

**SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN LITERATURE:
A READING OF *L'ANTÉ-PEUPLE* BY SONY LABOU TANSI**

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Abstract

At one point or the other, a time always comes when the oppressed or the hunted usually becomes the oppressor or the hunter. This is often when the later has decided that enough is enough and that it was high time he fought back. When this happens, social transformation is inevitable as the actions that follows always indicate a change of powers and a change of the norms. These manifestations and more are usually pictured in literature which is considered as the vehicle for societies to give sensitive expression to the innermost thoughts and feelings of individuals as well as the community. It is also often used to amplify and advertise ideas, and sometimes even to persuade the generality of the people to new directions. (Ogunba, 1978) This paper analyzes the role of social transformation in Francophone African Literature through a reading of Sony Labou Tansi's novel, *L'Anté-peuple*. Drawing on postcolonial perspectives, this research interrogates how the novel engages with various issues that pertain to the African continent such as colonization, neo-colonization, and the struggle for dignity and freedom. Through critical engagement with the text, this paper explores how the novel communicates the idea of African identity within a postcolonial context and how it narrates a transition from oppression to liberation. In doing so, this paper provides a more nuanced and informed perspective on the role of social transformation in Francophone African Literature using key actors to achieve this goal.

Keywords: Literature, Societies, Francophone African Literature, Social transformation, Neocolonialism, Liberation.

Introduction

Aristotle the great philosopher had often stressed that there will not be any effect without a cause and vice versa. Hence, for any actions or inactions by a force, in this case, by man, there is and there will always be a resultant effect in all spheres of human life and existence. Since this concept of cause and effect is narrowed down to man and his society, this is why the term of Social transformation or otherwise called Social change cannot be ignored. The concept of Social transformation though not broadly in the line of studies, is a concept that raises great concern to the society and human existence if not properly harnessed. Different scholars had perceived Social transformation in different light based on their various experiences, exposures and societies. The Wikipedia considers social transformation as a broad concept used to indicate social dynamics. The ideas, conveying the meanings of evolution, progress and change on the one hand and the meanings of development, modernization and evolution, on the other, are incorporated within the concept of social transformation.

The concept of social transformation has occupied a significant place in social sciences after the World War II. The literal meaning of the concept is changing form or appearance or character or alter out of recognition. Though an area of study less ventured into by scholars, social transformation was specifically used by Karl Marx in his book *German ideology* (1846) to mean a facet of social change which arises out of contradictions in a society and leading to rapid change provoked by a revolt or revolution. According to Marx, at some stage of social development, there is a conflict between the material forces

of production with the existing rules of production. The conflict based on these contradictions, leads to social revolution which is a phase of social revolution and termed by Marx and Marxists as a period of rapid social transformation which sees changes in mental, economic, political and social spheres of the society.

Ogundokun (2017) while in agreement had opined that social transformation is present in African novels of French expression which begins from self-consciousness, when people move away from, or move out of their ignorance to press for their fundamental human rights. According to him, social transformation is a developmental stage to resist and oppose societal ills such as threats, corruption and violence imposed on the less privileged, usually called the defenseless or innocent masses. He went further to argue that for an adequate anticipated social transformation to take place, not only in African societies but also in other human societies globally, there is the need to fight the social issues such as unfair distribution of economic resources, exploitation of the poor masses, corruption, greed, bad governance and oppression to a standstill.

It is worthy to note at this point that social transformation indicates the change in the form of society or the rise of new formations and that is why Kothari (1988) is of the view that modernization and revolution are two models of social transformation. In their novels, committed writers such as Sembene Ousmane in *Le Referendum* and *Les Bouts de bois de Dieu*, Mariama Bâ in *Une si longue lettre*, Aminata Sow Fall in *La grève des battù*, Ahmadou Kourouma in *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages* among others, have all portrayed the aftermath of societal struggles against oppressors of the people by the people as the manifestation of social transformation. It is with this in mind that we decided to undertake the study of social transformation as it is manifested in *L'Anté-peuple*, a francophone African novel by Sony Labou Tansi.

Colonialism in Africa

The history of external colonization of Africa can be dated back from ancient, medieval, or modern history, depending on how the term colonization is defined. Ancient Greeks, Romans, and potentially the Malays as it is pertaining to distinguishing between immigration and settler colonialism, all established colonies on the African continent, similarly to how they established settler-colonies in parts of Eurasia. Some of these endured for centuries; however, popular parlance of colonialism in Africa usually focuses on the European conquests of the New Imperialism and Scramble for Africa (1884–1914), followed by gradual decolonization after World War II.

The oldest modern city founded by Europeans on the African continent is Cape Town, which was founded by the Dutch East India Company in 1652, as a halfway stop for passing European ships sailing to the east. Established empires—notably Britain, France, Spain and Portugal—had already claimed coastal areas but had not penetrated deeply inland. Europeans controlled one tenth of Africa, primarily along the Mediterranean and in the far south. A significant early proponent of colonizing inland was King Leopold of Belgium, who oppressed the Congo Basin as his own private domain until 1908. The 1885 Berlin Conference, initiated by Otto von Bismarck to establish international guidelines and avoiding violent disputes among European Powers, formalized the New Imperialism. This allowed the imperialists to move inland, with relatively few disputes among themselves. The only serious threat of inter-Imperial violence came in the Fashoda Incident of 1898 between Britain and France. It was settled without significant military violence between the colonizing countries. Between 1870 and 1914 Europe acquired

almost 23,000,000 sq. km —one-fifth of the land area of the globe—to its overseas colonial possessions.

Imperialism generated self-esteem across Europe. The Allies of World War I and World War II made extensive use of African labor and soldiers during the wars. In terms of administrative styles, the French, the Portuguese, the Germans and the Belgians exercised a highly centralized type of administration called direct rule. The British by contrast sought to rule by identifying local power holders and encouraging or forcing them to administer for the British Empire. This was indirect rule. France ruled from Paris, appointing chiefs individually without considering traditional criteria, but rather loyalty to France. France established two large colonial federations in Africa, French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. France appointed the state officials, passed laws and had to approve any measures passed by colonial assemblies.

While the British sought to follow a process of gradual transfer of power and thus independence, the French policy of assimilation faced some resentment, especially in North Africa. The granting of independence in March 1956 to Morocco and Tunisia allowed a concentration on Algeria where there was a long (1954–62) and bloody armed struggle to achieve independence. When President Charles de Gaulle held a referendum in 1958 on the issue, only Guinea voted for outright independence. Nevertheless, in 1959 France amended the constitution to allow other colonies this option.

Neo-colonialism

Neocolonialism is the continuation or re-imposition of imperialist rule by a state (usually, a former colonial power) over another nominally independent state (usually, a former colony). This is the continuation of colonial representations and realities which remain after formal colonization has come to an end. Neocolonialism is the control of less-developed countries by developed countries through indirect means. The term neocolonialism was first used after World War II to refer to the continuing dependence of former colonies on foreign countries, but its meaning soon broadened to apply, more generally, to places where the power of developed countries was used to produce a colonial-like exploitation. Neocolonialism takes the form of economic imperialism, globalization, cultural imperialism and conditional aid to influence or control a developing country instead of the previous colonial methods of direct military control or indirect political control (hegemony).

Neocolonialism differs from standard globalization and development aid in that it typically results in a relationship of dependence, subservience, or financial obligation towards the neocolonialist nation. This may result in an undue degree of political control or spiraling debt obligations, functionally imitating the relationship of traditional colonialism. Neocolonialism frequently affects all levels of society, creating neo-colonial systems that disadvantage local communities, such as neo-colonial science.

Coined by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre in 1956, it was first used by Kwame Nkrumah in the context of African countries undergoing decolonization in the 1960s. Neocolonialism is also discussed in the works of Western thinkers such as Sartre (*Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, 1964) and Noam Chomsky (*The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism*, 1979).

Manifestations of Social Transformation in *L'Anté-peuple*

As the name implies in *L'Anté-peuple* (Anti-People) of Sony Labou Tansi, there are lots of social transformation traits portrayed all through the novel as evidence of the presence of social transformation in Francophone African literary novels. The first instance is observed when the school principal, Director Dadou corrected one of his female students who had come to pay him a visit in the office and who just greeted him without adding any polite form, to add “Monsieur le Directeur” to his name when addressing him, as a sign of respect and formality. This was done in order to underline the gap existing between the two individuals and to indicate that there is a class divide where one is the College principal and therefore superior to the other, a college student. “Ajoutez monsieur le directeur, s’il vous plaît.” (p. 12) As a response to this correction, the author reported that she never took to the correction and bluntly refused to add the polite form to her greeting of the director Dadou instead she was reported as exhibiting an unusual boldness and rudeness not known to the girls of her age:

Elle n’ajouta rien. Dadou leva les yeux. Comme un corps éblouissant que va quitter la vie, elle haletait de toute sa chair et ses yeux sortaient un peu, tourmentés par un lourd...désespoir ? Elle n’avait pas l’âge des désespérés. Même pas leur regard formel. Ni le tremblement de leurs lèvres. (p. 12)

In the office of the Director of the Girls’ College, Mr. Dadou, is the portrait of the President of the Republic, hanging directly opposite him. He had always been having the feeling of being the President since to him, the President was a successful man. He had recalled his struggle in life and recounted the absurdity of life as a whole; a place where one does or acquires something just because someone else had got the same thing and not necessarily because one needs such:

Des fois, il avait, lui, Dadou, Nitu Dadou, le directeur du collège normal de filles de Lemba-Nord, de curieuses démangeaisons de se sentir le président. Evidemment, ces démangeaisons étaient bien moches. Et sa vie elle-même – ou la vie en général, ces trucs-là, c’était également moche. Il avait épousé une jeune institutrice neuf ans auparavant parce que, à son âge, dans cette société cent fois plus moche que lui, les autres se mariaient bien. Il avait deux gosses, simplement parce que, avant lui, d’autres au pays avaient eu deux gosses à trente-neuf ans...On le fit directeur d’une normal de fille parce qu’on lui reconnaissait un soupçon de vertu. Pour lui-même, ce soupçon de vertu n’était qu’une marche du moche vers ses hauteurs où toute chose perd de sa sève primaire. (p. 13-14)

This could be seen as social transformation not only against oppressors but against himself and the society at large. While listening to a local song of a certain Ley, he had to intentionally change the last lyric from « prier Dieu » to « emmerder Dieu », hence from “praying to God” to “cursing God”. This is a trait of class struggle which is rebellion against the powers that be, whether constitutional or otherwise. The author reports:

Il avait changé le dernier mot du couplet pour mettre la chanson à sa propre dimension – Ley avait parlé de “prier Dieu”, lui alla trouver le mot kwamisa. Dans une des langues du pays : emmerder Dieu, c’est plus humain – c’est moins moche, et Dieu doit aimer ça. Il eut envie de sourire,

mais le sourire avorta. Que lui était-il arrivé à ce diable de chauffeur – dans cette ville. (p. 15)

While walking with one of his female students who was his secret admirer, he had refused to recognize her as a matured woman because to him, she was still but a little girl not yet worthy to be addressed as a woman. Inside of him, he had felt like spitting out the simple thought of Yavelde being a woman but was afraid not to arouse her suspicion and anger. According to him:

Ça n'est pas une femme, une enfant – une gamine de la nouvelle génération; il eut une forte envie de cracher. Mais elle verrait – et si elle voit, si elle devine, ça pourrait faire des complications -, elle était belle : les belles femmes se vengent toujours. Il se répéta encore une fois qu'il fallait refuser à cette gamine le titre de femme, même si elle avait les mêmes odeurs qu'une vraie femme. (p. 16)

As Yavelde's response to Dadou's answer of not being interested in little girls due to his personal principle and conviction, she proved to him that his conviction and others' before him was meaningless and registers her disbelief contempt for such beliefs. This response is a recognizable trait of social transformation.

C'est quoi la conviction ? Vous m'étonneriez citoyen directeur. On n'est jamais convaincu totalement de détester les jolies mômes. On prend des remèdes. Parfois horribles. Parfois artificiels. Parfois...moches. (p. 18)

And to register his contempt for the female student whom he could not avoid, he had to ask for more drinks as disobedience to her protest that he should not have any more drinks as he was getting drunk; and so while soliloquizing, the author reports:

Non, elle n'avait pas dit cela. Mais à force d'y penser, Dadou avait fini par entendre la chose. Il demanda un autre verre, pour désobéir à la gamine. La coquine. Elle n'avait qu'à se mêler de ce qui la regarde. Une technicienne du bar vint lui offrir une danse. Dadou monta sur la piste. Il se réveilla dans son lit, sur une mare de vomissures puantes. (p. 28)

Dadou's continuous ignoring of Yavelde had finally driven her to have illicit sex with a stranger in order to assuage her thirst and avenge herself of Dadou not finding her attractive or wanting anything to do with her. From the drinking bar where she had found him after a long time, while the college was on holidays, she had left in anger and in a hurry in search of love and acceptance. This move could be considered as an open social transformation against the class that regards itself as the superior of another. Hence, she was out to punish Dadou in a way not comprehensible as reported when she had in search of a certain N'Dolo, but fell into the arms of a stranger:

Ces mots la secouaient et lui donnaient la fièvre. Elle marcha dans la nuit. Elle marcha toute la nuit. N'Dolo était le plus adroit de ces garçons – de cette marmaille de garçons qui lui faisaient une cour assidue. Il n'habitait pas Kalamu, mais Matété. C'était loin, Matété. Très loin. Mais Yavelde avait décidé d'aller coucher avec lui, pour refaire au moins une partie de son corps qui fondait, ce corps enragé qui lui échappait. Elle marcha comme une folle ; arriva à neuf heures le matin, chercha la rue puis le

numéro. Un jeune homme lui apprit que N'Dolo était parti au Congo où son oncle avait péri. Et qu'avec les perturbations du trafic fluvial entre Kinshasa et Brazzaville, il ne rentrerait pas très vite. Yavelde trouva le jeune homme très charmant. Elle se laissa courtiser. Au retour, elle portait deux douleurs dans les jambes, deux fatigues dans les reins, deux nausées au cœur. (p. 54)

Soon it was resumption, and the first day in school, Yavelde had come with her bottled-up hatred and venom for the male race due to the humiliation she had suffered by her being ignored by Dadou despite her visibly throwing herself at him. This humiliation had driven her to go look for "love" elsewhere and obviously she was pregnant. So at this new academic year, she had resumed with a heart full of vengeance and the male folks shall be the target. That was why on the first day in class of the resumption date her mind was made up to foment trouble beginning from the class teacher, the Reverend Father Van der Weldyck, who while correcting her and scolding her for not seeming to be ready for the new academic year got one of the rudest shock of his life when Yavelde told him to "go to hell!": "Va te faire foutre! J'ai dit va te faire foutre." (p. 56)

The author elaborated this new-found hatred for males which is an excellent trait manifesting social transformation per excellence, and this time between a girl wounded at heart and all males that will venture to cross her path shall not be spared the bullet of this anger:

Elle ne parla point : la colère. Yavelde avait quelque chose à reprocher A tous les hommes de la terre. Tous, Blancs ou Noirs. Flamands ou léopards. Et le R.P. Van der Weldyck avait tort de se présenter sous le feu de sa hantise. Elle avait appuyé sur la gâchette : la répugnance que lui donnaient tous les hommes était partie. Elle le trouva comme tous, vilain, moche, sans cœur. Sans autre cœur que la honte de porter une braguette. (p. 56-57)

The Reverend Father had summoned her before Dadou, the director of the college in order for him to reprimand her. But when Dadou did not punish Yavelde like he ought to, The Reverend Father had concluded that he knew the real reason why Dadou was condoning the rude behavior while also implying that he belonged to a race that tells the truth unlike other races who were used to mincing words. By this implication, he differentiated the class to which he belonged from the others as being inferior to his. This implication is a trait of the unending social transformation:

Je connais la véritable raison, monsieur le directeur, et je vais vous la dire; nous autres, Flamands, n'avons jamais eu peur de nommer les choses qui existent : vous défendez la mioche parce qu'elle couche avec vous. (p. 58)

The last letter written by Yavelde as a weapon to implicate Dadou for having ignored her pleas for acceptance and love before she committed suicide is another manifestation of social transformation since by this letter she had intended to avenge herself and her death and make Dadou pay for his sins; a social transformation against her perceived oppressor which she had hoped to accomplish even from the grave. This letter was presented to Dadou at the police station where he was arrested, as an evidence and a testimony to be used against him in which Yavelde accused him of having sex with her and thereafter giving her abortion pills in order to terminate the pregnancy. She had claimed that her death was caused by the abortion pills Dadou gave her since he was not ready to marry

her and embrace polygamy. This letter served as a solid evidence against Dadou from which he will not be able to defend himself and which eventually caused him his family and everything he had worked hard for in life. The letter reads in part:

Je ne sais pas à quoi ressemble la mort : à un fleuve? A un pont ? A un mur ? A une porte ? J'en ai peur. Mais j'ai plus peur de la vie, cette vie où je laisse un monstre exécrable : Nitou Dadou. Un monstre, hélas ! que j'ai eu la douleur d'aimer crasseusement. Tout saute en moi et autour de moi (je donne à mon cœur et à mon corps les dimensions de l'univers). J'aurai pardonné si j'en étais capable. J'ai essayé : Je n'ai pas pu. Quand votre propre odeur vous dépasse, quand votre salive vous dépasse dans la gueule ; quand le caca aussi vous dépasse dans les tripes, il vous reste une chose à faire, une : agir. ...J'attendais un enfant du citoyen Dadou. Un soir, l'animal m'est venu avec de petits grains médicinaux. A cause de sa femme et de ses enfants, à cause du fait aussi qu'il n'aimait pas la polygamie, il me demanda d'avaler les grains pour me faire av.... p. 73 – 74

While Dadou was in the prison for the murder of Yavelde, the chief prison warden had got a liking to him and before long, they became as close as brothers could be and the warden had made life more easy and bearable for Dadou in the prison. When Yavelde's uncle Yealdara's father, now a Minister, got wind of this nice treatment, he personally visited the prison to instruct the prison warden against being kind to Dadou. Instead, he instructed him to make life unbearable for Dadou:

Cette ordure, c'est mon cas personnel. Il faut lui compliquer le séjour. « Devant un ministre, on dit toujours: "Oui, monsieur le ministre. » Mais derrière lui, le régisseur avait fait comme tout le monde : « Non, monsieur le ministre. » On aime bien désobéir aux petits grands. On aime les contredire. On aime penser autrement qu'eux. Mais pour le régisseur, c'était plus que cette simple dérangeaison. Il aimait franchement Dadou et n'aurait pas eu le cœur de lui compliquer les reins, comme on disait ici. (p. 92)

As usual, before the minister, the warden had replied a "Yes, Minister" but behind him, it was a "No, Minister". This direct or indirect disobedience to oppressive authorities by subordinates is considered as a struggle of the classes as the warden will not obey orders of making Dadou's stay in the prison unbearable. Instead, he had ensured that Dadou got the comfort he needed to believe in himself.

Even Yealdara, the late Yavelde's cousin, had tried to make her father see the reason why he must allow Dadou to be released from prison for a crime he never committed but her father had proved the more obstinate and bent on making Dadou suffer and even die while in prison as payment for his sins. This had caused disagreements and quarrels between father and daughter, Yealdara, who was obviously in love with Dadou. The incessant arguments, disagreements and subsequent hatred and rupture of relationship between father and daughter over oppression of the poor and innocent by the powerful, is a manifestation of class struggle in the novel:

Yealdara avait essayé de raisonner son père. Mais le vieux se montrait très dur. Et la rupture ne tarda pas à venir entre le père et sa fille. Il l'avait traitée comme une putain de service. Elle déclara que son père était la plus

crasseuse des ordures humaines. Et ils s'étaient tourné le dos. Puis elle alla à la cuisine et pleura. Sa mère était morte deux ans auparavant. Le citoyen gouverneur s'était remarié à une sorte de vierge de l'âge de Yealdara. C'était à ce moment-la que la crise père-fille avait commencé. Yealdara avait délaissé sa sociologie. Elle voulait à tout prix sortir Dadou de la prison. Le sortir des griffes de son père, de cette ville et de cette société incisive. Lui redonner le goût de respirer. (p. 92-93)

Dadou had complained to the prison warden that even when he leaves the prison there was no life for him out there. The warden had assured him that there was life for him with Yealdara. His reply is a struggle and reaction against himself and against the society that had rendered him insensitive and heartless. This had made him unable to love or reciprocate Yealdara's love for him or so he had thought:

Yealdara, je n'arrive pas... Si je pouvais l'aimer follement! Elle est belle. Elle a des profondeurs. Mais moi, j'ai perdu le goût du cœur. Le monde devient un vide écœurant. Tout devient écœurement et vide. Je n'ai plus qu'une chose à faire ici ; me laisser écœurer. Vilaine fonction. Tenez, ramenez votre rasoir, ça va me donner les idées. (p. 99)

The description of Yealdara's apartment, the type of car she drives and the decorations in her apartment, goes to show that though she could afford all the luxuries of life as the daughter of a powerful presidential minister, she still decided to live a low-key life style just to prove and humiliate those who think they are rich and could therefore oppress the less privileged and she had also intended to live outside the norm or following the bandwagon:

Yealdara habitait une villa luxueuse, tout au bord du fleuve, juste au sortir de Bandal. Dadou n'avait pas à se poser de questions sur la fortune de cette fille. Il y avait son père et sa sociologie, ses quelques années d'Europe. Elle aurait pu rouler en Mercedes. Elle s'était contentée d'une Fiat sport dont l'immatriculation était celle du plus commun des citoyens. Il y avait aux murs du salon des photos de Lumumba et une de Tabu-Ley. (p. 101)

Dadou's response to Yealdara's accusation that he was not a human but a thing, who never thinks of others or sees others but himself, is a clear trait and manifestation of social transformation against the society and its beliefs. He had affirmed the accusation while explaining that one could come together to the world but go different ways, one comes alone, dies alone, exist alone. To him the needs of others was just a weakness and a hypocrisy, hence his belief that he is all alone in this world. Those were the lines and thoughts of his absurdity:

C'est vrai. Au monde, nous y venons, parfois ensemble, mais chacun à son chemin. Et je crois qu'il faut se foutre des autres pour être en paix. On est venu un, on meurt un, on doit exister un. Le besoin des autres est une faiblesse ou simplement une duperie. Maintenant je sais qu'au monde, en ce vaste monde, je n'ai jamais eu personne d'autre que moi. Et ça, ça m'aide beaucoup. Je suis l'anté-grouille. (p. 102)

This final summation implies that Dadou was ready to exist outside the usual norm and to struggle against the society and its class. He went on to explain to Yealdara that there

were times when he was still normal, when he wanted to love others, listen to others, understand and help others but that those times are dead and that presently was his time of loneliness and solitude. He had however commended Yealdara as a very rare kind of woman and a beautiful one at that, a fact of which he was lying about:

Il fut un temps où je voulais aimer les autres, les écouter, les comprendre, les aider au besoin. Mais ce temps-là est mort. Aujourd'hui, le temps qui me traverse, le temps qui vit en moi, c'est le temps des solitudes. Ne pleurez pas. Je parle du dedans. Je parle pour faire du bruit. Parce qu'en moi c'est la grande Peur. Mais je vous admire beaucoup. Vous êtes une fille très rare. Vous êtes belle aussi. (p. 102)

When asked if she does not listen to the news, Yealdara had replied that she had thrown her little radio into the river. This is a show of class struggle and rupturing her relation with the society that had nothing good to offer except the superior and the powerful oppressing the inferiors and the powerless: "J'ai jeté mon poste dans les eaux du fleuve." (p. 152) And the prison warden who was now in the fish settlement village with Yealdara and the freedom fighters, had reported that he had to escape for his life because there was an explosion of which he was accused of being the mastermind. But he was able to prove that Yealdara's father was responsible for the explosion and by that his life was in danger: "Le Président de zone s'appelle maintenant commissaire général du peuple. Une bombe a explosé. Et c'est moi qu'ils accusent. Simplement parce que je pouvais prouver que c'est ton père qui a fait le coup." (p. 152) As a response, Yealdara had said that if she ever returned to the city, it will be to kill her father: "Si je peux revenir la-bas, ce sera pour tuer mon père." (p. 152)

All these are considered as manifestations and elements of social transformation since it is a struggle of an oppressed against the oppressing class. Another manifestation of social transformation could be observed when Yealdara had fixed an appointment with Marti Mouyabas, the personal adviser to the Presidency, to meet up on Sunday morning at the parc de la Liberté (Liberty Park). This was not to be as the park was fully guarded due to the presence of VIPs that were hosted in a nearby hotel. She was very angry when the taxi driver informed her that entry into the park was closed and heavily guarded and began to wonder why people always talked about freedom in a society where everything was restricted. She had concluded that it was when humans had descended very low that they always need God. And as a mockery of the hypocrisy, she had decided to go and worship with either the protestants in the Omega quarters, the Catholics in the Mountain of the twelve, or with the Muslims in the area of the Star. She had decided to take the longer route in order to have the feel of the muds and dirt of the streets. She had believed that this long and tiring walk will wipe off the odour of her degrees. She had finally arrived at the Saint Nicolas church where she met a large crowd praying to God. She had silently prayed that Marti Mouyabas should come. She was struggling with the society, the religious organizations and her certificates that she considered as detrimental to the wellbeing of all:

La colère brouillait dans le crane de Yealdara et jeta son corps dans une cruelle lassitude. Impuissante. Pourquoi parlaient-ils de liberté dans un monde où tout était fermé ? C'est quand les hommes descendent très bas qu'on a vraiment besoin de Dieu. Yealdara décida d'aller à la messe. Chez les protestants du quartier Omega ou chez les catholiques de la Montagnes-des-Douze. Elle irait même chez les musulmans du quartier de l'Etoile.

Elle suivit un très long chemin. Elle avait besoin de cette marche dans les boues et les mares d'eau pourrie. Elle sentirait la ville, cette ville bien semblable à d'autres : ça effaçait un peu l'odeur de ses diplômes de sociologie qu'on ne sait quoi avait réveillée. A l'église Saint-Nicolas, Yealdara fut bouleversée par le nombre de visage éplorés qui appelaient Dieu. Il faut bien qu'il vienne. Il faut qu'il finisse par venir. (p. 164)

In the novel, *L'Anté-Peuple*, the madmen and women were actually very sane men and women who were secretly regrouping in order to launch attacks on the state and its dictatorial and corrupt leaders that were the true oppressors of the citizens. They were setting the stage for a social transformation showdown in the country; a struggle that will change the tune of leadership after they struck. Yealdara herself is an excellent example of class struggle advanced and fighter as she had to leave and forsake her comfort and wealth in pursuit and search of Dadou, "the madman" and her constant struggle and disdain against the rich and mighty of the society who were bent on impoverishing and oppressing the citizens the more to their own benefits:

Yealdara marchait. Il avait plu toute la nuit. Il pleuvait encore jusqu'à dix heures. Elle marchait devant elle. On ne pouvait pas faire cent mètres dans cette putain de ville sans rencontrer un fou, la natte sous l'épaule, nu ou vêtu d'un cache-sexe qui en se soulevant laissait tout voir jusqu'à la racine. Il y en avait des deux genres. L'opinion disait déjà que c'étaient des gens qui avaient fui les emmerdements des papiers et consorts. Comme disait la légende, les singes étaient des membres d'une tribu qui, des milliers d'années auparavant, avaient fui les impôts sous un gouvernement impitoyable. Ils avaient demandé à leurs ancêtres d'intervenir. Les ancêtres, pour la préserver du mal, transformèrent toute la tribu en singes. (p. 174)

And when some men were making advances at her, she had concluded that men are all ugly and could make one puke. To her, the only exception was Dadou, whom she regarded as a freedom fighter: "Les hommes sont laids, tous; et à un point qui donne la nausée. Les hommes, moins Dadou. (p. 175)

The *Maquisard*, into which Yealdara was to be initiated, was a group of men and women, who constituted another excellent example of social transformation against the excesses of the political powers and tyrannical leaders, and it was through them that the war against these leaders was being brewed. She had learnt that almost all the lunatics in the city were members and agents of the *Maquisard* and that they have various camps scattered all across the cities. Their aim was to plan an uprising against the corrupt leaders in the society. These mad men were forced to dress as such because they believe that no one will pay attention to an insane person. Hence she had decided to go in search of Dadou, believing that she will find him in one of the cells of the *Maquisard*, the freedom fighters. The milling madmen and the group of *Maquisard* constitute agents of social transformation against the oppressors. It was not long before Yealdara herself presented herself as a freedom fighter and member of the *Maquisard* and was subsequently initiated with unusual and abnormal dresses and foul odour to make her pass for a mad woman. That was when the secrets of the *Maquisard* could be divulged to her and where she could subsequently find Dadou.

Il la présenta à un autre vieux qui à son tour la conduisit chez une vieille que Yealdara connaissait pour avoir passé quatre jours chez elle à vendre le poisson du vieil Amando. Pendant deux mois, on l'avait promenée chez des vieux et des vieilles vendeuses de poisson. On l'avait soumise à d'innombrables épreuves, puis vint la cérémonie capitale : l'affiliation. C'était une vieille folle, martyre des enfants et de tous ses voisins. On l'appelait Kaounsira. Kaounsira habitait une vieille mesure à l'entrée de la ville. Il y avait à tous les murs de tristes dessins de fou, des installations bizarres, des baves de matières fécales. La mesure comportait deux pièces, la deuxième donnait sur la plus vaste par une entrée sans porte ou une natte rouge servait de rideau. Yealdara attendait impatiemment, assise sur une vieille boîte de lait Nido. Kaounsira allait et venait. Elle se mordait les lèvres, grattait sa tête rasée par endroits, murmurait, maugréait, jurait, chantait, dansait... Yealdara, tu te battras pour l'honneur, l'amour et la dignité. Tu tueras parce que Dieu donnera la résurrection aux âmes fortes. La justice et la paix seront les seules raisons de ta guerre. *Kalack-Srita*. (p. 175-178)

In addition, that marked the affiliation and initiation of Yealdara into the group of the *Maquisard*, which symbolises a manifestation of social transformation, as she was reminded during the initiation that she shall kill for honor, love and dignity and that justice and peace for the oppressed shall be her watch word. It is worthy to note here that the *Maquisard* were the resistant army set up to fight against the excesses of the leadership in power. In their meeting before the onslaught, the head of the *Maquisards* had asked for a volunteer as a pointer to the social transformation and a bold heart ready to confront all consequences, to which Dadou indicated his interest to be in the forefront of the struggle against the oppressors of the people. "Qui de vous veut servir à quelque chose ?" (p. 180) At this meeting was the planned to execute the prime minister and when Dadou had asked to know the reason for this, he was instantly warned by the chief of the *Maquisard* never to ask questions to the resistant army: "On ne pose pas de questions à la résistance." (p. 183) He had gone further to explain to Dadou that there was nothing he needs to know except that they were fighting in order to take their rightful place in the society that will not be given to them by the powers that be and that because they have been pushed to the wall in choosing either to die like flies or like men and he had started recounting to the gathering how he became a resistant fighter. In the city where he lived with his family, a man had envied his wife and in order to have her, he had reported him to the authorities as being a traitor and a critic of the government. There was a massive man-hunt for him and he had escape for his life but not without leaving dead law enforcement agents in his trail. He was finally able to leave the city, his wife and children and his parents and finally had to forget about them as losses he had incurred. Hence from that time he had decided to remain in this city. Thereafter, he was joined by other resistant fighters who themselves have been victims of the authority. And with them he formed a group of leaves and grasshopper eaters. And one day when they had gone to visit their wives, they were shot at by the security agencies loyal to the government and they too had responded with gun fire; and since then it has been kill or be killed.

Les questions, les réponses, nous, on les laisse aux vivants. Vous savez comment je suis venu au maquis ? Un mec de là-bas enviait ma femme. Il m'a fait passer pour un maquisard. On voulait m'arrêter. J'ai descendu cinq bérets et j'ai foutu le camp. Je ne pouvais plus reculer du moment que ma

place, là-bas, je l'avais tuée. J'ai couru devant, toujours devant. Parce que derrière moi, c'était le néant. J'ai tué d'autres bérets sur mon passage. J'ai créé mon chemin par leur viande. La chasse avait duré quatre jours... Mais là-bas comme mes papiers étaient morts – comme ma place était morte – je suis resté ici, d'autres sont venus : Santiago et Fouty-Mak. Nous avons formé un groupe de mangeurs de feuilles et de sauterelles... Et depuis, on tire. Ils tombent, ou bien c'est l'un de nous qui tombe. Mais nous tirons sans poser de questions. La réponse, les questions, c'est l'affaire de Dieu. Tu es instruit, n'est-ce pas ? (p. 183-184)

And that was how the head of the *Maquisard* ended his tale which is a manifestation of social transformation per excellence portrayed in Francophone African novel. The culmination of the social transformation in the novel was the successful assassination of the Prime Minister, Mouyabas, by Dadou himself who represented the *Maquisards* and the oppressed people. Though he almost postponed the idea due to the man allowing him to sit on the seat reserved for him in the church during mass, he had to summon up courage when he remembered the words of their leader back in the camp. That was when he drew his weapon and shot the Minister at close range. "Il pensa à ceux qui tiraient dans la forêt, à ceux qui tombaient, à ceux qui allaient encore tomber. Au moment de l'offertoire, il déroula sa natte, sortit son arme et tira, à bout portant. Le sang coulait à flots des oreilles de Mouyabas." (p. 186-187)

The novel ended with series of crackdowns against all madmen and women, both real and fake ones, in order to avenge the death of the Mouyabas the prime minister, until the day he appeared in a dream to his successor with the message : "Mon cher, cesse de déconner : le temps appartient au peuple et à Dieu." (p. 189)

Conclusion

The above study has shown without doubt that there is always a resultant effect from any cause. It therefore goes without saying that in any given human society, the docile and harmless citizens who hitherto have been living as responsible citizens of the society and saints could suddenly become the criminals, irresponsible and revolutionary in nature. It is worthy to note however that social transformation should not only be associated with the negative aspects of change; but could also be positive. However, this will only depend on the forces that are impacting the cause. Hence just like in a society where good governance begetting good social transformations, bad governance will surely beget bad social transformation and these two cases are always traced back to the populace. Nitu Dadou was otherwise a responsible father to his two children and a wonderful husband to his wife. He was also regarded as a great and a responsible teacher by the authorities and this had earned him the coveted position of the Director of the girls' college where he was working. One could ask: what later provoked his sudden change of attitude and caused him to hate the society and be against her? The answer is not farfetched as the society in which he lived and worked was responsible for his social transformation. If one should consider Nigeria in particular and the world in general as a case study, one would not but agree that the concept of social transformation or change has eaten deep into the very existence of humanity. During the COVID-19 era, a lot of people were seen engaging in one form of business or the other in order to survive. This form of social change has also been provoked by government policies. Most others realized that there is more to skills acquisition than before when university certificates obtained from the four walls of any university was your visa to greatness. Hence by the foregoing as portrayed

in the eyes of literature, it could be deduced that social transformation is the life blood of any society as it is often said that the only permanent thing in life is change.

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