

The Significance of Employing Socialist Realism in Selected Contemporary Anglophone Kenyan Novels

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Abstract

However, Socialist Realism is an outdated literary, many Kenyan authors apply its features in their literary work. The features help the authors to show many issues which rose in their society. As a result, this paper focused on the Significance of Employing Socialist Realism in the Contemporary Anglophone Kenyan novels. The selected novels were *Dust*, *Was Nyakeeru My Father?* and *A Journey Within*. All are published after 2000 as a result it helped the researcher to show the significance of Socialist Realism in current Kenya. The researcher used qualitative research methodology to analyze the selected novels. And Critical reading of the selected novels helped the researcher to find useful extracts from the novels. Finally, the researcher concluded by mentioning five major significances of employing Socialist Realism in the selected novels.

Keywords: Socialist Realism

Introduction

Fikre Tolossa (1983) discussed; in revealing the vices of society and describing the 'life and adventures' of the individual caught in the confines of family traditions, religious dogmas, and legal norms, Socialist realism could showman a way out of his bondage. Socialist Realism serves as a key to show the problems of conventional issues within a given nation. It is obvious to deviate from the current statuesque by rising Socialist Realism features in realistic scenarios. However, the narration and the tone of the story are not affected by such expressions.

It is the acceptable nature of Socialist Realism; as a result, this part of the study will discuss why it is employed in the selected Contemporary Anglophone Kenyan novels. The crucial roles which the Socialist Realists have played in the given stories are discussed in this topic.

Four different aspects are discussed as the significance of employing Socialist Realism in the novels. These are to Criticizing Capitalism, to show Social Commitment, to state Alienations, and to show crime in the selected novels are the major significances.

Methodology of The Study

The method implies a mode of procedure in this specific paper. Procedure in any field may be set down in terms of specific steps or a set of rules. In the better and well-articulated literature, the

subject of Socialist Realism a set of rules can be found, stated with a variety of emphases but capable, perhaps, of being compactly defined. The Soviet definitions of socialist realism employ a system of standard concepts which are by their nature sufficiently open to leave a great deal of room for the expression of the personality of each practitioner in this school of literature.

The researcher used a qualitative research approach for analyzing the selected novels. Qualitative research may involve a range of data collection instruments such as storytelling, narratology, thematic perception, and the like. The research used the deconstructionist reading approach. It helps to find out the literal and the underlying meanings of the text. And through the process, he investigates Socialist Realism ideologies and practices which are found in the novel [1].

As the analysis of the study, the researcher focuses on the novels, Elizabeth Kabui "Was Nyakeeru My Father?", Florence Mbeya [2]. "A Journey Within, and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor "Dust" [3].

For analysis, theoretical sources relevant to the topic scrutiny were gathered first. In this phase, the researcher of this research collected relevant literature on critical works on Socialist Realism literary theory. Some other useful, local, and international researches were collected to make the analysis clear and resourceful. The researcher focuses on important extracts that reveal the Socialist Realism

ideology from the novel. Finally, analysis and interpretation of the extracts are making to arrive at certain findings and conclusions.

Research Design

Yonas discussed literary work is built from several aspects and elements. To interpret a literary work appropriately it needs appropriate theory and methodology relating to those elements. Methods and approaches in literary criticism function as a means to make the study easier. This research was literary criticism. To criticize means to analyze, interpret and evaluate literary work.

Data Sources

As this research requires complicated data and references, the researcher briefly collects the primary data from the selected novels. And secondary sources will be the reading materials, which write and discuss Socialist Realism, which helps the researcher to find out the main significances of employing Socialist Realism for the study.

Discussion

On this part of the paper the researcher discussed major significances of employing socialist Realism in the selected contemporary Anglophone Kenyan novels. These are Criticizing Capitalism, to show Social Commitment, to state Alienations, and to show crime in the selected novels are the major significances.

Criticizing Capitalism

As Fikre mentioned after the second half of the 20th century, many socialist writers wrote their works for criticizing the bourgeoisie and their deeds against the proletariat [4]. So, the Contemporary Kenyan writers are using Socialist Realism literary theory to criticize the current Kenyan economic system, capitalist system. Socialist Realism is used to show the deficiency of the capitalist system and its effect on the citizens. In the novel *Was Nyakeeru My Father?* The author used Zach, the narrator's friend, to express the problem of Kenya and the government, even complaining against God at the end.

He complained about the education he had received at school; an education that could not get him a job; the government that he claimed had forgotten young people like him and he even complained about God whom he said made the rich richer and the poor poorer [5].

As discussed above, Socialist Realists writers believe that the mass of the society is forgotten in current world political, economic, and social systems. As a result, they use their characters to mention it and to remind the forgotten once. In the above extract, the character complained against education, the government who forgot young generations, and God. But on the last one, he misunderstands the task of God and the Kenyan Government. Because it is in the capitalist system, the rich become rich, and the poor get poorer; the Kenyan government brings this system to challenge the poorest people.

The other incident that discussed criticizing the economic system of the country is mentioned in *A Journey Within*. When the major character Monika discusses the budget of the school and its fund for some projects and equipment that the school needed urgently, it is shown that the question of budget from the government is not

enough for the school. On their discussion, Mr. Katangi suggested a funds drive for the aid of some projects, and the head accepted him. However, the head added:

“We ended up with more goats than cash. It wasn’t easy to find willing buyers”

Kibet laughed. “So what did you do with the goats?”

“we had to sell a few of them at very low prices to a businessman in Lodwar and the rest were feasted on by staff and the students.” There was hilarious laughter [2].

In the above extract, the goats’ story is an example to talk about the economic policy of the Kenyans. The school needed the money badly, as a result, they collected goats as a gift. And then they were discussing selling the goats *at low prices to a businessman*. However, they needed more money, so they sold them at a low price. They should help themselves, rather they were tried to help the businessman by selling the goats at a low price. The businessman will get more profit than they got from the goats. As an economic system, such kind of wealth distribution shouldn’t be created in that area, but it happened.

The other thing mentioned in the novel was, the country doesn’t have a budget for such activities. The staff members would ask the minister of Education in Kenya for supporting the school. But they wanted to ask a member of parliament who was based around that area.

“Wouldn’t the area Member of Parliament help if we approached him?” Monika asked.

“Hey, we never see that man around until election time,” Birset pointed out. “We really cannot count on him” [2].

The above extract discussed how they wanted to ask the parliament member and how they rejected the idea. Such kinds of problems are discussed in the continent of Africa. It happens everywhere at different levels; the country doesn’t fund and help many country-side schools. The schools were funded by local investors and indigenous parliament members. The parliament member would mention the question in the House of Representatives. And he would persuade for additional funds but, they are doing this till they are elected. So in such an economic system, in a capitalist, economy system the richer are more benefited than the poorest. If that school was located in Nairobi, it would get help from the government. I can say that the far is not visible for the capitalist economic system.

To Show Social Commitment

Another aspect that shows the implementation of Socialist Realism in the selected contemporary Anglophone Kenyan novel is social commitment. Social commitment is an ethical concept that suggests an individual work and cooperates with others. It is working with Persons and other formal and informal organizations for the help or the benefit of society. In the novel *A Journey Within*, Monika showed such kinds of character for helping her students. She describes the teachers’ task that relates to being committed, in her school.

... “Perhaps one needs to experience it in order to understand,” she said, but I suppose it is something to do with the responsibility

that teachers find suddenly placed on them. A teacher spends every day molding the lives of young and innocent minds . . .”

In the above extract, teachers play a crucial role in students’ life, by mentoring them [2]. And Monika continued and said . . . “one is not just a teacher, but also parents and a counselor to them. . .” (105). the author tried to discuss the task of teachers through her character, Monika.

In Socialist Realism, individuals like teachers are working for the needs of society. In another way, the teachers were supporting the state by producing good students. The author tries to convince her readers how being a teacher is good. And they are living for others to be rewarded at last. Besides this, she preached being a teacher has fruit that is not seen. It takes time.

On the other hand, in the novel, the character tries to give some philosophical definitions for mothers. When Stella and Monika were talking together about Stella’s life, her new two-month-old baby boy, they defined being a mother. Then Monika said . . . “It is a miracle, Stella, to grow another human being inside that small space in the abdomen.” (106). And Stella continued, “Every time I feel him, I too think he is a miracle,” she said, smiling and fondling the baby’s little fingers.” And, to imagine that he grew in me is so incomprehensible that I still think it’s one of the wonders of womanhood.” (106)

As mentioned, Stella listed out the task of the woman and her duties to give care for her baby. She stated how it is a miracle to raise a baby in the womb and feed him after birth. She continues and discusses some unique and philosophical features of being a mother.

“There is this connection between me and him. I’m confident it’s the best part of my being a mum,” she said with great delight. I don’t know if other mothers feel the same” [2].

In the above extract, the narrator wants to tell how being a mother has value in human life. The narrator doesn’t express things that are directly related to being a father.

In Socialist Realism, the socialist woman was at the beginning a working mother. She married a worker. The man’s role is most of the time being a father. He is not nearly as different as that of the mother. The woman in Socialist Realism is simple. However, forceful, hardworking, and devoted to the family, equal and liberated. In today’s social structure, unlike bourgeois feminism, women are voted, and often members of parliament. She is equal to men.

Dr. Frick said, “the mother should be able to devote herself entirely to her children and the family, and the wife to her husband and unmarried girls shall only be allowed in those occupations which correspond to the female nature. For the rest, however, all occupations shall be the preserve of the husband” [6]. So the character, Stella, fulfilled such kinds of socialist woman characteristics. She acts like a wife for her husband and a mother for her baby boy. Her life is restricted within the family. But such labor divisions break by capitalists and consider men to take and share equal power with females in household things.

In the novel *A Journey Within*, when Stella and Monika discussed love and marriage, they raised some definitions and the motivations behind marriages. Stella understands marriage: . . . Stella shrugged “If I may speak for myself, I’d say the need to belong, and having someone, something, and someplace to call your own.”

“How about love?”

“That is supposed to be a prerequisite, but I don’t know that it is.” She replied. “In the end, I think marriage is just a need for companionships that’s constant, where children are born and raised, and family unions grow with shared values and interests” [2].

The above statement is directly related to Soviet fiction’s understanding of love and marriage. In Soviet fiction, love has culminated in marriage. A good and secure marriage was to be permanent. A relation based on mutual trust, children were born a sexual relationship existed. The narrator of *A Journey Within* used her character voice to reflect Socialist Realism’s understanding of marriage.

The other Social Commitment was seen in the novel when the main character, Monika, was changing some situation in Kostas secondary school.

. . . Mulandi shrugged with resignation. “on a serious note, I’ve never been certain of anything in my life like what I think about your abilities,” he said. “You helped put this school on the national map, even while you were crying out loud about not being cut out for teaching. You rescued lost souls, like myself, rehabilitated wayward students like Jomo, put to the test the arrogance of Mrs. Katsngi, touched Max’s heart and made all of us realize that there is still a lot we can do to change things. . . [2].

In Socialist Realism, people were doing for the society and for changing the society in general. In this novel, *A Journey Within*, Monika tried to change the people around her. The headteacher, Mulandi, is one of them who is telling her how she changes his life. And Jomo, the student who was rehabilitated from addiction. He also appreciated her by mentioning her deeds with Max.

In the other novel, *Was Nyakeeru My Father?* We have another story that shows the sense of commitment. Jimmy recommended Zach to find out who Nyakeeru is, and then he lost for three days to work on it.

On Monday after my morning chores, I went out to the tea plantation and found Zach there.

“where have you been?” was his greeting.

“did you find out?” was my response.

“No,” he said and my heart sank. “Just a little,” he added [5]. In this extract, Zach was trying to find out about Nyakeeru however, he was right or wrong. The main thing here is to commit what he wanted from Jimmy. The other Social commitment is seen when James told his father about Zach. Zach was smoking Raha, a drug, so James told his father about Zach’s problem. By doing this, his father also wants to help Zach to change his life if he stops smoking Raha.

“Your father somehow found out that I sometimes take Raha,” he said looking straight at me.

I wanted to drop my eyes in guilt but thought better of it. What I had told father was the truth so I was only guilty of speaking the truth. I stared right back at Zach.

I expected Zach to remind me of my pledge not to expose him but he surprised me by saying, “I am happy he got to know.”

I cocked an eyebrow seeking explanation and Zach pointed at the almost complete pigsty. “He will support me only if I stay off the leaf and bad company” [5].

In the above, the father doesn't tell Zach how to find out about Raha. But he wants to help Zach. So as is mentioned, he wants to help Zach to stop smoking. On the other hand, if Zach stops smoking, he will be a productive young boy like others. And James found out that his father was truly amazing, as his thought. He folded his arm on his chest and stared at Zach seeking a commitment from him. Zach didn't touch the leaf for the whole week after he talked with James's father.

To sum up, in the novel *A Journey Within*, commitment is seen from a teacher's angle. And it describes the main character's influence in that school, however in the other novel, *Was Nyakeeru, My Father?* the commitment was discussed through a family who helped the boy from addiction. At the end of this novel, a man helped the boy after the boy stopped smoking Raha. As a result, in both novels, the commitment was discussed in different features and levels.

To State Alienations

A novel, *Dust*, portrayed Kenya as different from the one in official historical documents. There was a forgotten part of Kenya that is called Northern Kenya. Nyipir takes his children Odidi and Ajany to a boarding school down south. It is south of the Ewaso Nyiro River. After they went there, the head of the school thought that they did not know how to use the toilet, and they were highly warned not to steal, to use politics, to fight with other students. In Kenya, people from the Northern part are considered “Uncivilized” and others believe that such societies are not exposed to modern ways of living.

The novel, *Dust*, takes the main part of its story in Northern Kenya, near west of Lake Turkana, and mount Kula called Wroth Ogik. Wroth Ogik means the end of a journey. This part of Kenya is hot and dry; it lacks adequate social amenities like hospitals, schools, and other infrastructures. Beyond this, the region is highly affected by illiteracy and lack of security.

The residents are pastoralists; their lives depend on livestock and they engage in cattle rustling against each other to improve their stocks. As a result, due to the above listed; the inhabitants think that they are not part of Kenya. Even students mock them by asking, “Ati, from where? Is it on the map?” and the whole classmate said, “you people cook dust to eat” (*Dust*, 14). And the narrator describes her character, Odidi, and Ajany as follows:

... They were chance off spring of Northern Kenya dry lands. Growing up, Odidi, Ajany had been hemmed in by arid land geographies and essences. Freed from history, and the interference of Nairobi's government, they had marveled at Anam Ka'alakol, the desert lake that swallowed three rivers- the Omo, Turkwel and Kerio. . . [3].

On this part of, Northern part of Kenya is an area of the remoteness of the country, both literally and likely. The area looks like individuals forced to live there as a punishment. As a result, the narrator says that the involvement of Odidi and Ajany in music and painting helped them escape from embarrassing stories of hunger in the Northern part of the country.

... Music and painting cancelled out memories of annual February humiliations when news stories of Northern land famines arrived with portrays of emaciated, breast-baring, adorned citizens, and skeletons of livestock. They suffered a flurry ‘school walks’ and ‘Give your-change-save-a-life’ and ‘Help the poor starving Kenya picnics’ . . . [3].

The above extract stated, Odidi and Ajany are using music and painting to face and escape from reality. The reality was they were highly forced and negatively treated by the teachers and students, so they wanted to hide in music and painting.

The other novel, *A Journey Within*, also discussed such kinds of alienation. As the narrator discussed Monika's appointment to take up a teaching position it was at Kostas Secondary school in Murwet Region. The narrator continued and said that the bus which Monika traveled to Murwet was dusty and rugged. It shows how the infrastructures were poor; there was a small shopping center in Kostas.

“... Monika still found it too warm. She was tried, famished, and very stuffy from all the sweat and dust that had accumulated on her during the entire journey” [2].

The people's life was poor, and they were starving. The narrator states on her way to Murwet, Kostas Secondary School, she sat with a woman with three kids, three months up to three years. They disturbed their mother a lot. They were crying, and the woman was struggling with the baby. Finally, the baby was getting sick and helped by Monika.

The story continues after she arrived at Murwet, she met a man, Mzee Ibrahim Abdulla, a well-known person. He lived there for ten years. He lived there for ten years. He knows everybody, and he has full information about the guests who come from other regions to Murwet. He doesn't have a governmental position, but he planned many things. He dreamed of having connections with other countries before he arrived at Murwet.

... His business was keen to expand the business north wards into Sudan, Ethiopia and Djibouti. But as he often told of the adventure that brought him here, when he arrived at Murwet, he was exhausted and decided to stop for a while. . . [2].

On the above idea, this region forgets by the government, and the people tried to survive on their own. The school, Kostas Secondary

School, was not built by the government. But the government took over its administration and administered the school without building any needs for the school. Their school didn't have a Library and Laboratory. The school teachers tried to collect funds for the school.

Generally, as discussed before the novels show the alienation of some regions which are found in Kenya. In Socialist Realism, such kind of alienation leads the people to work together for some common goals and objectives. Pushing aside can be an outbreak for searching for solutions. Socialist alienation is the cause for people to work together and to achieve a common goal.

To Show Crime in The Selected Novels

In current contemporary Kenyan Socialist Realism writers, crime is discussed as a major theme or as a minor theme. In the selected contemporary Kenyan novels, crime is found in different aspects and at different levels. Socialist writers reveal the crime, which is made against the society in the society; they focus on higher officials' crime. The writers stand for the majority of the people rather than for the higher officials. In the novel *Dust*, the writer narrates a story that happened post the 2007 Kenyan election. There was a big problem after the election. There were mobs, murders, and assassinations in post-election Kenya. As they put clearly in the novel, Nyipir thought that his son is like Mboya, a brilliant but helpless victim of a brutal nation, and he narrates the links Nyipir draws between 1963, 1969, and 2007. What, then, changed about this endocentric Kenya after Mboya was killed, according to Nyipir?

After Mboya, everything that could die in Kenya did, even school-children standing in front of a hospital that the Leader of the nation had come to open. A central province was emptied of a people who were renamed cockroaches and 'beasts from the west.' But nobody would acknowledge the exiles or citizens who did not make it out of the province before they were destroyed. Oaths of profound silences – secret shots in a slithering civil war [3].

In the above extract, the author largely put the horrifying public imaginary. The assassination was attributed to a jealous Gikuyu elite afraid of being usurped from power; after the assassination, "facing a revolt from the Luo and the growing support for change among Kenyans [...] Kenyatta's closest allies reverted to their ethnic bailiwicks through loathing to force the Kikuyu voters to return sitting members of parliament in the election."¹⁰² On the other hand, the narrator narrates *Compelled*, now, to return to the North, he leaves Nairobi with Ajany and Isaiah. When they arrive at Wuoth Ogik, they learn that Akai had indeed come home, inflicted considerable damage, and fled again. This is where *Dust* finally tracks a grieving Akai down:

Awoman, who has run away from home to outspit death, shreds her clothes. She has travelled two hundred and fourteen kilometers to do this [...] Healing and insight. A spirit problem. A spirit solution requires a forfeit. A scapegoat. What is she willing to offer? Soul healing needs sacrifice. Given the extent of the problem – she agrees, death is the problem – to appease its hunger, something beloved and of blood must be offered. Something that will endure awfulness. 'What could that be?' She thinks about it for a long time [3].

As mentioned, while Ajany was chasing after Odidi's ghosts and trying to flee her own in Nairobi and Nyipir was at home building cairns. And grappling with ghostly memories, Akai, weary of the problem of death, was immediately oriented to the future as she dreamed up ways to solve it.

For example, in the novel *Was Nyakeeru My Father*: the narrator, James, told his reader about the incident of his classmate, Valerie, mother.

... The newscaster was reporting that a woman had been arrested at the airport with a consignment of drugs. The woman would be taken to the law courts the following week. Then there was a caption of the woman. She was said to be an airhostess, and she was in handcuffs [5].

As mentioned above, the woman was caught at the airport with drugs, she tried to use her position to commit a crime, and she would be taken to the court by next week. And when the girl heard this news she wanted to hide at James house, because she believed that everyone knows that her mom is a criminal and people probably think she is a criminal too. She felt embarrassed for her mother's crime.

In the other novel, *A Journey Within* there was also an action that was done by a major character that is directly related to the story. After the protagonist, Monika, learns of the crime that was committed by Mr. Mulandi, the story changes its direction, and Monika is forced to choose Max over Mulandi. The writer puts a clear crime for Mr. Mulandi and why he is not chosen by Monika. The story was a dialogue between Elisabeth and Monika. During their dialogue Elisabeth raised a question and said to Monika "I hope you are not dumping that young man for that senior bachelor" and continues "knows too much, and he is trouble, I tell you". (90) But Monika denied it and acted like she had no idea. But Elisabeth stood up and took Monika by handled her out of the staff room. Walking out of earshot, and she told her,

"I am older and perhaps I know a thing or two about relationships. So, I'll tell you now that everyone knows what has been going on ..."

"But nothing has really gone on," Monika protested, feebly. "it's alright," she told her. "There is really nothing wrong with you having relationship with Mr. Mulandi and even marrying the man, if that's what you want."

"Please ..."

"Just listen to me for a minute," she begged. "There is talk that the man is married...?"

"What?"

"Yes, a young girl who was forced to leave school and with whom he has two children" [2].

In Socialist Realism, the writers reveal a mistake, a crime, or abuse of someone else's life mentioned in their story. Because they believe that society gets a lesson from such kinds of writings. That is the reason Socialist Realism novels have a deductive value, and they can shape society as well. As mentioned in the above conversation, betraying a schoolgirl and forcing her to leave the school is considered a crime. Monika was looking for a reason to leave that

man, and then she found such a good reason. His crime was against humanity. He used and let the girl down. In the society of Kenya, such kinds of actions happen most of the time, but the teachers and the abused girls, don't reveal it. As a result, the writer of the novel reflects what is happening there, in Kenyan school.

To sum up, in Socialist Realism actions against human beings are considered a crime. So crime is discussed in different ways in the above novel. In the novel *Dust*, crime gets the name 'murderer'. The major character was murdered by soldiers who tried to defend the government. On the other hand, in the novel *A Journey Within*, crime got another name, female harassment. Female students were harassed by their teachers at school and outside the school. In the other novel, *Was Nyakeeru My father?* the crime was stated as a drug trafficker. The woman was held at the airport when she was transporting drugs within her bag. In general, different criminal incidents discussed in the above novels and their punishments are also discussed.

Generally, Socialist Realism writers expose crimes against humanity in their writings. They stand for the society that is attacked, killed, murdered, and pushed by the government or government officials.

Conclusion

The significance of employing Socialist Realism in the novels is discussed. The first importance was Socialist Realism used for criticizing the capitalist system and its deficiency in Kenya. In the novel, *Was Nyakeeru My father?* Such criticism started from criticizing the education system in Kenya and its outcome for jobless citizens. On the other hand, the novel *A Journey Within* capitalism is criticized for focusing on the market. The other significance of employing Socialist Realism in the novels was to show social commitment. Social commitment addresses through school, and through helping individuals to save themselves from drugs in the

novel *A Journey Within* and in the novel *Was Nyakeeru My father?* respectively.

Alienation was another significance of employing Socialist Realism in the novels. It discussed the topography and its influence on the society they live in. The last significance of employing Socialist Realism in the selected novel was to show criminal incidents. There were different types of crimes discussed in the novels. Murders discussed in *Dust*, drug trafficking in *Was Nyakeeru My Father?* and female harassment in *A Journey Within*. So besides such crimes, the authors also discussed criminal punishment in their work.

Looking at the three novels in general, apart from the established relevance of Socialist Realism as a subverting mode of expression working differently from realism. The writers seem to have used it to create awareness and initiate dialogues about political, economic, social, and other issues. And that is fundamental in different contexts of Kenya [7].

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