for. The narrator notes that "Hock craved for that simpler, older world he'd known as a young teacher, which was also a place in which hope still existed, because it was a work in progress" (p. 43). Hock's fondness for Africa is exemplified in his having learnt the language in the less than three years he spent in Malabo before his sudden departure at the news of his father's ill health. Hock addresses the immigration officer in Malabo dialect; but it is instructive that the officer tells Hock that he himself has never been to Malabo – statement which attests to the distant, inadmissible and inaccessible nature of the weirdly quaint locale. For the purpose of this paper, Malabo will serve as a microcosm for Malawi, and Malawi will in turn serve as a point for generalising about Africa.

The post-independence Malawi described by Theroux is one hit by the mad urge and rush for migration and exile, and this contrasts sharply with what was obtainable in the pre-independence times. When Hock tells Gilroy at the American embassy in Malawi that he is heading to Malabo, Gilroy replies that "No one ever goes there" and goes on to observe to him that people are leaving the country in droves: "Everyone wants a ticket out" (p. 46). Here lies the postcolonial irony; that while Hock is running from American civilisation to the "peace" and jungle of Africa, those in Africa are lining

up at the American embassy to get a visa to escape. Then Hock gets to meet Fogwill whom Gilroy describes as "one of those people that stays [sic] behind after everyone has gone" (p. 47). Fogwill also does his best in persuading Hock not to undertake the perilous journey to the Lower River, but to no avail. In their discussion, one sees the shocking poverty, decay and decline the country has descended into shortly after independence, such that Malawi's Independence Day comes to be seen as the happiest day the country has ever known (p. 58).

The realities depicted in the novel henceforth are an exemplification of the post-independence disillusionment that Malawians were exposed to when the country slipped into anarchy not long after independence celebrations. The hopeless case of Africa is hinted at when Gilroy explains the futility of the West trying to help Africa out of her many problems. It is a case of taking a horse to the bank of a river without being able to persuade her to drink. Gilroy describes Africa as a bottomless pit because no amount of help offered from the West can salvage the situation. There is an underlying post-postcolonial argument in Gilroy's words because it is only Africa that can rescue herself from her current predicament through sound leadership and an empowered followership. Gilroy points Hock to the long line of people, mostly Africans, waiting to get their visas and informs him that the people are dying to leave the country because it is a failed state (p. 48). Then he poses a relevant question: "Whose fault is that?" This question also has underlying post-postcolonial implications. For Igwe (2010) in a publication entitled *How Africa Underdeveloped Africa*, it is Africa that should be blamed for our contemporary postcolonial woes (p. 13). While this study aligns itself with Igwe's assumptions, it goes a step further by stating that it is the evil leadership in Africa that has thrown the continent into its present predicaments, including the extreme poverty that is currently ravaging the continent.

Available records indicate that after independence, Banda took certain policy steps that were not in the interest of the young and developing nation (Semu, 2002, pp. 77-99; Lwanda, 2014, pp16-45; Zeleza, 2002, 9-23). His leadership style brought him in conflict with his Cabinet Ministers, and their resistance resulted in the collective doom of the country, which descended into thirty years of political darkness and underdevelopment. The attempt, therefore, in some quarters to blame the West for providing the framework for Banda's dictatorship is escapist and secondary.

Malawi is depicted in *The Lower River* as a country that has been driven by her leadership to a beggarly position where it has no choice but to accept everything thrown at it by the West. This is seen in how Hock selects the gifts he hopes to donate to the non-existent school in Malabo, which, of course, he still believes in his innocent ignorance to be there. The persona narrates that "he chose hurriedly, pointing to

shelves, thinking that anything he bought would be welcome" (p. 50). Africa is here presented as a beggar with no choice. Yet the point is that in a post-independence Malawi, the country still relies on donations by sympathetic individuals and agencies for its survival. All the infrastructures built in the pre-independence times have been run down by the new leaders without any replacement. This is shown in Fogwill's words which inform Hock that "the train's not running anymore" (Theroux, 2012, p. 55), in response to Hock's recollection of how he rode the trains to see the Ethiopian Emperor on Independence Day.

What currently runs the country is criminality in the form of daring theft and corruption, vices that are induced by extreme poverty. Fogwill intimates to Hock, to Hock's disbelief, of the negative changes that have been taking place in the country since independence. He says he used to keep his door open at night but that these days even dutifully locking the doors is of no use as he has been broken into countless times until there is nothing left to steal (Theroux, 2012, p. 55). Malawi is also portrayed as a milieu that is ravaged by HIV/AIDS, spread by the leadership's incompetence, complacency and helplessness, as well as the people's ignorance and superstition (Hayes, 2013, pp. 349-358; Lee, 2010, pp.33-48; Kamlongera, 2007, pp. 81-87). Fogwill who has spent many years in Malawi could authoritatively report to Hock that back in Malabo the people are known to kill albinos and use them for medicine and potent charms in addition to deflowering virgins in the hope that it cures AIDS infection (Theroux, 2012, p. 56).

The arrival of Hock in Malabo in the second part of the five-part novel opens his eyes to the –post-postcolonial realities in the country. The first signs that things are not as they used to be are reflected in the description of the landscape and the state of the vegetation. The author writes that "none of what he [Hock] saw from the car was lovely: the Africa of people, not of animals. And that was its oddity, because it looked chewed, bitten, burned, deforested, and dug up" (Theroux, 2012, p. 64). At Boma, Hock observes the ruin that has overtaken the district commissioner's house, the locking up of the Bhagat's General Store and the disuse and disrepair of the railway station. At Marka, when Hock asks the men about the harvest, the weather and the fishing, the responses he receives are in groans and sighs. It is apparent that drought has taken over the land, and the drought is symbolic of not only the leadership drought but also the economic drought in Malawi (p. 70).

The gap in the exchange rate between the Malawian Kwacha and the American dollar also points to the sorry-state of the Malawian economy. When Hock enquires from the men at Marka how much they need in order to be able to afford the paraffin to burn the ominous remains of a crocodile, the men mention five hundred kwachas,

which Hock places at three dollars. Such a huge gap in the exchange rate shows the developmental and economic gulf between Malawi as a post-postcolonial nation and the developed nations of the world. The Malabo to which Hock returns remains a jungle of no access roads years after the end of colonialism. The narrator's apt description is very revealing: "Manyenga slowed the bike and plunged into the bush, not a road, hardly a track, just an opening in the high grass that led through the yellow bush to a clearing, a scattering of huts, the big upright baskets on legs that were granaries, the crisscrossed paths that marked the edge of Malabo" (74, 75).

The poverty of Malabo is complex, extensive and complicated. It can be traced directly to the gradual loss of values that can make for the development of any society. This poverty of values is directly linked to the leadership of Manyenga, the new leader of the community who welcomes Hock with what later turns out to be a tragically-ominous expression: "This is your home, father" (Theroux, 2012, p.75). Manyenga's father, now late, whom Hock had met during the pre-independence era had the right set of values which must have accounted for whatever progress was recorded in the community at the time. But with the accession of Manyenga, materialism and greed become the dominant principles and values, accompanied by the concomitant misplacement of priorities. Indeed, the Manyenga leadership can be said to be a direct duplication of the leadership at the national scene, where personal interests are pursued at the detriment of the collective good. Once Manyenga sets his eyes on Hock, his only interest is in how to milk him of his entire valuables and cash. Manyenga rules over a community of children who have no education because the only school the missionaries built and left is in ruins.

The Malabo poverty is so rife and permeating that "market day was no longer observed, because there was nothing to sell" (Theroux, 2012, p. 92). According to UN-1993/95 reports quoted by Chisinga (2002), rural poverty predominates in Malawi and stands at 60 per cent (p. 28). Poverty in this context is seen as "a condition characterised by serious deprivation of basic needs in terms of food, water, health, shelter, education, and a lack of means and opportunities to meet minimum nutritional requirements" (Chisinga, 2002, p.28). This is the nature of poverty that Theroux recreates in *The Lower River,* where the people of Malabo resort to eating cassava because there is no other source of food. Gala tells Hock: "There is little rice. There is no millet. Not much flour. We are eating cassava most of the time" (p. 303). The water Gala offers Hock is shown to be cloudy, an indication that it is not safe for drinking. Hock pretends to drink it by taking the tumbler to his lips and then keeping it down (307). In the post-independence era which *The Lower River* is assumed to depict, the Banda regime gave the world an impression that the country's economy was buoyant.

According to Chisinga (2002, p. 27), this macroeconomic index "contrasted sharply with the severity of want and deprivation among the populace.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted a critique of leadership and the social conditions in Malawi using Theroux's *The Lower River*. It is interesting to see that the quality of leadership determines the quality of life of the people in a given polity, as the post-postcolonial interrogation of the leadership (the new Self) structure in African literary criticism has indicated. In the examination of the rich/poor binary structure in *The Lower River,* the poverty of Malawians is seen to follow consequently from the poverty of leadership as exemplified in the dictatorial tendencies of Manyenga, who in terms of textual historicity, metaphorically represents the dictatorial leadership of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, the life president of Malawi who ruled Malawi for thirty years. The Mayenga leadership is depicted as selfish and shamelessly corrupt. Although Hock, a poetic metaphor for the West, returns to help the people of Malabo, Mayenga systematically blocks Hock's aids and does everything to obtain them for himself in the form of pecuniary gains. Mayenga specifically frustrates Hock's effort to rebuild the school in the Malabo community, and action that impedes the education of the Malabo children, perpetually rendering them ignorant and illiterate. Authored by a western writer, the *The Lower River* serves a reply from the Centre to the Empire's virulent attacks now revealed to be directed at an agency that had, perhaps, long become secondary and almost irrelevant.

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Authorship and Level of Contribution

Emmanuel Omobowale suggested the research area. He supervised the writing process, offering useful insights and suggestions to improve the quality of the work. He also edited and proofread the paper. **Eyoh Etim** carried out the research that birthed the paper. He wrote the paper as well.

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