

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

Apartheid and Exile in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus

Dr. Markus Ishaku

Lecturer, Division of General Studies, University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri, Nigeria

Abstract:

Brutus lived and wrote his poetry when apartheid thrived in South Africa. This means he was writing either as an exile or sometime as a prisoner. These circumstances greatly influenced his poetry and continued to serve as the central theme of his message. Although he remained resilient in his unwavering hope for freedom, he advocated for peaceful resolution of the crisis, he never wanted bloodshed. Even after his death; December 26, 2009, people fondly remember him as a poet who until the end wrote about and fostered peace. Brutus' recollection of his exile and prison experiences perpetrated by the apartheid regime in South Africa serves as a good entry point into the world of his poetic exploits. Many Critics looked at metaphor, imagery, and other qualities of the language of modernist poetry in Africa apart from both a work's historical setting and any detailed biographical information that might be available about the author. This study, however, is more historically or philosophically inclined, it sought to place African poetry into a larger historical and theoretical context. The research emphasized historical development by relating changing styles of the literary representation of reality by the selected poet. The study also observes that the substantial emotions depicted or aroused by Brutus are universal human feelings symbolized by the work rather than mere copying of a foreign literary tradition, or a mere expression of personal sentiments.

Keywords: *Apartheid, exile, modernism, history, and traditions*

1. Introduction

In order to understand the poetry of Brutus, one has to understand the socio-political history of South Africa. The message carried by the poetry of Brutus is of a battle against a vice-one devilish system called "apartheid". It is at the root of murders, arsons, illegal imprisonments, exile and all forms of dehumanization meted out to blacks and coloured in South Africa. Apartheid is the policy of racial segregation formerly followed in South Africa. The word *Apartheid*; "separateness" in the Afrikaans language stands for the rigid racial division between the governing white minority population and the nonwhite majority population. Brutus obviously would get no other theme than to admire his people and his land which were being exploited. And so in his poetry reoccur certain images from the language of gallantry-troubadour, in particular. The notion of a stubborn, even foolish knight – errantry on a quest in the service of someone loved. He used the love metaphor as an image in his work, because it seems a true kind of shorthand for something which is part of his life and his stubborn pursuit of justice in a menacing South Africa.

Like other African Modernist poets, his foreign influences were from the British and American literary tradition like: John Donne, T. S. Eliot, Joyce, Ezra Pound, Kenneth Panchen, Kenneth Rexroth, Wallace Stevens and Gerald Manly Hopkins. But despite his foreign influences, Brutus has an individual voice- resilient and probing. The characteristics of his work are the use of private images, allusions to eclectic sources and the tendency to pack too much into his lines. These facts make Brutus an African Modernist poet in his own brilliant way.

2. Brutus' Allusion to Foreign Imagery and other Assorted Sources

Brutus' allusions to foreign sources occur much perhaps due to his exile experience. He had travelled over land and sea far from his home and the images of his encounter with the foreign world often appear in his struggle for freedom and justice. This moved him to his choice of image "The Troubadour". Using the complex sonnet form, the poet gives a deliberately measured expression to the undying spirit "A troubadour, I traverse all my land / exploring all her wide - flung parts with zest" behind his poetry. He travels over the land non-stop and with passion of an errant knight, with patriotism unmatched. He used this image in his work because it seemed to him "a true kind of short hand for something which is part of my life and my pursuit of justice".

The effective use of alliteration and assonance gives the impression of a measured statement, which depicts the poet's stand and point of view. One notices that images of eroticism in the first four lines buttress his point: "wide-flung parts", "her secret thickets", "loved one", "mistress favour" and "breast", are used interchangeably with that of politics, to drive home the poet's message: that is, his underlying love and devotion to his mother land, where he should be free to live and express himself but which is being denied him by the oppressive racist system. Below are the first four lines in full:

A troubadour, I traverse all my land / exploring all her wide-flung parts with zest probing in motion sweeter far than rest / her secret thickest with an / amorous hand:

On the other hand, "... *delighting in the rest / of will...*" shows his ability to stand and fight for his convictions. While words like 'arrest' and 'unarmed' show the traumatic experiences and the defenselessness of the poet against his captors.

In addition to borrowing the sonnet form from English poetry, Brutus's poetry also bears echo of the *Bible* and allusions to world events. For instance, 'the Saracened', the verb form of 'saracen', in line 7 makes allusion to Arab Muslims known as the 'Saracens'. The poet refers to himself as a defender of justice i.e. Knight. He describes his opponents; the whites and their war machines as 'Saracens'. And in line 9 "Thus, Quixoting till a cast-off of my land" the poet refers to Don Quixote, the eponymous hero of *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, the novel by the 16th century Spanish novelist Miguel de Cervantes. The character was known for foolish acts; therefore "a quixotic act" is a futile and ridiculous act. These allusions are similar to Soyinka's reference to the Sibyl, Ulysses, Hamlet, and Joseph.

Brutus poem "This Sun on this Rubble", is basically a meditation on the ways of nature and their possible implication for man. The poem starts with a meditation on the sun shining on a broken heap of earth after rain. Look at the starting lines:

The sun on this rubble after rain. / Bruised though we must be / some easement we require /unarguably, though we argue against desire.

The idea Brutus is conveying here using the image of the sun, which symbolizes nature's periodic blessing, is that there is a temporary respite to the oppressed blacks in South Africa. The poet in the first four lines above, is being prophetic "some easement we require", yet he was not too sure because of the nature of the system of apartheid "though we argue against desire" which was not predictable, perhaps making reference to the temporary relief they experienced after the Sharpeville massacre. In the other part of the poem, he compares this temporary relief in the pain suffered by his people to ways of nature which is provided by the sun after the rain. These lines present a graphic image of men broken by oppression and torture.

Under jackboots our bones and spirits crunch / forced into sweat-tear -sodden slush / -now glow- lipped by this sudden touch:-sun-stripped perhaps, our bones may later sing / or spell out some malignant nemesis / Sharpevilled to spear points for revenging

"Crunch" here suggests critical moment experienced by the blacks, and "Sharpeville to spearpoints for revenging" tend to suggest that the oppressed blacks have been sharpened to outburst of violence and bloodshed. The last stanza of the poem echoes the *Bible* and Christian mode of worship, where Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication are offered in silent prayers at the beginning of worship.

but now our pride-dumped mouths are wide / in wordless supplication -are grateful for the least relief from pain /- like this sun on this debris after rain.

This poem shows how Brutus, a characteristic Modernist, uses assorted sources and compresses so much meaning into few words, images, and metaphors to convey his thought.

The poem "Sibyl" is an allusion to Greek mythology. Like Soyinka's "Sibilant", Brutus uses the name of the old woman of the oracle who makes prophecies of doom, in order to project his own prophecy about the inevitable bloody destruction that would be the result of the political and social instability in South Africa. In this short poem the Poet imagined the future state of affairs of South Africa. The clusters of negative, pessimistic "her seer's eye saw nothing that the birds did not" and bleak images "autumn's austere nemesis would come to cleanse?" he uses spell doom. The poem reads:

Her seer's eye saw nothing that the birds did not, / her words were sharp and simple as their song; / that mutant winds had honed her teeth on ice that sap ran viscous in the oaks and senile pines- / these things were common cease except to those / whose guilty fear had made them comatose / who could not guess that red coagulate stains / would burst from summer's grossly swollen veins / or spell out from the leaves opulent decadence / that autumn's austere nemesis would come to cleanse?

The accusation that African Modernist poets drag foreign images and forms into their poetry is, to certain extent, proved correct in this poem. Brutus makes reference to 'autumn', 'summer' and 'ice', foreign images that African critics consider out of their range of knowledge. But these are also available images to Brutus considering the fact that the poet spent long time in exile where these images are prominent. And since the spirit of that period allows room for such artistic experimentations; Brutus being inclined to Modernism therefore was very diverse in his choice of materials.

Erotic images are copiously used by Brutus in his poems collected under the title "Sirens, Knuckles and Boots" especially, the poems which deal mostly with violence in South Africa. Examples of such include: "A Common Hate Enriched Our Love and Us", "Night Song City", "The Rosy Aureole of Your Attention" and "I am Out of Love with You Now". As mentioned earlier, the poet has the habit of referring to South Africa, the land of his birth, as a lover, a mistress. And like someone in love, he holds passionately to the object of his love, the land and laments its discretion by people he regards as enemies, the whites. He also laments his temporary estrangement with the land, his love, as shown in these lines:

I am out of love with you now; /Cold-sodden in my misery

Your contours and allurements / cannot move. / I murmur old endearments to revive / Our old familiar glow again / like sapless autumn leaves / they rasp in vain

"Night Song City" typifies the poet's romance with his land. Here Brutus brings out the image of mistress that he loves so much. In the event of crises, he persuades her to "sleep well" despite "the harbor lights glaze over restless docks, / police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets;". The following lines give vivid picture of the type of houses the South Africans live in "shanties creaking iron sheets", which in fact make them further vulnerable to "violence like a bug-infested rag is tossed / and fear is imminent as sound / in the wind-swung bell;". This is a daily experience which had formed an aspect

of the black South African. Yet Brutus in his characteristic stubbornness of hope urges his Mistress South Africa to endure and "sleep well".

the long days anger pants from sand and rocks; /but for this breathing night at last, /my land, my love, sleep well.

The uncertainty of life, threats of death, despair and violence in South Africa are clearly depicted by Brutus in this poem. He is angry with those he refers to as enemies of the land: the violators and desecrators of his love, the land. To add to the torture are the police cars which like cockroaches ransack the cities in search of real and imagined criminals to clamp down on. The ghetto areas, which blacks occupy, are places of constant terror and police brutality. Brutus condemns this inhuman treatment in his usual resilient and controlled way, not allowing his anger to overshadow his poetic style "violence like a bug-infested rag is tossed/ and fear is imminent as sound /in the wind-swung bell;"

It is typical of Brutus to lament his unconsummated love with the land, his love. The last poem from "Siren, Knuckles and Boots" is a good example. It reads:

When last I revealed / All your length I vowed to Savour your most beauteous curves With such devout and lingering delight / That they would etch themselves into my brain /To comfort me throughout the prisoned night.

But waking early in the frosty dawn /And finding you disheveled and unkempt / My heart arose as though you shared your best /And then I wryly knew myself to be / The slave of a habitual love.

The Modernist feature in the poet's use of these erotic images is that since apartheid has denied him the chance to live and interact freely in the land he loves, he consequently went into exile, this causes him to have a lot of sentimental attachment to the land, his love. And because he could not find suitable words and images to express his love, he settles for erotic images, which are the ones he deems fit to use in expressing his bitter experiences. This is understandable if we recall the fact that the poet is free in this period to express his experiences, any how he deems fit without inhibitions; and that there is no limit to the height his imagination can go in doing this.

"In the Dove Grey Dove-Soft Dark" taken from 'After Exile' represents the Modernist's emphasis on the use of images. One notices a pile-up of images in the poem. This is to evoke feelings in the reader, rather than describe the situations; the poet chooses to depict them in concrete images and metaphors. He achieves this modernist evocation of feelings by making allusions to eclectic sources. By so doing he hopes to arouse the senses of sight "the dove-grey dove-soft dusk", touch "walls softened", feeling "alive and tender with a mist of spray from the sea," and hearing of the reader to the situation he describes. See these lines for instance:

In the dove -grey dove -soft dusk / When the walls softened to frozen smoke / and the rigidity melted / receiving to miles, / when the air was alive and tender / with a mist of spray from the sea, /the air luminous and the sky bright with the dulling glimmer / of cooling molten lead

'I am the Tree ...', 'I must conjure my past ...', 'Burry the great Duke...' and 'Today in Prison' are also taken from "After Exile", and together they represent a composite picture of life of the oppressed blacks of South Africa. The first poem presents three different images of existence as a struggle unavoidably accomplished by protest. The images are specific and historic as well as natural and universal. See these lines:

I am the tree / Creaking in the wind / outside in the night /wisted and stubborn: /I am the sheet /Of the twisted tin shack / Grating in the wind

In a shrill sad protest: /I am the voice /Crying in the night /And will not be consoled.

In stanza 1 and 2, the poet refers to himself as both the 'tree' and 'the sheet,' 'creaking' and 'twisting', that is, protesting against the inhuman laws of South Africa. Stanza 3 makes allusion to Mathew Chapter 2 vs. 8 in the *Bible* where a voice was heard in Ramah and Rachael wailing and lamenting over the death of his children. In this poem, Rachael's lamentation for the innocent children massacred on the orders of King Herod in his attempt to eliminate the baby Jesus has become the poet's representative of those who mourn injustice and operation in South Africa.

The second poem tries to figure out the origins of oppression and protest in the history of man. He indirectly acknowledges responsibility for this painful existence. This is similar to the journey of discovery Soyinka undergoes in "Idanre" in order to figure out the origins of wickedness and destruction in man:

I must conjure from past / The dim and unfavored specter of a lave, /Of a bound woman, whose /Bound figure pleads silentlyAnd whose blood I must acknowledge in my own.

The poet attributes his plight to his wicked ancestors who sold their relatives into slavery just out of greed and love for material things. He does this albeit subtly in concealed images. A hasty reader will not make sense of his allusions in the poem.

The third poem approaches the problem of oppression and protest by the path of possible reconciliation and compromise. Typical of Brutus, he has always wished for a peaceful reconciliation of the conflict between blacks and whites in South Africa. He, as always, not given to violence implores dialogue as a better way for amicable settlement.

The final poem of the group simply re-states and presents very poignantly the condition of the oppressed and the deprived in South Africa; a condition relieved only by the simple ritual of a song which affirms hope deferred but not destroyed. See these lines:

Today in prison / By tacit agreement / They will sing just one song:

Nkosi Sikekela Africa.

"/Nkosi Sikekela Africa" meaning: "God save Africa"; the anthem of the African National Congress and a revolutionary and rallying statement.

'At last the roses burn...' is similar to the poem above, in that it re-echoes the nostalgic feelings the poetic has over his land, South Africa. Though surrounded by luxury and comfort abroad, yet he regrets his estrangement from home. His heart craves and pants for his dear land, South Africa and he grieves for it. See these lines:

At last the roses burns / red flames and orange; / tea-rose pink and white smoldering in the dark foliage /in the dark-green lustons leaves: / the world is ripening and abundant /replete with its joyous growths /while my heart, unseasonal grieves.

For a poet so oppressed, suppressed, dehumanized and disoriented like Brutus, the only way he can keep in touch with his mother land is through this undying devotion and declaration of romantic love. It may be necessary to also recollect here that the Modernist poets recall their overflow of powerful feelings not in tranquility but in situations of chaos. The poet responds to his immediate environment the way he deems fit, because, as mentioned above, modernist allows poetry to operate in a liberated medium. The conception of poetry as rigid order of words has become obsolete, giving way to experimentation with language and style. The above analysis demonstrates Brutus's use of foreign and diverse sources to convey his message, typical characteristics of Modernist poets.

3. Experimentation with Language

Typical of Modernist poets, Brutus' verse technique, is solidly in the Modernist camp, consisting of ambiguity, irony, complex images, and his language is closely knit texture, highly condensed and full of allusions to eclectic sources and symbols. Brutus like other Modernist Poets express the concerns of Modernism in a form which itself breaks radically away from previous poetic tradition.

Brutus' involvement in political activism and related protests against racism and the apartheid laws of South Africa led to his arrest and subsequent imprisonment. But even in prison, they could not repress his resilient spirit and avowed commitment to his cause. He therefore kept the vision alive by constantly writing notes in the form of letters to his Aunt, Martha. This was how Brutus beat the restriction to write publicly. This is in every sense not a conventional letter. One can observe that the letters are so compact and condensed. This is a very good illustration of Modernist poetry; saying so much in so few words. These letters are in the same fashion with Soyinka's "purgatory" and Arthur Notje's "Letter from Pretoria Central Prison". These poets demonstrate their masterly use of language to depict life in captivity, where hatred for injustice is presented in discretion.

Letters 1 - 10 describe the conditions in the cell. The prisoners engage in violent fights using all manner of dangerous weapons on one another. For instance, "Letter 1" shows how dangerous weapons are hidden even in "anus" to be used on one another. But Brutus uses words, phrases or clauses that are mild about the gravity of the problem, like "useful bits of steel", "disciplined anus", "morning air" and "soft and vulnerable is naked flesh", to confront his tormentors in subtleness. He outlined the tools of violence in the prison "nails", "screws", "metals" and expressed surprise as very "chilled, appalled" that despite the practice of seizing these things at point of entry, they still surface in times of need.

The prisoners also engage in perverse sexual relationships like homosexuality and sodomy. The poet is shocked by this horrifying display of bestiality behavior among the inmates. Gruesome images are used to depict this barbaric practice. Letters 7 and 8 for instance, shows this clearly and most painful are "those who beg for it/ who beg for sexual assault...". Look at these lines from Letter 7 for example:

Perhaps most terrible are those who beg for it, / Who beg for sexual assault... / It is regarded as the depths of absolute and ludicrous submission. / And so perhaps it is. / But it has seemed to me one of the most terrible /Most rendingly pathetic of all a prisoner's predicaments.

Man by this prison condition had been reduced to the status of animal. They even changed roles "Blue Champaign" they call him - the most popular "girl" in the place. This devilish change of sexual role is one of the aspects of dehumanization that apartheid unleashed on South Africans. The letter presents an image of man at the height of bestiality, it reads:

"Blue champagne" they called him- / the most popular "girl" in the place; / so exciting perhaps, or satisfying: young certainly, / with youthful curves- this was most highly prized.... / and he had become that most perverse among / the perverted; /a "man" in the homosexual embrace /who once had been the "woman".

Here the dignity of the African "man" is taken away and he becomes "woman". In most African society's, this is not an acceptable turn of event; a 'man' in the homosexual embrace who once had been the 'woman'. Thus Brutus in his "Letter 8" is experimenting with language to present a picture of man's inhumanity to man but in non-militant way. "Prison" serves as metaphor for the entire South Africa and the prison conditions stand as a constant reminder to the overlords of the Africans are passing through during apartheid. One notices here the height of bestiality these inmates have reached and the consequent emasculation, dehumanization and damage done to their personality. This victim's distorted and mangled personality "he had become that most perverse among the perverted" was due mainly, to the protracted incarceration and extremely callous living condition suffered in prison. But typical of the Modernist poets, Brutus makes the strongest statement in subtle, disguised images and metaphors, often concealing much in simple, amorous language.

4. Subject and Form

Closely linked with language is experimentation with subject and form. This in Soyinka's work is embedded. There is no practical deviation in Soyinka's poetry as found in Brutus. In *Stubborn Hope*, it would appear that the experience of exile and the compelling need for urgent militant action against apartheid forces him to abandon his Western Modernist style to his own form of Modernism due to the desire for immediacy of communication. The ability to shift from earlier literary convention is itself a Modernist tendency which Brutus successfully mastered and put into use. He decided that henceforth his poetry would contain "no ornament, absolutely none" and that rather than writing for other poets or students of literature, he would write for the ordinary man on the street, for the ordinary woman who is not knowledgeable in matters and for the ordinary youth that hangs out at the airport carrying baggage. He developed his

own voice, make deliberate attempt to address the situation on ground in a direct manner without hiding facts in images and symbols. The poem below is a demonstration of his voicing for freedom. He started with desire to “celebrate victory”, urging his fellow to “struggle “move on further victories” until total freedom “free” is achieved. This practice of saying so much in just three lines of a Haiku, shifts from his earlier forms. The poem reads: *Celebrate Geronimo's victory! /Forward to further victories! / Free Mumia!*

This is the method of a plain-speaking public orator whose diction clarifies and expresses the passion of the community on an occasion that demands specific action, not self-reflective contemplation of the eternal verities of the human condition. At appropriate times, this voice can be exhortative, at other times, stately, accurately summarizing the particulars of the common cause. As a prolific modernist, Brutus responds to situations as they come. He had no moment of tranquility as the romantic poets had; he documented his experience extemporaneously fast and at the moment. This is a landmark in the growth and development of modernism with an African quality.

Brutus did not, however, abandon his lyrical voice exclusively for the common, everyday voice of the collective “we”. The Romantic Modernist poet still fumed desire *writhes in me:/ a red cloth rose / a flame in storm lamp, /the tawny amber of cognac /at the evil of apartheid.*

Here the “I” of the romantic lyricist persists, forging images that reflect the poets’ personal emotions. In contrast, a poem such as “Zocalo” written March 11, 2001, also reflects technically on a sequence of images, but here the images are pictorial and used to visualize the general political and economic concerns of the collective “we”. The poem reads:*It stretches for great distances / that enormous expanse, / harsh surface underfoot /immense, a great square / confronting a vast edifice; / nearby, steps, a cathedra- / Maria Imperatriz, possibly / mothers, babes at their breasts...*

“Zocalo” is one of his communal poems fashioned from direct, abstract statements, eschewing imagery that could be seen as exclusively poetical or personal. Brutus, deviated from traditional Modernist techniques and created a remarkable poetry for the public occasion: imagistic when appropriate to intensify the message, philosophically descriptive when contemplating the root causes of injustice, but primarily constructed with an almost prose-like verse technique that defines the message as clearly as possible, emphasizing the general and the abstract not the specific and the particular.

In 1973, Brutus visited China and was influenced by the Haiku (*a three-line poem with 5 syllables in the first and last lines and seven syllables in the second, usually with emphasis on the season or a naturalistic theme*). He had used the Haiku to express his deepest feelings of anguish and despair, of joy and accomplishment, as well as his memories of loves lost, and his longings for absent loves. One example of a poignant haiku poem of love and mortality is:*That gentle touch on / your cheek many years from now:/ ashes from my urn.* His ‘Haiku’ poems contain a number of similar personal moments into gem-like images “gentle touch your cheek” that scintillate with the inner soul of a man who dedicated his outer life “ashes from my urn”. This recollects the Urn of the “Ode to the Grecian Urn” which is the image of the final rest of man. Up to that point Brutus maintained his zeal to lifting the weight of oppression lying heavy on far too many human beings.

There is no doubt; the poet’s experience of apartheid was grim and greatly distressful. In fact, the social situation in the then apartheid South Africa was very oppressive, unjust and hard to bear. Adrian Roscoe and Ken Goodwin are in praise of Brutus because he shows so much control and maturity in his protest, often times using amorous language to make serious political statement of anger. Brutus, like most other Modernist writers, believes that the strongest statement is made in subtle and often disguised images and metaphors. One sees such example in how T.S. Eliot conceals his criticism of the 20th century chaotic Europe in the ‘Waste Land’.

5. The of Place Nature in Brutus’ Poetry

In Modernist poetry, nature ceases to be the central subject and setting of poetry as in the case of romanticism era. Brutus and other inmates languish in prison, as they are condemned to a seemingly irredeemable abyss, a notorious haven for political detainees known as Robben Island. The Poets laments that the worst part is that those outside do not know what is happening inside the four walls of the prison where innocent people languish in jail. He also laments the physical and mental torture inflicted on those incarcerated. His lamentation is made more pathetic because those out of the prison do not know what he was passing through “the not – knowing / is perhaps the worst part of the agony/ for those outside”.

This horrific experience “what cruelties must be endured... / the indignities... what wounds.../ the hunger...” is compared to that echoed in Soyinka’s *A Shuttle in the Crypt*. In fact, the level of degradation and deprivation in the prison is alarming and yet most of these inmates are political prisoners who are innocent of the charges/ punishments inflicted on them. In Letters 11-17, the poet having been in seclusion for a very long time, tries to get used to the fact that he is a prisoner, a convict “one reaches a stage/ where one resolves to embrace / the status of prisoner / and seeking to escape nothing”. He waits patiently for the day of freedom, but the challenges are overwhelming and he is greatly weighed down. He now knows that the things he takes for granted, like the sun, moon and star can really be important and life’s source of happiness. Letter 16 for instance is specific about this status, it reads:

Quite early one reaches a stage / Where one resolves to embrace / The status of prisoner / With all it entails / Savouring to the full its bitterness / And seeking to escape nothing. / “Mister”, / this is private; / just get used to the idea / “you’re a convict now.”

The letters (poems) concentrate on the agony of the persona and his worry about his state of isolation. His thought was particularly directed at the freedom of the birds and clouds. He realized that while he was now confined against his wish, the clouds and birds were not restrained. This contrast between the clouds and birds on one hand and himself as prisoner was the basis of the argument in the poem. The poet moves on to elaborate on the limitation and the deprivation imposed on his movement and liberty by the prison authority.

Letter 17 is the focal point of them all. It does not waste time in telling us where he is. The first line "in prison" adequately tells us the location of the experience. The two other lines in the first stanza also introduce the reference to the birds and clouds. He is conscious of the fact that he is a victim of an unjust and heartless system – apartheid administration. He cannot even see the sky "there can be no hope of seeing the stars: the arcs and the fluorescents have blotted them out". The fluorescent light - which is – artificial is the only source of light for him. He imagines and admires the movement of the birds in the sky. He again recalls that the common reference to the liberty of the birds can only be meaningful to someone like him who has lost his freedom. He focuses again on the clouds and expresses his admiration of their movement. He is particularly bothered that the freedom which nature makes available – as we see the birds and the clouds enjoy it – is not available to him. Ironically, freedom has more value for him than the birds and the clouds. The thematic interest of "Letter to Martha 17" is about the value of freedom. The evidence that such a deprivation is not natural is seen in the different situation in which the clouds and the birds find themselves. This is a subtle condemnation of imprisonment as man's own invention.

In Letter 18, Brutus tries one early in the morning to just catch a glimpse of the stars in the sky "I remember rising one night after midnight / and moving ... / to try and find the stars". The energy he exerts in doing this shows that even things given freely by nature and which we take for granted become important in a situation of continued confinement. The remaining lines of Letter 18 read thus:

And through the haze / the battens of fluorescents made / I saw pinpricks of what / I thought were stars. / Greatly daring / I thrust my arm through the bars / and ceasing the switch in the corridor / plunged my cell in darkness / I scampered to the window / and saw the splashes of light / where the stars flowered.

Unlike the poets of Romanticism era, Brutus has no time to sing about the flowers, the trees, sea, or any other natural creation for its beauty or to derive pleasure. He gives all his time to man and presents the South African as his measure of character. Typical of all Modernist poets, he objectifies and gives prominence to humanity by acknowledging his pains, nature thus, cease to be center of his poetry, a modernist feature which manifest greatly in the Letters to Martha.

6. Personal Experiences as a Tool for Public Protest

Brutus' "Stubborn Hope" is an example of a record of personal experience in a chaotic situation like prison and exile. His verse emanates from personal sources; the primary, thematic tool by which he bridges the chasm between the personal and public realms is his centralization of love. Here, love is not conceived of as an abstract concept but as a metaphor of the poet's deep and abiding sense of patriotism. Thus, the land of South Africa is depicted in a multiplicity of images as a woman that is often subjected by violence, turbulence, uneasiness and even outright anguish. Yet these aberrations do not mar the original feeling of affection and hope because: *I know my love can endure, / resist all things- / even as a storm and footprints scar her ravaged face / and leave her dearness still unmarred*

There is a persistent indication that certain abnormality inhibits the poet from actualizing his affection for his land. This abnormality, the obvious aberrations of apartheid, is depicted as a disease condition: *how are the shoots of affection withered at the root? / What lops the tendrils that reach out*

Modernists record their experiences not in tranquility but most of the time in chaos. Brutus is intensely aware that given the distortions of apartheid, a certain therapeutic violence is required to cleanse it of the scourge of injustice and oppression. Thus, while still remaining within the limits of the love metaphor; he depicts such violence as an inevitable part of his affection and patriotism: *if in time I can endure no longer / the torturing of unrequitedness / and claw your contours with deliberate clumsiness / I beg you to remember / such violence may be pervasion of frustrated tenderness*

In the poem "Our Allies are Exiles", Brutus powerfully laments the plight of all his compatriots in exile, especially writers and artists. For each of them, exile is a negation of his being, a necessary sacrifice for freedom at home. The pain of exile consists in a double futility: a wasted life and a wasted death: *Our allies are exiles / to their earth un-returnable or corpses that rot in alien earth*. Exile offers only a passing succor; it renews the longing for home and enkindles patriotism: *I have been bedded / in London and Paris / Amsterdam and Rotterdam, in Munich and Frankfurt / Warsaw and Rome - / and still my heart cries out for home!*

Prison and imprisonment which are recurrent themes in Brutus' poetry become attraction, permanent scars which follow the poet wherever he goes: *images of prisons around the world, / reports of torture, cries of pain / all strike me on a single score*

The subject 'freedom' in South Africa calls to mind such authoritarian obscenities as the obnoxious Pass Law, the Colour Bar, the Immorality Act, the Sharpeville and Soweto massacres as well the daily ritual of cold-blooded massacres of black youth to satiate the appetite of the gods of Western capitalist investment. The prime symbol of the denial of freedom remains, of course, Nelson Mandela, they broke stones together in the Robben Island Prison, they spent time together, but they were not allowed to talk to each other.

Brutus' preoccupation with freedom goes beyond mere contemplation and wishful longing. In the poem "I am a Rebel and Freedom is my Course", the poet/patriot cut the image of a crusading freedom fighter "I am a rebel and freedom is my cause", canvassing international support "many of you have fought similar struggles/ therefore you must join in my cause" and sharing in the hopes of freed mankind everywhere:

In *Stubborn Hope*, endurance becomes a stoic acceptance of suffering as concomitant of the struggle for freedom while hope itself is a reaffirmation of the will to succeed. The path of optimism is littered with potholes of self-doubt, self-reproach and even outright apprehension:

There are times / when our repudiation of ourselves/ is so complete

the acceptance of our corruption / so absolute / the thrust of our concupiscent propensities/ so unarguable / that capitulation, surrender

- nay more! / the embrace of despair / is almost final

It is to the credit of Brutus' revolutionary optimism that he is able to transcend the pangs of understandable despair and disillusionment to reaffirm his hope in freedom and the triumph of justice. This much is the emphasis in the title poem, "Stubborn Hope", in which the poet stresses the value of endurance in the struggle against apartheid. He says:

Somewhere lingers the stubborn hope / Thus to endure can be a kind of fight, / Preserve some value, assert some faith / And even have a kind of worth:

As hinted earlier, the essence of the formal freshness of *Stubborn Hope* derives from the technical (and, invariably, ideological) departure which Brutus makes here from his earlier verse especially as contained in *A Simple Lust*. This does not, however, make the poems simplistic. On the contrary, these short poems derive their strength from a certain metaphoric intensity which enables them to appeal at more than one level of meaning simultaneously.

This quality derives largely from a certain economy in the use of images which is exhibited in two patterns. One is in the form of an extended metaphor. A simple image is elaborated throughout an entire poem or a situation where a short poem consists of just a series of related images, thereby deriving its force from the combined associative potentials of these images. This pattern finds expression in "How are the Shoots of Affection Withered?" where the image of a diseased plant with withering tendrils, droopy branches, blighted buds, etc. is used to capture the political climate in South Africa. The second pattern is displayed in the elegy "For Frank Teruggi": *A single rose / a single candle / a black coffin / a few mourners / weeping...*

In aid of directness of expression, the poet displays a consistently keen sense of audience which manifests in a certain striving for audience participation. Such audience anticipation takes the form of short declamatory lines as in the poem "Stop". The poem reads:

Stop--- / I ask you to think for a moment / To think of pain / Of hunger, / To think of people who are not free, / To think of death ...

The poems grouped as "Postscripts" and "On the Island" are similar in kind to "Letters to Martha", for they bear evidences of the bleak and cheerless condition in prison. Written in prison to give firsthand information to the reader: - *except that you may see these small acts / some evidence of my thought and caring*

He expresses his fearlessness as a continuous theme "but still I do not fear their power to wound". "Postscripts 1" is therefore written to comfort a relation for "grief, loose and anxious care" "Postscripts" 5 for instance: Postscripts 5

There were times in my concrete cube / -faceless both the nights and days- / when the arbitrary wind gusted / and I, desolate, realized / on how easily I might be damned.

In "After Exile" also the poet compares and contrasts South Africa with England, where he first went in exile. He uses 'grey' as a symbol for South Africa and 'Silver' for England. These poems also give him a basis to look back at life of the oppressed in South Africa. In England he feels completely alienated, in spite of the comfort and all "England's seducing charms..." he is surrounded with, "why should one not grow comfortable", yet he still yearns for South Africa, the only land he can call his own. He concludes that he must be stubbornly in love for his own home. Look at the concluding lines: / *dear quirks of loveliness to enchant: / I must be dourly stubborn in my love / for an acid eroded dust -bowl of a love*

By the time we come to the end of such poems, the poet is no longer a lone voice! We are compelled to join him. His experiences are so graphically pictured in such a way that carves in everybody in prison or out of prison. He is 'a lead' in the suffering and cried loud enough on behalf of others. His personal experiences therefore are symbolic for public protest. By far the more involved dimension to Brutus' poetic style is a certain sense of dialectics which presents experiences and issues in their essential contradictoriness, thereby resolving certain key oppositions. Hope is counter posed to despair, courage to cowardice, tenderness to violence, freedom to un-freedom, love to hatred, justice to injustice and beauty to ugliness. It is in the ability to project and resolve these binary oppositions that the real strength of Brutus as a Modernist poet resides.

7. Modern Technology and the Poetry of Brutus

As earlier pointed out, the increasing dominance of modern technology was another prevalent Modernist preoccupation, but unlike Soyinka, Brutus did not condemn it vehemently, rather he is one of the poets that see technology as the flagship of 20th century progress. Brutus brings diverse experiences of technology to his poetry, unifying them through his attention to social injustice. Going through his poems collected at the Worcester state college, one sees the impact of technology manifesting in the use of terms related to modern technology like 'Airport' in "Philadelphia Airport" of February 2000, 'Limousines' in "Pittsburg" of August 9, 1999, and 'stairs' in "Gerard Sekoto's Studio" of March 16, 1980. Indeed, all the 23 major headings in the *New Poems from the Dennis Brutus Collection* have made reference in one way or the other to certain technological development as a means of general improvement on life. He sees technology as a means of accessing health, safety, food, shelter, the opportunity and right for the enhancement of our's and the earth's well-being which does no harm to others. And so in his quest for equality and justice in South Africa he propagates the theme of technology in his poetry efficiently. Look at the first stanza of "Two Notes on Poetry", dated February 2, 1987:

When they just told me, I was / "deportable," / the first images that came to mind / were portable things: / portable radios, / TV's / typewriters - then I saw myself dangling / as if by a handle / from some official's officious arm

When a judgment was delivered that he should be deported from his home land, his first impression was whether he has become electronic gadgets like 'TV' or 'Type writers'. These things were close to him and obviously occur to him first. Type writer for instance must have been of great assistance to his writings. "Then came incredulity", it was not

technology to be deported, it was Brutus that has become so much important than technology “what was this foolishness?”, and “what about inalienable rights” his human right notwithstanding./ *Then came incredulity: / “What was this foolishness?” / and “What about inalienable rights?” / and finally: “I don’t believe this folly.” / but they were in deadly earnest.* (Feb. 2, 1987, 2010:83)

Dennis Brutus, no doubt, is one of Africa’s major Modernist poets, and like Soyinka, he is prolific and his works bear much of the tendencies of modernism. Several such references are found his poetry and he does not in any way condemn technology, even though he regarded the hurried “they were in deadly earnest” substitution of it for the dignity of man as unbelievable foolishness “I don’t believe this folly”

Modern technology in the poetry of Brutus is therefore seen in two parts: first that the fact that the dignity of man is being substituted for modern thing is too him foolishness. It is this foolishness of the white overlords that he waged his war against to his last breath. He especially complained that the fluorescents (technology) blotted out the stars from his vision. On the second level, modern technology has enhanced his work of art, for through the TV, Type writers and the airport Brutus had achieved universality unmatched to other African poets who remained at home and use only African images and symbols to communicate. It is not out of place therefore if this research states that Brutus is a modernist African poetry inclined to technology. But serious efforts in the area of research and record of African critics and literary scholars are yet relate his poetic contribution towards the emergence of Modernism with distinct African Quality. This section has discovered that modern technology as shown in the poetry of Brutus contributed immensely to the growth of African Modernist poetry.

8. Conclusion

From the analysis so far it has been discovered that modernist poetry which was a reaction against social situation of Europe and America in the 20thC, has an authentic African version demonstrated through Brutus prison and exile experience poems, through his pester at technology, and his imagistic presentation of the harrowing situation in South Africa. His central image the ‘Love’ and his central theme ‘freedom and justice’ and particular to him, created of his experience in Africa. This is not an imitation but creativity, a documentation of historical occurrence. The emergence of an African modernist poetry is an aspect emanating from the techniques of Modernist African Poets like Brutus rather than foreign poets and critics who knew nothing about the Africa Brutus writes about.

9. References

- i. Akosu, T. (1984). “Poetry and the Repressive State: The Example of Dennis Brutus,” in *Images of the Voiceless, Proceedings of the Popular Culture and the Media Conference*. Department of English, ABU
- ii. Avery, T. (2006). *Radio Modernism: Literature, Ethics, and the BBC, 1922-1938*. Ashgate Publishing
- iii. Bahadur, T. (1971) “Can the Prisoner make a Poet? A Critical Discussion of *Letters to Martha* by Dennis Brutus”. In *African Literature Today*. No.6. London: Heinemann.
- iv. Balogun, O.F. (1982). “Modernism and African Literature” in *Ife Studies in African Literature and the Arts (ISALA) No.1*. Harmattan Issue p.66
- v. Brutus, D. (1968). *Letters to Martha*. Ibadan: Heinemann
- vi. (1970). *Poems from Algiers*. London: Longman
- vii. (1978). *Stubborn Hope*. London: Heinemann
- viii. (1984). *Salutes and Censures*. Ibadan: Heinemann
- ix. (1988). *A Simple Lust*. Ibadan: Heinemann
- x. Cerventes, Miguel De (2003). *Don Quixote*. Los Angeles: Harper Collins Publishers
- xi. Cuddon, J. A. (1990). *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin
- xii. Doglas, K. and Ruth R. (2005). *The Companion to African Literature*. Oxford: James Arrey / Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- xiii. Egudu, R.N. (1978) *Modern African Poetry and the African Predicament*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd
- xiv. Feinberg, B. (ed)(1972). *Poets to the People: South African Freedom Poems*. London: Heinemann
- xv. Findlay A. (1985). *Root and Branch: An Anthology of Southern African Literature*. London. McMillan
- xvi. Funsho, A. (1991). *African Literature and African Historical Experiences*. Heinemann Educational Books(Nig) Plc, PP. 73- 82
- xvii. Gordimer, N.(1973). *The Black Interpreters: Notes on African Writing*. Johannesburg: Raven Press
- xviii. Goldman, J. (2011). *Modernism is the Literature Celebrity*. Texas: Texas University Press
- xix. Grenz S. J. (1996). *A Primer on Post Modernism*. Grant Rapids: Erdmann
- xx. Irele, A. (1990). *The African Experience in Literary Ideology*. Baltimore: Indiana University Press
- xxi. Ker, D. I. (1977). *The African Novel and the Modernist Tradition*. New York: Peter Lang Publishers Incorporated
- xxii. MacArthur, J. (1995). “Imaginary Homelands and *Thoughts Abroad*. Dennis Brutus’: Hybrid Modernism,” in *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*, eds. Craig McLuckie and Patrick Colbert. Colorado Springs: Three Continents press, p.72 In *World Literature in English*. London: Macmillan
- xxiii. Mahood, A.D. (2007). *Modernist Literature: An Introduction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press
- xxiv. Obasi, U. (2005). “Social realities in the poetry of Tanure Ojaide and A.K. Ramanujan”. A Paper presented at the Ojaide International Conference, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria, 7th -10th July, 2005
- xxv. Ojaide, T. (1989). “The Changing Voice of History: Contemporary African Poetry”, *Genève Afrique*, Vol. xxxii. No. 1

- xxvi. Omole, K. J. (1991). "Linguistic Experimentations in African Literature" in *The Literary Review : An International Journal of Contemporary Writing, Vol. 34 No4*, Walter Cumins(ed), New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickson University USA, p.588
- xxvii. Paktkke, R. S. (2013). *Modernist Literature and Post Colonial Studies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, Amazon. Com
- xxviii. Pol. Ndu: (1971). "Passion and Poetry in the works of Dennis Brutus". In Okechukwuezu (ed.). *Modern Black Literature*. New York: Black Academy Press, p.41- 54
- xxix. Saunders, M. (2014). *Without World War I, What Would Literature Look Like?* Australia: The Conversation Media Group
- xxx. Shelton, J. (2014). *World War Changed War and Literature Forever*. Texas: Texas University Press
- xxxii. Senanu, K.E. and Vincent T. (eds.) (1972) *A Selection of African Poetry*. London: Longman
- xxxiii. Wylie, Hal. (1980). "Creative Exile: Dennis Brutus and Rene Depestre", In *Nsukka Studies in African Literature*, No.3