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Narrating Tyranny in Alain Mabanckou's *Memoirs of a Porcupine*

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ABSTRACT

Magical realism has been employed as a form of narration in African written literature most notably in the novels *The Famished Road* (1991), *Wizard of the Crow* (2006), *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952), *Woman of Aeroplanes* (1988) and *The Healers* (1978) some of which have been adapted into films that have received critical acclaim. Alain Mabanckou can be considered within the framework of this literary tradition, as this paper aptly demonstrates. All the same, it is important to note from the outset that there has been either little critical concern with magical realist writing in African literature or it has been addressed merely as the remains of a precolonial mythical consciousness making incursions into the world of the realist story. This paper examines the engagement of magical realism in Mabanckou's fiction with specific focus on *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. The paper explores the use of magical realism as a trope that enables one to understand several pertinent issues such as abuse of power and political intolerance. This reading has enabled us to have a nuanced understanding of magical realism as a trope. The overarching argument is that magical realism is not just a mere trope employed in the chosen literary texts but is a literary technique as well as a tool of narrating tyranny.

KEY WORDS: anarchy, criticism, diaspora, immigrant, magical realism, tyranny

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Charlotte Baker and Hannah Grayson (2018) posit that since the rise to power of autocratic leaders across Africa in the early years of independence, artists, filmmakers, novelists, poets, photographers and song-writers have been preoccupied with the compelling figure of the dictator, placing him at centre stage in their work. Their concern with the question of dictatorship requires little speculation, for African dictators and their regimes have defined the postcolonial period in Africa. Within a decade of independence, nearly all African states had evolved into dictatorships or single-party regimes, and the consequences of their autocratic regimes are still felt across the African continent today. As such, this article examines the narration of tyranny in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* by Alain Mabanckou through the prism of magical realism.

Introduction

Magical realism can be considered as a literary technique where the world is depicted in a magical or mysterious ways. According to Cuddon (2013:23), the characteristic features of magical realism are, “the intermingling and juxtaposition of realistic and the fantastic or strange time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy tales and even surrealistic descriptions”. Within the works of magical realism, the world is still grounded on the real world but fantastical elements are still considered normal therein. In a text that employs magical realism; magical elements blend in to create a realistic atmosphere that accesses a deeper understanding of reality. Magical elements could be from talking objects to telepathy but are presented as normal within the novel. Much of the strangeness in magical realism derives from folklore, religious parables, myths, allegories and superstitions. Magical realism is a manifestation of the reality of people and their accommodation and integration of beliefs in extraordinary phenomena. In magical realism, the supernatural is not displayed as questionable but is integrated with the norms of perception of the narrator and characters in the fictional world. The reader of a text is made to see extraordinary events as though they are normal and common. The mystery, bizarre or usual representations in a text are useful in passing the intended message.

Cooper (1998) in *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye* observes that magical realism thrives on transition, on the process of change, borders and ambiguity. According to Cooper, at the heart of emergence of magical realism in the third world, is the fact that “these countries encountered western capitalism, technology and education haphazardly. Cities grew wildly from rural origins and families were divided between members who were western educated and those who remained inserted in the pre-colonial economies and ways of seeing of the world with any number of positions in between these extremes. This social patch work, dizzying cacophony of design, is the cloth from which the fictional carpet is cut, mapping not the limitless vistas of fantasy but rather the new historical realities of those patchwork societies.(Cooper1998:15). In the chapter, “An Endless Forest of Terrible Creatures” in Cooper (1998), Brenda observes that African writers often adhere to animism, incorporate spirits, ancestors and talking animals in stories, both adapted from folktales and newly invented yarns in order to express their politics. The stories encompassing a transgression on boundaries lie at the heart of the adaptation of the

past. Cooper observes that magical realist writers have an urge to demonstrate, capture and celebrate ways of being and of seeing that are uncontaminated by European domination. But at the same time, such authors inevitably a hybrid mixture of which European culture is fundamental part. In other words, “these postcolonial culturally displaced migrants who write magical realist novels are quite distant from the mass of the poor illiterate peasants and workers that populate the countries of origin” (Cooper 1998: 18). She further notes that magical realist writers tend to portray the disillusion in African nations that is crucially linked to the nationalist project in its preoccupation with the sickness of the State. Indeed, Cooper’s insights are useful in this paper that discusses the fiction of Mabanckou, a migrant magical realist writer.

In a nutshell, writers use magical realism to offer an implicit critique of the society, most notably politics and the elite where the narrative merges different realms and disturbs received ideas about time, space and identity. In Latin America, for example, where the people were economically oppressed by Western countries, the magical writer Garcia Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* uses the genre to express their distaste and critique American imperialism, corporate greed and governmental oppression. Fantasy employed in magical realist writings offer effective metaphors representing something internal to the protagonist. In the next section, we delve into depiction of tyranny in Mabanckou’s novels through magical realism.

Manifestations of Magical Realism in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*

In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, Mabanckou brings a new power to magical realism. *Memoirs of a Porcupine* draws oral lore and parables in its implicit criticism of those who use traditional beliefs as a conduit for violence. The text is about how human beings relate and how some individuals turn out to be foes by wantonly killing others. In *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, Mabanckou uses the porcupine to tell the story of Kibandis, thus exposing their tyranny especially in the killing of innocent people. Before he dies, Papa Kibandi initiates his son into the practice of killing people through power similar to sorcery or witchcraft. Young Kibandi achieves powers after taking Mayayumbi (ritual liquor) which make him invincible and at the same time attract a double which will be expected to work closely with him in executing killings. Papa Kibandi’s double is a rat with the big tail, flattened back ears and hooked paws (MP65) while that of young Kibandi is a porcupine. The two use their powers to arbitrarily kill relatives and villagers for no apparent reason other than envy, jealousy and sinister character. When young Kibandi dies, the porcupine confesses all the killings to a Baobab tree. The porcupine explains at length its role as the double to young Kibandi during their killing missions. It claims that, “I was my master’s third eye, his third nostril, his third ear, which means that whatever he did not see or smell or hear, I transmitted to him in dreams and if ever he did not reply to my messages, I’d appear to him just as the people of Sekempe were going out in the fields” (*Memoirs of a Porcupine* 5).

Papa Kibandi kills successful people in the society. For instance, Marapari is bewitched and killed because he bought himself an electric saw that made him do his work easily and efficiently. Papa Kibandi was jealous of the equipment and envious of the savings

which came from the huge profits Marapari earned. His sister (Maniongui) also meets her death before her wedding day because Papa Kibandi opposes the union for reasons that have to do with regions; “No marriage between a Southerner and a Northerner.” (MP58). Matuomona is killed because she refused to marry Kibandi who is double her age. She dies when her corn soup goes the wrong way in the throat. Senga, the skilled brick maker is killed because he refused to work for Kibandi. Loupiala, the nurse, is accused of being too talkative and showing off her diploma is subsequently killed while Nkele is killed because of his success in farming and is accused of selfishness because he has refused Papa Kibandi a plot land which is situated by the river (MP 58). Loubanda , the tam-tam maker who is successful with women also dies at the cruel hands of Papa Kibandi. Mabiala, the post-man, dies after he is accused of showing interest in Mama Kibandi. Curiously, Papa Kibandi did not attend the burials of these victims which raised eye-brows and got people asking questions in Sekempe village. With the rising deaths in the village, his sister Eteleli, forcefully takes Papa Kibandi to a famous and powerful witchdoctor at Lekana village so as to have him examined for witchcraft he has been alleged to be practising. (MP61). Tembe-Essouka, however, fails to implicate Papa Kibandi in the allegations made against him instead Eteleli’s husband Nkouyou Matete is implicated in the killing of his own daughter (Niangui Boussina). Papa Kibandi uses magical powers to shield himself from being identified as the culprit. The object that protects him is a palm nut that he has inserted inside his anus. The narrator says about the object:

“He lifted his boubou around his waist, squatted down, breathed out sharply. Held his breath, pushed, pushed, pushed again, farted gently. A palm nut shot out of his anus. He grabbed it, inspected it, brought it to his nose, smiled and said, “My Dear Tembe -Essouka , you really are blind” (MP 66).

His happiness is however short lived because Papa Kibandi later dies when Tembe-Essouka asks the villagers to kill a rat which he had identified as Kibandi’s harmful double. Scouts of angry villagers kill a rat in the forest and indeed when they arrive back in the village, they find Papa Kibandi dead. In death, no one attends Papa Kibandi’s burial. It is young Kibandi and Mama Kibandi who take trouble to carry the already rotting and foul smelling corpse to the forest where they bury it and then go on exile to Mokassa village:

“Towards the end of the day as darkness began to fall, Mama Kibandi and my young master rolled the corpse in palm leaves and carried it to the forest- buried it in a field of banana trees”. (MP, 69)

The moral lesson here is that what goes around comes around and that tyrants could end up dying lonely.

Following the footsteps of his father, Young Kibandi and his double, the porcupine, go on a killing spree as well. For instance, wise old Otchombe is mysteriously killed by young Kibandi because he opposed his candidature for the village council (MP128). Kiminou, Papa Loubota’s daughter whom young Kibandi was interested in marrying is killed in the

pretext that Papa Loubota did not attend the funeral of his mother and therefore he is a bad man who deserves revenge and this should be carried out by killing his daughter, the object of his pride. The porcupine was responsible for killing Kiminou:

“I drew a deep breath, took one of my strongest quills and threw it straight her right temple. Before she could realize what was happening, then a second. She shuddered in vain, she struggled and she was paralysed.” (MP 93)

Magically, the holes that were made by the porcupine’s quills at Kiminou’s temple all disappear. Young Kibandi is not identified as the killer because just like his father, he had stuck a palm nut inside his rectum.

Amedee was killed because he was considered boastful and walked with his chest puffed out and was disdainful of the tradition of the village people. He was also accused of philandering with village women and exhibiting intellectual arrogance. The porcupine kills him by driving its quills into his head and then removes them and licks the blood leaving not the slightest trace of blood. The next day Amedee is dead and buried. His parents, however, refuse to have the ritual of identifying the killer because of their Christian faith.

Tyranny in Memoirs of a Porcupine

The porcupine in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* can be interpreted to represent tyrants or despots who kill their opponents at the slightest provocation or divergence in opinion. The Kibandis have zero tolerance to any criticism labelled against them which is similar to many of the authoritarian regimes in Africa. In other words, the porcupine is a tyrant who uses absolute power to terrorize people. The porcupine, young Kibandi’s double, testifies on this characteristic of Kibandis that they would not tolerate any form of criticism:

“Young Abeba we ate him because he had teased my master for being thin when he spotted him half naked at the river side... We ate Asalaka when he called my Master a sorcerer... We ate Loumounou because she had rejected my masters advances in public...we ate old Mabele because he was spreading lies about my Master”. (MP, 127).

Clearly, all those who were killed criticized Papa Kibandi and young Kibandi in one way or another; a trait of all tyrants who generally do not entertain any form of criticism. For example, young Kibandi kills the twins (Kete and Koty) and baby Youla because they told him the truth about his character, that is, he is a cruel person who wantonly kills people and eats children. “You are a bad man because you eat children; we know you ate a baby” (MP 134). Mabankou uses magical realism in the novel to expose and satirize despotism and political excesses in the society.

The handing over of killing power from old Kibandi to young Kibandi is similar to power transitions in Africa: New regime is as repressive as the old. Kibandi in *Memories of a Porcupine* is a metaphor for Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. When explaining the dictatorship

of Mobutu as exemplary of all tyrants in Africa, Abbey and Harris (1997) state that during the 1970s, Mobutu emerged as an arrogant leader who saw himself as personification of Zaire. He was the nation and his words were the nation's truth. He was intolerable to criticism because to criticize him was to deny the essence of nationhood. Those who opposed him were killed or disappeared from the public. Mobutu assassinated high profile personalities like Patrice Lumumba and massacred unarmed civilians as depicted by the porcupine and his master, Kibandi. It can be argued that the porcupine represents agents of dictators who commit crimes on behalf of the master and therefore becoming difficult to corner the masters for the crimes they commit.

Magical realism is a tool that can subtly ridicule and parody authority over the misuse of power with the hope that it can control behavior and offer useful moral lessons. Magical realism is employed in *Memoirs of a Porcupine* so as to reveal fratricidal killings by those in power. Such tragic matters may not easily be penned down in a dictatorial regime and so magical realism becomes handy in passing the message discreetly. Magical realism serves an allegorical purpose in *Memoirs of a Porcupine*. It is used to teach morals and satirize political excesses. Mabanckou uses the legend of Kibandi and the porcupine to teach a moral lesson that justice may be delayed but eventually it will be served. Kibandi is at the end killed by the powers of Tembe -Essouka after killing thirty-nine people. In my reading of the text, Kibandi can be equated to the unjust political systems in Africa headed by corrupt and manipulative politicians who abuse power forgetting that their end will come. The porcupine admits to the baobab that he could not to save him (Kibandi) from death when the ghosts of the twins attacked young Kibandi. When the twins (Kete and Koty) and baby Youla bring Kibandi to his knees, it implies that the masses, who look harmless, can overcome dictators if only they unite. Kibandi is harmful because of lack of self esteem. He feels inadequate, skinny and of inferior complex. Mabanckou cautions those who abuse power given to them because if they do, the day of reckoning is beckoning. In other words, what goes around, comes around.

African Psycho is a disturbing diatribe against society by a super villain called Gregoire Nakobomayo who murders because he wants to follow the footsteps of his role model, Angouilima. Angouilima is a serial killer who is reputed for his mastery of the mpini, a kind of witchcraft power expressed in a herb which makes him invisible. The mysterious character, Angouilima, has six fingers on each hand. He has two faces and four eyes instead of the usual two; two in front and two behind, something which enables him see in all directions (*African Psycho* 44). He has two anuses. He has two penises and so can make love to two women at the same time (*AP* 44). Angouilima has the magical power to change his sex; he can disguise himself as a woman at times so as to get away with criminal mission unrecognized. He can change into a herbivore and also take the appearance of a shivering white puppy so that people can sympathize with it during the rains. Angouilima can live almost everywhere such as underground, at the bottom of the sea, in tree tops, in freight trains, he can turn himself into a package or blend into a flock of sheep, live in cemeteries and in hollows of baobab trees (*African Psycho* 43). This power to camouflage enables him to commit heinous crimes but cannot be detected or identified easily so that

he can be brought to account. In similar vein, tyrants also commit horrendous acts such as murders but because of camouflaging it becomes quite difficult for them to be punished because of lack of sufficient evidence to prosecute and punish. The character Angouilima is employed by the author to tell the reality about power, authority magnificence or grandeur some personalities especially those in power in Africa are said to enjoy exercising. Some of the tyrannical rulers like to be viewed as invincible gods who must be obeyed or hero worshipped. Angouilima is elevated to the level of a demi-god as many African strongmen have been in numerous African nations. He kills people as he wishes and sends everyone in a panic mode.

Gregoire's obsession is to become a serial killer like Angouilima, the mysterious figure whom he looks upon as his role model and mentor. Gregoire wishes to identify with him. He refers to him as "My Great Master". Although he is now already dead, this does not prevent the interaction with him: "I would spend an eternity in front of the Great Master's grave and tell him about my days and nights" (African Psycho 37). In some African traditional beliefs, there is a constant communion between the living and the dead and so Gregoire goes to Angouilima's grave so as to have a conversation with him on his mission to become a serial killer in the same way Angouilima was before he committed suicide. Although Angouilima is now dead, he can see everything going on in the land of the living (African Psycho 27). Gregoire Nakobomayo's desire to cause havoc is as a result of the psychological effects he suffered under the adoptive parents and the foster care system. The childhood deprivation and suffering drives him into vagrancy and juvenile delinquency. The negligence by the government puts orphans and other picked up children at the risk of child abuse in the foster families. Gregoire Nakobomayo dislikes the whole idea of living with foster families because they treat him like a wild animal who can be subjected to tests like a specimen in the laboratory. Gregoire, for example, is asked several questions in order to determine his Intelligence Quotient. Harshly, he is at times made to put on cumbersome and warm clothing during hot weather making him sweat very much and suffocate. During catechism classes, Gregoire is beaten to pulp by a cruel catechist for failure to remember teachings. Gregoire is treated cruelly by his foster family and eventually runs away from the family after gouging his adoptive brother's eye while defending himself against the threat of sodomy. Having undergone these psychological and physical abuses, Gregoire vows to be a menace to the society. By being a menace, he is in effect a tyrant and a threat to the society. In the heart of the novel is the problem of abandoned children and beings left to fend for themselves without love and hope and who are trying to prove that they exist by engaging in tyranny evidenced through the murders they commit. Mabanckou in the novel highlights the problem of vagabonds who are left to fend for their own as a result of the civil wars in the Congo Basin. These children fall into forms of juvenile delinquency such as prostitution and drug smuggling as a means of survival.

Gregoire wants to kill in order to get a position in the society, to exist, to make meaning to his life. What motivates Gregoire is that he craves for attention and public recognition. He looks for validation from the media hoping the media will write long stories describing his horrific deeds. To justify his attempted murder of girls; he labels them prostitutes even

if they are not. Gregoire gives himself the mission to purify his country (He –Who-Drinks-Water-Is –An-Idiot) from polluters especially those from the opposite country (Zaire). He considers prostitutes germs, bacilli to be weeded out of the society. It is clear that Gregoire's tyranny towards foreign girls is motivated by Xenophobia. He desires to kill Germaine and other girls from Zaire for offering sexual services at a low cost thus threatening the business of local girls. Gregoire's uncontrollable urge to murder can be viewed as a displacement of the deep seethed anger Gregoire has towards other people because of the difficult childhood he was subjected to. The cause of Gregory's irrational behavior is humiliation by his parents and society. Gregoire feels rejected, unwanted, a burden. This humiliation leads him to be a tyrant. He displaces the pain he feels by causing harm on others particularly women because his mother abandoned him at birth. Humiliated by his unwanted birth and not celebrated, Gregoire, as by way of revolt and indignation that hatred and contempt for his mother and by extension all women.

“If I could kill all the women of the Earth, I would start with my mother, for the little that one shows me even now. I would tear a rock heart and I would cook in the furnace of my room and I eat with sweet potatoes licking my fingers over the rest of her body rotting” (African Psycho 19)

In this desire where sadism and cannibalism mix, we see irritation and injury of the soul resulting to humiliation. This humiliation makes him a cruel and harsh person who displaces the pain he feels by causing harm on others particularly women. Through out the novel, the tear and the withering of the soul of Gregoire will be accentuated as he faces the banality of his life.

Institutions in African Psycho are responsible for perpetuating tyranny which Gregoire is responding to. He ridicules the foster family that has failed to give him what he needed most: Love and Tenderness. Gregoire's tyranny is as a result of government policy of treating citizens according to their economic status. Even after Independence, the dwellers of the city are zoned and divided into the left Bank and the Right Bank. Those on the right side of River Seine are successful and live in a slightly elevated terrain while those on the Left shore are crammed down and occasionally get excrement wrapped in bags from the Right Bank. In the same way that the relief of the Right Bank is higher than that of the Left Bank, its people are at the top of the social and economic pyramid. The packaging of excrement in a bag is a way of the author to mock the shallowness and vanity of people downtown who are deemed very civilized. Social inequality can therefore be viewed to be breeding tyranny. The occupants of the Right Bank, represented by Fernandes Quiruga use their privileged position to acquire wealth illegally and rob women and money from the people in the Left Bank. The amenities in the left Bank are dilapidated because the authorities only visit during periods of elections. The inequality between residents of either side is no longer linked to colonialism, domination and exploitation of indigenous by Whites; everything happens now among Africans. The text provides a picture of the failure of policies that have not released Africa from underdevelopment especially when the protagonist, Gregoire Nakobomayo is viewed as a social and political metaphor of Africa.

In conclusion, *Angouilima* in *African Psycho* exemplifies the despotic rulers in Africa who are cultic and living a larger- than- life status but in the end are overthrown and buried like dogs. Mobutu Sese Seko and Idi Amin, for example, were feared African leaders who lived like kings, but when they died in exile in Morocco and Saudi Arabia respectively, only a few people attended their funerals and there were no sympathies expressed by world leaders. Just like *Angouilima* their powers were deflated in the end and their smallness exposed. *African Psycho* is about the traumatic legacy of the on-going civil war and strife in the Congo region. The incessant wars have led to the presence of orphans, who out of lack, engage in prostitution and other forms of juvenile crimes. The harsh conditions they find themselves in, create an emotional wound leading to psychological injury. The difficult life lived by the novel's protagonist (Gregoire Nakobomayo) is narrated through magical realism. Achille Mbembe (2001) observes that in the post-colony, "the commandment is constantly engaged in projecting an image of itself and of the world- a fantasy it presents its subjects as a truth to be instilled into them so that they acquire a habit of discipline and obedience" (Mbembe 2001:43). Mbembe maintains that the post-colonial polity can only produce fables and stupefy its subjects bringing on delirium. He contends that the only way of accurately representing the immediate present in Africa is not through standard realism but through a mode that is excessive, grotesque, cartoonistic and hallucinatory. This is evident in the discussion of *African Psycho* where the discourse of power penetrates its targets and drives them into the realms of fantasy and hallucination.

Magical realism in *Broken Glass* centers around people who are disillusioned in an unnamed African country. Mouyeke, the witch doctor brags that he is not an ordinary person because he claims to have powers to stop rain, control the heat of the sun, read people mind, wake up souls from the dead and change piss into red wine. Mouyeke claims he can perform miracles on a scale greater than that of Jesus Christ. He swindles people out of their money by making fetishes which he claims can make them rich: "Mouyeke went around cheating honest folk, innocents who paid huge sums of money" (*Broken Glass* 77). When his fetishes (*gris-gris*) fail to make them rich, they conclude that he is phony and that he has swindled them. He is taken to Court where he is exposed as a fluke because he should have made those fetishes for himself or his relatives first so as to become rich himself or his relatives before turning to others (*Broken Glass* 78). After admitting taking people's money, the Judge sentences him to six months imprisonment without the chance of a parole and a fine of four million Congolese francs plus a five year deprivation of civil rights(*Broken Glass* 79). *Fault Zero* has powers to restore eye sight, give a voice to the dumb, enable a man regain his erection and even make students pass exam. With these powers, *Fault zero* is also a tyrant who curses people who do not respect him by making their off-springs have bodily features of a pig. Mabanckou employs magical realism to interrogate pertinent issues affecting Africa such as dictatorial and inefficient governments, poverty and superstition with the view of presenting the reader with reality affecting the countries so that they can engage in a dialogue that can alleviate them from the situation. In his writings, Mabanckou uses magical realism to satirise tyranny. In this context, satire is a mode of writing that exposes ills, failings of societies or individuals in order to scorn or ridicule.

The humorous stories such as the peeing contest between Casimir and Robinette enable the narrators to cope with the difficult situations they find themselves in. Under ordinary circumstances, multitudes of people would not gather to witness and cheer “urinal combat” where the winner is determined by the duration one takes to empty the urinary bladder. This cheering could also have deep symbolism of what the masses cheer everyday in the political class, for instance, the rhetoric and empty promises that give false hope. Mabanckou in *Broken Glass* describes at length the peeing competition pitying the gigantic Robinette and the diminutive Casimir. After a long peeing contest, Casimir is declared winner and Robinette is bound to keep the pre-match promise of henceforth allowing Casimir to have sex with her anytime, anywhere and at no cost. The political system has oppressed the masses in this un-named country so much so that life has become unbearable for the majority and so plunging in dark humour is the only way of making life bearable and liveable.

Tyranny is meted by the people against the business premise of *Stubborn Snail*. Initially, verbal attacks were made against the bar. Then a group of righteous band of brothers set siege at the bar for forty days and forty nights but did not succeed. Critics of the bar resort to witchcraft but it also fails. Robberies are committed but the proprietor remains unfettered and courageous. A group of thugs fail to bring down *Credit Gone West* despite being armed with crude weapons. The thugs were armed with clubs, cudgels, and poisoned spears from the times of Shaka Zulu, sickles and hammers from Communist countries, catapults, Pygmy hoes and machetes that were used in the Rwandan genocide. All the weapons fail to stop the enterprise of *Stubborn Snail* who can be interpreted to be a metaphor of Africa who must remain resilient in order to prosper despite the challenges it faces. The stubbornness symbolizes Africa’s failure to stop Europe from unleashing under development that has dogged the continent for a long time. Taken into anarchy and tyranny of such a system, the weak that do not have the stamina or tenacity of *Stubborn Snail* dislocate and break in disarming anonymity of widespread madness without hope of being rehabilitated.

When *Broken Glass*, the primary school teacher, criticized the government, he is transferred to a remote area that lacks amenities such as dispensaries, electricity and piped water. According to his wife, he was an exemplary teachers and a little too revolutionary. He called his country by the name that existed before the Berlin Conference when Europeans partitioned Africa and criticized the lack of vision of its leaders who delight in the colonial legacy they do not seek to revise. The punitive disciplinary action by the Governor of transferring *Broke Glass* to remote area is a form of tyranny by the government.

Black Bazaar highlights how to deal with the dictators and civil strife in Africa where “dictators are sucking the continent dry and inciting different ethnic group to tear each others guts out before the cameras of the international community” (*Black Bazaar* 199). As part of the solution to the problems bedeviling Africa, the narrator through a discussion with his African friend suggests that Africans should be responsible for their own problems, for example, working hard to improve their economic conditions. He urges Africans to stop being lazy. He uses the tom-tom, a drum that symbolically represents luxury and fun but

which makes Africans poorer because they enjoy themselves instead of working hard. “We hear those tom-toms from morning to night to the point of leading happily settled women astray” (Black Bazaar 120). In Black Bazaar, Mr. Hippocratic claims to have seen Mobutu giving a speech to a packed stadium. Mobutu Sese Seko was feared during his tyrannical rule. However, when he was ousted out of power and later died of bladder cancer when exiled in Morocco, he was buried by a handful of people- a stark contrast to his halcyon days in power. According to The Washington Post (14/9/1997), Mobutu’s funeral was attended only by his family and a few dignitaries in their individual –not official- capacities. Although he was a devout Roman Catholic, there was no official communication from the church over his burial ceremony. Even in Zaire, the country he ruled for thirty-two years, there was no sympathy expressed over his death. His power had been deflated in the same manner as Angouilima’s death in African Psycho exposes him as only a small manner. Mr. Hippocratic in Black Bazaar proceeds to tell the facts about Mobutu and his regime in general, that he is the person who plotted the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the first Prime Minister of Congo. He insists that being corrupt and tyrannical; Mobutu’s regime had been responsible for the suffering of many Zaireans. Mr. Hippocratic discloses that Mobutu makes people suffer, he is a villain, he is evil, he is a tyrant. We should send in the Americans to do a spot of mopping over there! That man brings shame on your race. He is intolerable. (Black Bazaar 33) Mr. Hippocratic blames Congolese living overseas for doing nothing to oust despots in Africa, who make people suffer through their villainy and evil schemes. The diaspora are viewed as cowards who do nothing about the famine in Africa where men have many wives and at the same time always fighting each other. Mr. Hippocratic also draws attention to Idi Amin who robbed his country democracy by instituting a single party system (Black Bazaar 233). He asserts that Africa is yet to get rid of dictators because although Amin and Mobutu are now dead, other dictators are still in power in Africa: “And I am only talking to you about dead dictators here, I don’t want any trouble with those who are still alive... (Black Bazaar 223). Roger, the French-Ivorian and the narrator expound how African post- independence governments have failed to build on the technological benefits of colonialism such as roads, electricity, railway and safe drinking water thereby ushering in underdevelopment, poverty and misery. The infrastructures that were left by colonialists are now dilapidated due to lack of maintenance.

Tyranny is evident in Blue White Red from what befalls Massala-Massala while in Paris. Having been lured by Charles Moki to travel to Paris, the dream city, Massala-Massala hoped to make lots of money and lead a luxurious life. He had been convinced that he would make money to buy a Mercedes Benz and build a palatial mansion. To an extent, Massala Massala is right to believe in the glamour of Paris because of the lifestyle Moki leads whenever he returns home. While in Paris, Moki lives like a church mouse thereby saving enough money to enable him build a magnificent mansion in Africa for his family, installs electricity and even fixes a water pump. Furthermore, Moki purchases and sends home two Toyota cars which the family puts to use as taxis hence escaping poverty. The truth that Moki does not expose is that in Paris he engages in fraudulent activities because he defrauds the people through sale of clothes and has also taken possession of a dilapidated building slated for demolition hence skipping the payment of rent. Captivated by the

magical Paris, Massala-Massala seeks consent from his father to travel abroad. Although he is not convinced, the old man gives him consent but warns his son about evil spirits which could ambush him at night and take away his passport or erase annotations in his passport. Eventually, when Massala-Massala makes it to Paris, France, he realizes that the magical city that had so obsessed him was nothing but a myth, a mirage, and a pipe dream. Charles Moki had used exaggeration, an element of magical realism to describe Paris. He had lied and was not explicit thereby obstructing accurate decision making.

At Paris, Massala-Massala is utterly shocked to learn that Moki had no mansion but lived in a deserted and dilapidated building earmarked for demolition by the municipal authorities. In order to survive, he is recruited to the crime of selling counterfeit train tickets. This is after being christened Bonaventure Marcelo from Guadalupe, a country Massala-Massala has never heard of. Owing to his criminal activities, he is soon caught by the law and is jailed at Seine St. Dennis Prison for eighteen months. After serving the sentence, he is repatriated to Congo, penniless. It is evident that racism and other forms of discrimination and ill-treatment meted out to other African immigrants induce negative emotion leading them to engage in crime. In the context of this paper, an immigrant is one who settles in a foreign country and is derived from 'immigration' which designates entry into a country of non-indigenous persons who come to establish there; generally to find work. This immigration is often triggered off by war, search for freedom, political oppression or poverty and immigrants search for better place where they settle and struggle to survive. Mabanckou uses Massala-Massala to paint vividly the level of suffering and misery of immigrants who are victims of discrimination in Paris. They are packed like sardines and sleep on the floor wrapped in blankets. Massala-Massala is a victim of harsh social conditions and oppressive economic hardships (a form of tyranny). Persons end up committing crimes which lead to the fragmentation of self. In *Blue White Red*, Mabanckou exposes and condemns the fraudulent activities of African immigrants in Paris while denouncing marginalization of these immigrants by France authorities and calling for positive intervention in the lives of African immigrants in France. It is to be understood that the marginalization of immigrants in France is a form of tyranny.

As a result of the tyranny executed by the State and those in power, the people are traumatized. Due to mismanagement and harassment by the State and its agents, individuals in *Broken Glass* are traumatized. Each individual who pesters Broken Glass to tell his or her story has been born again from an old life full of middle class banality, having passed through absurd hardship into sordid conditions in this haven of the spectacularly fallen. Pampers, for example, has incontinence due to sodomy in prison where he is also verbally abused with words like tart, a vegetable from Tipotipo market, a cockroach, a moth, rotten fruit of the breadfruit tree. Having undergone the horror of sodomy and constant verbal abuse, Pampers is an emotional wreck. Printer is traumatized by what he witnessed when he lived in France. His wife had a fling with his son whom he sired with a Caribbean woman. At one point, Printer caught them making love in his bed. That event caused distress to Printer to the extent that he sought refuge in alcoholism, which he colloquially refers to as "bottled solace". The novel's protagonist, Broken Glass represents mankind. The nature of

our addiction whether to alcohol or facile narratives that explain our lives depends on two factors: the presence of a substance to consume or a person to consume it with abandon. The novel is about the way we understand and mediate our collective histories, especially the histories of those who fall outside of mainstream national narratives.

The draconian French immigration policies are drafted in such a way that it is nearly impossible for an immigrant to attain citizenship status. Alain Mabanckou tells the reader through the first person narrator, Massaala-Massala that African immigrants make effort, even fraudulently to enable them penetrate a world which had been closed to them. Those who desire to go to France are encumbered by stiff travel and residency documentation, subjection to refugee status and having to live clandestinely. Ironically, the African immigrants who eventually make to France have to contend with racial discrimination and other forms of discrimination unleashed on them. It is not easy for them to get decent jobs and so they end up doing odd jobs not minding how dishonest it is; the end justifies the means. What matters to them is to be economically empowered. As such, illegal migrants like Massala-Massala are forced by circumstances to commit the crime of forgery of identity documents. Prefet, his accomplice, secures him cards with the names Bonaventure Marcello and Jocelyn George that indicate that he hails from Guadeloupe, a country in the Caribbean that Massala-Massala has never heard of. When Massala-Massala is forced by circumstances to use the names Eric George and Marcello Bonaventure, the new identity fragments his identity. He becomes traumatized. The loss of original identity triggers internal conflict and a disconnect to his selfhood. The result is a serious identity crisis. He becomes an alienated person who does not know himself anymore. Even when he looks himself in the mirror in his shanty abode, he cannot recognize himself. Paris, therefore, does not offer opportunities for social and economic growth as earlier imagined by immigrants and this forces them to engage in crime which subsequently leads to them being imprisoned. Immigrants are oppressed more in Paris and then they return home as a traumatized lot as evidenced by Massala-Massala's situation.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that Mabanckou employs magical realism strategies to critique complicity of African leaders in the form of tyranny or dictatorship. The employment of magical realism in Mabanckou's novels *Memoirs of a Porcupine*, *Broken Glass*, *African Psycho*, *Black Bazaar* and *Blue White Red* is not accidental but deliberately employed by the author to expose the ills of tyranny in Africa. Magical realism has been quite effective in examining dictatorship that has bedeviled the African continent. With this trope, Mabanckou provides description such as how tyrants fall out of grace in the course of their political tenure where they might have assumed a larger- than- life status.

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