REPRESENTATIONS OF 'ECONOMIC HIT MEN' IN SELECTED MALAWIAN POETRY

Nick Mdika Tembo[1]

Abstract

Africa's worsening socio-economic plight has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate. Much of this debate has flourished in the social sciences where it has been pointed out, for example, that Structural Adjustment Programmes have had negative effects on Africa's social and political conditions. This paper proceeds from a similar premise. Specifically, it resolves how David Rubadiri, Felix Mnthali and Bright Molande imagine the Bretton Woods Institutions in sub-Saharan Africa and simultaneously negotiate the relationship between 'the West and the rest of us' in their poetry. I also argue that a reading of the poems allows for an opening up of a discursive debate on the effects of neoliberal ideologies in the 'Third World.'

Keywords: Bretton Woods Institutions, poetry, socio-economic plight, Structural Adjustment Programmes, Third World

1. Introduction

There is a contradictory yet mutually dependant relationship between the high poverty levels and the upsurge of externally-driven aid[2] in sub-Saharan Africa. Most countries of this region adopted the IMF and World Bank sponsored Stabilisation and Structural Adjustments (SSAs) in the 1980s 'in search of a way to revive ... declining economic growth triggered by the oil shocks and general world economic recession of the mid and late 1970's' (Munthali, 2004, p. vi). Despite such a move, however, the region has ironically plunged itself into an endless cycle of poverty and debt. This has led J. Barry Riddell (1992) to

1. PhD student in English Studies, English Department, Stellenbosch University. Email: 18910254@sun.ac.za/ntembo@cc.ac.mw. Tembo has taught courses in African and European literatures in the University of Malawi's Chancellor College, and in the Department of English and Communication Studies at the Catholic University of Malawi. He has previously written on Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Wole Soyinka, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Malawian poetry and prose. Email: 18910254@sun.ac.za. / ntembo@cc.ac.mw

2. In her book titled Dead Aid, US-based Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo distinguishes three types of aid: humanitarian or emergency aid, 'which is mobilized and dispensed in response to catastrophes and calamities'; charity-based aid, 'which is disbursed by charitable organizations to institutions of people on the ground'; and systematic aid, which refers to 'aid payments made directly to governments either through government-to-government transfers (in which case it is termed bilateral aid) or transferred via institutions such as the World Bank (known as multilateral aid)'. Unless explained otherwise, my use of the term 'aid' in this paper is limited to 'systematic aid', or 'concessional loans and grants' the developed world has transferred to the developing countries. For details, see Moyo, 2009, p. 7.

1816-7659/05/13 1-9

observe that with the arrival of Structural Adjustment Programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa things have fallen apart again (pp. 53-68). In this paper, I explore how the selected Malawian poetry reads the Bretton Woods Institution in sub-Saharan Africa. Some of the questions I attempt to address in this paper include: What choices have been made by Less Developed Countries by opening their economy to the outside world and how have those choices affected the living standards of people? When is foreign aid genuine and when is it greedy and self-serving? What is literature's (especially poetry) place and potential as a mode of representation of, and resistance to, neo-colonialism and international aid agencies in sub-Saharan Africa?

Traditionally, billions of dollars in aid have been sent from wealthy countries to prop up the largely fragile and vulnerable economies of sub-Saharan Africa. But as John Perkins (2006) observes, beyond the saving-the bottom-billion mantra under which concessional loans and grants are given to what is conveniently dubbed as the Third World lies an obnoxious form of economic exploitation perpetrated by a class of 'Economic Hit Men' who, according to him, are consortia of 'corporations, banks, and governments (collectively the *corporatocracy*) [who] use their financial and political muscle' to control the Third World (p. xiii; original brackets and emphasis). Perkins thinks that this group

> ... is driven ... by a concept that has become accepted as gospel: the idea that all economic growth benefits humankind and that the greater the growth, the more widespread the benefits. This belief also has a corollary: that those people who excel at stoking the fires of economic growth should be exalted and rewarded, while those born at the fringes are available for exploitation (2006, p. xii).

The paper espouses Perkins' concept of 'Economic Hit Men' for two reasons. Firstly, a critical survey of the activities of international aid agencies shows that they largely work towards economically sucking the Third World dry and thus subscribe to Perkins' coinage of the term. Secondly, and more objectively, these institutions espouse an economic outlook that 'encourages [third] world leaders to become part of a vast network that promotes [their benefactors'] interests. In the end, those leaders become ensnared in a web that ensures their loyalty' (2006, p. xi) and a continued downward spiral of their governments' economies.

2. Theoretical Considerations

Anti-colonial and decolonising aesthetics have increased in scope in most postcolonial discourses in recent years because of the way developing countries are being politically and economically exploited by Western countries.[3] Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey (1997) particularly note that the introduction of the IMFs neoliberal Structural Adjustment Programmes in the Third World in the 1980s 'was a clear signal ... that post-independence African regimes have not severed the bonds of imperialism' and that 'foreign control of African economic policies is facilitated by the massive indebtedness of African regimes to American and European governments and financial institutions' (p. 87). The fact that most African governments run on what Ayi Kwei Armah (2010) calls 'hand-me-down colonialist structures' (p. 292) and are aid-dependent only helps increase the popular disaffection on the continent.

This leads to the vexed debate on the suitability of economic policies as a subject of literature. The debate is predicated largely on two contending schools of thought which attempt to figure the purposes of literature in society. On the one hand is the *l'art pour l'art* (or art for art's sake) view which advocates that literature should be seen as an artistic creation whose worth is not in any didactic, moral or utilitarian function but in the aesthetic appreciation of its inherent value(s). On the other hand is the view shared by Karl Marx and Friedrich Angels (as cited by Terry Eagleton), that literature is a vehicle for 'social criticism and analysis, and the artist [is] a social enlightener' and that 'literature ... [is] an instrument of social development' (1976, p. 43). Put simply, literature mirrors the realities of society and the writer has a crucial role to play by using his or her work to expose, instruct and educate the audience of whatever vices, follies, abuses, and shortcomings that may inform society. Perhaps it is this latter function of art and artists that led Wole Soyinka (1968) to observe, in reference to the African context, that 'the artist has always functioned in African society as the record of mores and experiences of his society *and* as the voice of

3. I am aware of the problematic nature of the term 'West' (that which represents [Western] Europe and North America), as it reinforces the notion that it is only countries from these two regions that have had major cultural, socio-political, technological, and economic influence on Africa. Yet Africa today is also a playing field of fast growing economies and the technological boom from the emerging economic world (e.g. Russia, Brazil, China, India, Japan, the Middle East, etc.). I still employ the terms 'West' and 'western' in this paper for their popular meaning, even when I am referring to countries outside geographical Europe and North America.

vision in his own time (p. 21; original emphasis). In the case of this paper, the link between poetry and economics is easy to establish: In so far as economic policies affect the living standards of the people, they become a subject of social scrutiny, and the writer will always be there to expose whatever ills such policies may bring to bear on society, ideally with the intent of shaming the culprits and desiring society to change for the better.

Drawing on the theoretical work of David Jefferess' *Postcolonial Resistance: Culture, Liberation and Transformation* (2008), this paper sets out to examine the idea of resistance as a primary framework for the criticism of neoliberal ideologies as articulated in David Rubadiri's 'Begging A.I.D,' Felix Mnthali's 'Neo-colonialism' and 'The riddles of change,' and Bright Molande's 'In the name of the people.' Jefferess contends that 'the concept of resistance functions as an amorphous concept in postcolonial studies, identifying a diverse range of modes, practices, and experiences of struggle, subversion, or power' (p. 3). It is herein posited that the above-cited poems draw upon postcolonial resistance theories to mount a sustained struggle against neo-colonialism and its agents in the developing world. Ultimately, the centrality of post-colonial resistance in the African's desire to reclaim what is otherwise lost to the West will be asserted in this paper. The paper will show, furthermore, that resistance and protest are discursive concepts. In facilitating the spirit of radicalism, resistance and protest serve as a defence against external exploitation. They remove the downtrodden from their helpless, subjugated condition to a level where they can 'write back' and 'fight back.' Within the context of the poetic discourse, Tanure Ojaide thinks that such a stand suggests the continuation of radicalism in African poetry. Ojaide contends that

> ... despite the demise of communism in Eastern Europe, the flowering of multi-party politics in Africa, and the gradual dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, African poetry will continue to be radical. *This is because of the debt burden created by the IMF and the World Bank and the worsening socio-economic plight of African countries*. Thus, even though the ideological point has been blunted in international politics, there will still be strident calls for the amelioration of the plight of the masses. Poets will continue to portray the bleak socio-economic landscape with negative and ugly images and dream of light at the end of the tunnel (1995, p. 17; emphasis added).

For one thing, the four poems that I examine in this paper do not focus solely on what Tim Woods (2003) calls 'First World and Third

World international relations' concerning aid (p. 92). Instead, they deploy and foreground a collective narration that gestures resolutely towards resistance to foreign domination and external influence, urging us to listen for the echoes of vulnerability, exploitation, poverty and mass suffering that come out of the Third World. Furthermore, instead of going along with the currency of thought so much in vogue since the nineteenth century that the Third World cannot prosper on its own without some form of 'help' from a benevolent hand *out there*, I read the selected poems as challenging the notion of philanthropy as guiding the presence of international aid agencies in sub-Saharan Africa. Like Chinua Achebe, the three poets use art to persuade the leadership and the electorate to 'look back and see where the rains began to beat [them],' in social, political and economic terms.

3. David Rubadiri's 'Begging A.I.D.'

David Rubadiri's 'Begging A.I.D.' is significant in two ways. In the first instance the poem, in terms of periodization, was published in 1968 when most of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were barely a decade into self-rule[4]. It could be argued that the poet is out to tell us that for the majority of Africans, self-rule had not brought about fundamental changes, which was contrary to the expectations of the electorate on the African continent who indulged themselves in thoughts that full political independence of Africans from colonial rule would mean real change in Africa. Secondly, and more objectively, the poem becomes a scaffold from which sub-Saharan Africa's poverty, insecurity, and the psychology of dependence can be measured against the 'well-meaning' intentions of the West. Rubadiri draws on history to portray and finally challenge the notion that with the colonist driven out of Africa, poverty was going to be a story of the past amongst Africans and that with the presence of 'billions of dollars in aid sent from wealthy countries to developing African nations' (Moyo, 2009, inside front cover) to help prop up their fragile and vulnerable economies prosperity would soon begin to show in the region.

The title of Rubadiri's poem, 'Begging A.I.D.,' has a tinge of double entendre, or verbal irony. When viewed against the rest of the

4. The paper uses Ghana as its paradigm. History has it that Ghana was the first state south of the Sahara to assume independent rule from Britain on 6 March 1957. Ngũgĩ observes that 'Ghana's independence in 1957 … had fired the imagination of the entire continent. Democracy and social justice would reign. Africa would truly be for the Africans'. See wa Thiong'o, 1998, p. 74.

poem, the title conjures up images of help and, therefore, someone being no longer inconvenienced. There is an incongruity, however, between what is intimated in the title and what we actually find in the lines of the poem especially when we learn that the poet is actually dramatizing the plight of a society that is terribly emaciated despite the 'A.I.D.' that had been coming its way. Thus the message that the title brings to bear on the reader has significant implications for the construction and articulation of begging for 'A.I.D.' This comes out clearly in the third stanza of the poem where the persona maintains that:

> In the beggarhood
> of a Circus
> that now is home,
> the whip of the Ringmaster
> cracks with a snap
> that eats through
> the backs of our being.

The most significant aspect of the art of begging is the fact that the pulse holder (referred to as 'the Ringmaster') will always tempt his victim to ask for more, what Bright Molande (2010) calls 'keep[ing] the African running towards [IMF and World Bank] goalposts that keep changing every time [he] gets there' (p. 8). This tactic allows the former to hold out for more (by coming up with *donor conditionalities* that 'eat through/the backs of our being') until a better offer is found. As if to prove that systematic aid has strings attached, the poet-persona concludes the poem by making the following observation:

> Hands stretching
> in prayer
> of submission
> in a beggarhood
> of Elders delicately
> performing the tightrope
> to amuse the *Gate*
> for *Tips*
> that will bring home
> *Toys* of death.

In the above stanza a number of interesting observations are made regarding how the beggar with 'hands stretching' behaves himself, as represented by the 'tightrope' and 'tips' he must adhere to if he is to

continue getting crumbs from 'the Ringmaster' of the previous stanza. The speaking voice illustrates to us that unless the beggar performs these rituals to satisfy those who are in control of the purse strings ('to amuse the *Gate*'), he will not get what he wants. The word 'gate' as used in this poem is symbolic. In Christian mythology, open gates symbolised the way into heaven, while closed gates stood for the way to hell. Within the context I have chosen to read the use of this word in the poem, the opening of the gate symbolises access to systematic aid and/or concessional loans and grants, while its closure signals denial of aid and, consequently, a life of suffering for the denied. All the African beggar needs to do is 'amuse the [ones at the] gate' of Washington, Paris, London or Swiss-based organisations by following all the prescribed 'tips' (or *donor conditionalites*). A twist to the tale is presented in the last two lines of the stanza, however, where we sense that the art of begging does not necessarily bring respite. It, in fact, only brings more misery to our beggar, to the amusement of the purse holder. This becomes evident when the speaking voice presents a scenario where the beggar is left clutching 'toys of death', instead of being indulged with toys that will bring a lasting smile to his poverty-stricken self.

Earlier in the poem, in the opening stanza, we noted that Rubadiri does not hide the fact that the West's underhand tactics are performed with the African sell outs' silent endorsement. We learn, for example, that 'While our children/ become smaller than guns' the sell outs become toothless zombies (or 'big/ Circus Lions') who do nothing but follow whatever economic and social reforms the big master suggests to them without considering the long-term effects of those recommendations. An image of gaunt faces of starving children is evoked in this stanza ('our children/ [have] become smaller than guns'). What I consider to be sad and unfortunate is that while the young (who signal the future of the continent) stare starvation in the face, the 'Elders' (who are supposed to provide the needed guidance to the young) do nothing to remedy the situation. In fact, the elders in this poem have been cordoned off to 'the Zoo' of Western fantasies, 'away from [the realities of] home'. It is as if Rubadiri is saying that the ordinary person in sub-Saharan Africa has been left to fate and chance by a leadership that spends its time jumping from one international flight to the next, signing and singing controversial multi-lateral and/ or bi-lateral pacts so that the 'children' back home do not starve,

instead of conceiving and implementing long-lasting solutions that would ensure their nation states' survival if the benefactor stopped giving concessional loans and grants. Thus contrary to the widely held opinion that systematic aid helps reduce poverty, we get the opposite of this opinion in the poem.

Following this line of thought, the relationship between 'the West and the rest of us' (after Chinweizu) becomes easy to grasp. What is more, it becomes easy to illustrate how and why within the discourse of how 'the West underdeveloped Africa' (after Walter Rodney) Rubadiri's 'Begging A.I.D.' is a work of art that captures the negative impacts of aid. It is on account of this position that I make the observation that often, if not always, begging reduces a person's dignity and status. The beggar is perpetually chained to the obligation of gratitude even when the occasion does not demand that he thanks his benefactor. What is more begging makes the beggar susceptible to heinous forms of manipulation from the begged, which is what most Sub-Saharan countries have been subjected to ever since they embraced Structural Adjustment programmes.

4. Felix Mnthali's 'Neo-colonialism' and 'The riddles of change'

Felix Mnthali's poem, 'Neo-colonialism,' is discussed together with Rubadiri's as one of the poems that were published before IMF's Structural Adjustment Programmes were introduced in Sub-Saharan Africa. The poem's title is intriguing as it immediately suggests a new form of control or power. In common parlance, this control is thought to be exercised by the rich institutions from the West over Third World countries. Perceived by its critics as another form of imperialism where industrialised powers interfere politically and economically in the affairs of post-independent Third World nations, neo-colonialism is seen to be an evil that is here to wreak havoc to Third World domestic economies. For Robert Young (2001), neo-colonialism is 'the last stage of imperialism' in which a postcolonial country is unable to deal with the economic domination that continues after the country gained independence (p. 44-52), while Philip Altbach (1995) regards neo-colonialism as 'partly a planned policy of advanced nations to maintain their influence in developing countries' and 'a continuation of past practices' (p. 452). This understanding leads Sourav Nag (2013) to the conclusion that neo-colonialism has led to the birth of 'transnational

monopolies in the financial sectors in a majority of nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America,' with the 'IMF and the World Bank as [its] crucial tools of exploitation' (p. 142). The exact nature of the influence of neo-colonial agents is the subject of Mnthali's sarcastic poem.

The first stanza of the poem, 'Above all, define standards/prescribe values/set limits: impose boundaries,' introduces us to what neo-colonial agents (i.e. the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) do once they set foot in the Third World. As well as requiring the latter to align their domestic economies with the set global standards, the idea of 'setting limits and imposing boundaries' brings to mind the *donor conditionalities* (discussed in Rubadiri's poem above) as a basis for the developing world's continued relationship with the West and the international aid agencies. The ability to 'rule the world' even if the neo-colonial agents have 'no satellites/in space' (portrayed in the second stanza) and the fact that Third World member states keep running to them for succour (expressed in the penultimate stanza) clearly establishes the former as shrewd and calculating institutions. Here, Mnthali not only exposes the vulnerability of developing countries to profiteering International Financial Institutions; he is also exposing 'the mechanisms of neo-colonialism' (Nkrumah, 1965, pp. 239-54).

Mnthali's poem also appears to suggest that the Third World is locked in a cycle of poverty and want because it seeks the West in desperation, hopelessness and despair. This is reflected in the third stanza, where the poet states:

> Whatever tune you sing
> they will dance
> whatever bilge you spill
> they will lick
> and you may well pick
> and choose
> their rare minerals
> and their rich forests.

There is a cheeky and sarcastic resonance here in that Mnthali is well aware that the 'standards,' 'values,' 'limits' and 'boundaries' the twin doctrines of neo-colonialism 'define,' 'prescribe,' 'set' and 'impose' on the developing world (as spelt out in the first stanza) are 'bilge,' that is, they do not make sense and do not sit well with institutions that claim to ride the wave of philanthropy when aiding

the developing world. Even more overt in this stanza is the idea that neo-colonial agents are in the third world to 'pick/and choose/their rare minerals/and their rich forests.' It is this pillage of the continent's treasured resources that Mnthali could be said to reject in this poem.

The stereotypes about desperate Third World countries are, therefore, essential to the ideological justification of aid, neoliberalism and strategic philanthropy. Such stereotyping exists to subjugate 'those born at the [economic] fringes' (Perkins, 2006, p. xii) and assign them to their natural place at the behest of what Perkins calls the *corporatocracy*. More seriously, since these stereotypes are deeply ingrained in the psyche of the largely clueless African leadership, they are extremely difficult to elude and therefore they have a key role in the African politician's praise-singing of the West and its international aid agencies even when the latter's intentions reek of confidence tricks and exploitative tendencies. Of such leadership, Ayi Kwei Armah (2006) has this to say:

> When our politicians and diplomats talk of [Western] aims in Africa today, they speak of multisecular friendships, a historical identity of interests, complementary activities, symbiotic economies, partnerships for development, bureaucracies for cooperation, and agencies for helping our progress, even when the reality they strive so hard to mask keeps poking up through the weak fabric of their liars' rhetoric, showing that *after centuries of [Western-driven] development and stultifying aid we remain where the [West] pushed us, at the bottom of the world*. (p. 239; emphasis added)

Armah adds further that the leadership in sub-Saharan Africa is 'living in the here and now' and that it is all too willing to 'routinely retort that *given the power equations of today, our states are too little to survive if they refuse to sell what powerful strangers want, at the prices the powerful strangers dictate*' (2006, p. 237; emphasis added). Armah's observations here are only a continuation of his ideas in *KMT: In the House of Life* (2002), where he appears to suggest that post-independent African nations are locked in a cycle of desperation, hopelessness and economic despair because of the continent's subservience to structures put in place by 'the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation' (p. 92). Armah then wonders why sub-Saharan Africa still wallows in abject poverty and want even when the region is capable of getting out of its present economic plight: 'If we are too helpless …, *what prevents us from becoming Africans and saying goodbye to misery?*' (2006, p.

237; emphasis added). The 'misery' in question here comes about as a result of the crushing levels of poverty that have become the defining feature of the developing world, and that make African governments to 'keep running' towards the ever widening IMF and World Bank goalposts for succour in the form of aid.

To return to Mnthali's poem, the concluding stanza accentuates the discourse of double standards, which is thought to be a characteristic trait of neo-colonial agents in the developing world:

> Above all,
> Prescribe values
> And define standards
> And then sit back
> To allow the third world
> To fall in your lap.

The cunning nature of the agents of neo-colonialism is hinted at here, with the last two lines of the poem giving the Third World the impression that the international finance institutions it seeks for economic succour are not as honest and well-meaning as they are made out to be. Mnthali thus takes motivation from this latter characteristic to question the philanthropy of the West in its dealings with the developing world. Consequently, the mainstay of Mnthali's poem is informed by negating the above position.

It is no surprise, then, that in 'The riddle of change,' the poet-persona associates change brought by the West with mystery ('riddle') and transience ('dew'), that is, the West and its international aid agencies have brought no significant change to Third World economies, and that whatever suggestions they make lack sustainability in the long term:

> They settle like dew
> over the crannies
> and crevices of our lives;
> they blow
> through the corridors of power
> they prevail over this land
> like the *chiperoni*
> across the highlands

Through his identification and association of the West with power, Mnthali construes the West as a colonising force that is able to prove its superiority over the developing world. *Chiperoni* is a Malawian term

for a cool moist air from the south-east of the country. The name is derived from Mount Chiperone in neighbouring Mozambique. When the wind blows from the south-east of this mountain, clouds are forced to rise over it and bring cold and rainy conditions to most parts of the neighbouring southern Malawi. The comparison of the West to *chiperoni* highlights the dormancy of third world countries, just as people cannot freely go about doing their daily chores when there is *chiperoni* weather. The dormancy, in Mnthali's case, could be said to be rooted in the third world's inability to descry the transient nature of the change brought by the West. It is this attitude that the poet-persona questions in the stanza below:

> But what have we gained
> from our evasions, oversights, omissions
> monumental mendacities
> calculated tranquillity?

The relationship between the alliterative 'evasions, oversights, omissions' of issues that directly affect the Third World and the 'monumental mendacities' that are 'calculated in tranquillity' probably by the First World highlights the artificiality of change brought by the latter on the one hand and the near-cluelessness of the former on the other. It is this duplicity and its accompanying transience that is reflected in the first part of the penultimate stanza:

> They speak of final solutions
> as if beyond good and evil
> a mere lie could be final;

Overall, Mnthali shows in this poem that the Third World's social, economic and political liaison with the First World is a lie merely and that any talk of change ought to be regarded as a 'riddle' which, 'like dew,' has settled 'over the crannies/and crevices of our lives.' The poet's acknowledgement of the Third World as a backdrop for white fantasies of conquest and heroism, as a space onto which First World egos can conveniently be projected, explains his decrial of the latter's confidence tricks and exploitative tendencies.

5. Bright Molande's 'In the name of the people'

Molande's 'In the Name of the People' is a thinly veiled account of the lust and greed of Bretton Woods Institutions and their allies in Africa. In the poem, the poet descries the horrors and tragedies of BWIs' presence in the postcolonial African state. Operating from

caustic satire the speaking voice thinks that international aid agencies are 'ugly vultures' that 'lurk in the dark' waiting to swoop down their unsuspecting African victims and snatch them up to some distant height in the West where they can enjoy their catch in the comfort of their cosy homes:

> Ugly vultures lurk in the dark,
> A furious storm of bats' propaganda
> Blows out candles and eyes of the stars;
> And the moon cowers behind the veil of the night.

Molande's use of 'vultures' to refer to people with bad intent is a well exploited poetic metaphor that has received critical interpretation from various scholars on the African continent. In his study of 'Human-Animal Relationships' (2011), for example, Syned Mthatiwa points to the often derogatory nature humans associate with the vulture. He posits that this bird of prey 'is an unfortunate animal that is held in great contempt by many people' (p. 85); a villainous carrion-eating bird, and a supernatural agent of evil or prophet of doom (p. 88). Mthatiwa observers further that the vulture is also regarded as a victimizer (p. 94); and a greedy bird that is always lent to scavenging proclivity (p. 259). By referring to the Bretton Woods Institutions and their allies as 'ugly vultures', Molande seeks to bring out the greed and underhand tactics the latter bring to sub-Saharan Africa's economic table, just as the actual bird of prey is held in contempt for its 'scavenging proclivities' (Mthatiwa, 2011, p. 253). Thus the vulture, the 'night-bird' notorious for its 'carrion-eating proclivities', the 'villain[ous], supernatural agent of evil or prophet of doom' (Mthatiwa 2011, p. 88), becomes a metaphor for the hideous or contemptuous IFIs whose mannerisms are equally loathed.

International aid agencies have often been looked at as a bunch of smart crooks that thundered into sub-Saharan Africa's domestic policies and manipulated them to suit their own selfish ends. What is wrong with all this is that the latter has not only indulged the former but it has also allowed them to stay like the people of Umuofia in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Like in Achebe's society, Bretton Woods Institutions have driven a divisive wedge on the already wobbling African economies and the continent has fallen apart. The end result is that the developing world is supine today because it opened its economy to the cunning West.

What is interesting in Molande's poem is the manner in which

the poet represents Bretton Woods Institutions and their allies in Africa. His vision of the West as a soulless soul, one that engages in what it does not because it is guided by any sound dogma but by greed is accentuated further in the first part of the next stanza where we are told that the West has the audacity to tell the developing world that it is 'pathetically wretched', and that it needs a saviour (succinctly and poignantly expressed in the line 'They say we need a God') even when 'these heathens and pagans have none'.

Having identified the inhumanity of the West and its thieving aid agencies in sub-Saharan Africa, Molande outlines the empty rhetoric the latter use to entice their unsuspecting African victims, often characteristic of politicians during electioneering:

> They say their interests are our interests
> And our interests are their interests:
> But what do we have in common?

This quip has arguably become one of the BWIs' most notorious catchphrases in recent times. A seemingly philanthropic multinational aid agency will stride into any developing country with its economic doctrines and set about advancing its economic policies while lying through its teeth that its interests are the interests of those it seeks to work with. The truth of the matter, however, is that there is no difference or impact that will be made on Africa – at least in its positive sense – except by Africans themselves. What is more, the interests of the thief cannot be those of the robbed; at least not when the robbed is left bleeding from a telling gash from his smiling assailant. Molande also rightly exploits the developing world's ability to inject financial and material aid with its right hand, only for it to siphon the resources out of the continent with the left:

> We'll lie to our innocent taxpayers we are philanthropists
> Dispatch abroad dollars and pounds from government coffers
> And dispatch our private companies, technical help to Africa
> Mobilise our private companies to win all contracts
> And collect tithes of the aid into our private pockets
> As African governments pay our private companies.
>
> In the name of democracy, anybody can become President
> Let court messengers, secretaries and rhetorical vendors rule!
> When threads of confusion are carefully knit beyond detection
> The chaos is done, poverty rages on, and the lie is complete.

A kind of what Jack Mapanje would call 'a lie-achieved world' is patently exhibited here in that the developed world is involved in 'the gluttonous consumption of the earth's resources' (Perkins, 2006, p. xii), while claiming that its activities are of good intent. The expression 'We'll lie to our innocent taxpayers we are philanthropists' clearly depicts Western governments as neither being altruistic nor pursuing an agenda that is totally in consonance with clearly laid down rules regulating fair trade and a healthy economic competition embraced by all. This is why we see them 'dispatch[ing] abroad dollars and pounds from government coffers' to Africa on the one hand, and 'Mobilise [their] private companies to win [back] all contracts/And collect all tithes of the aid into [their] private companies' on the other. This way the West and its representative aid agencies on the continent make sure that it gets back whatever economic investment it made in the Third World.

The opinion of the above stanzas attests the assertion made by Ayi Kwei Armah (2010) who argues that since time immemorial,

> the [African] continent has been under a steady, devastating assault. *That assault has been the destructive work of thieves, murderers, pirates and all sorts of conscienceless adventurers driven by just one bloody god: profit*.... [T]here are still armies of Europeans on this continent, organizing the pillage of our resources, with the help of larger armies of collaborators and accomplices we are pleased to call our governments, ministers, diplomats and bureaucrats. (pp. 238-39; emphasis added)

The tone of the vignette quoted above is decidedly angry because Armah is consciously aware of what he considers to be the continuation of exploitation of those living on the economic fringes by the rich capitalist societies of the developed world. This class of 'destructive ... thieves', 'murderers', 'pirates' and 'conscienceless adventurers' believes, either rightly or wrongly, that class divisions are a necessary occurrence and that exploiting 'those born at the fringes' (Perkins, 2006, p. xi) should not be looked at as a crime. This further suggests the cunning and profiteering nature of the international aid agencies.

Because the West is only interested in siphoning resources out of Africa, any talk about the latter standing on their own is anathema to the former. This explains why the speaking voice in the poem sternly warns his partners against showing signs of emotion when skinning the 'African corpse':

> Do not! Repeat! Do not allow them to industrialise!

Give them this day their daily manna from our Heaven:
Let our economic hitmen create enough luring poverty.

There is a sense in which this stanza echoes Perkins' *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*. As a poem that contests Bretton Woods Institutions in Africa, the sarcasm in Molande's verse becomes incontrovertible. We are persuaded to agree with the speaking voice that 'economic hit men' have succeeded in 'creat[ing] enough luring poverty' in Africa. The West has also maintained a sinister policy of not allowing its willing victims to 'industrialise' for fear of losing its potential market base. This resonates with Susan George's observations that '[t]he [International Monetary] Fund lives in a never-never land of perfect competition and perfect trading opportunities, where dwell no monopolies, no transnational corporations with captive markets, no protectionism, no powerful nations getting their own first' (1988, p. 56). Such 'a never-never land of perfect competition and perfect trading opportunities'; such ready market is nowhere else than in the third world. This has become their playground where 'those born at the fringes' are available for exploitation.

6. Conclusion

To reformulate the key concerns of this paper, I have described the relationship between 'the West and the rest of us' on the one hand, and the way that poetry challenges and contests the exploitative neoliberal ideologies that seem to 'keep the African running towards [IMF and World Bank] goalposts that keep changing every time [s/he] gets there' (Molande, 2010, p. 8), on the other. As I have shown, the themes dominating the selected poems are quite indicative of the fact that the West's project of what Sandra Barnes calls 'strategic philanthropy' in Africa is more myth than reality. In fact, the analyses have clearly illustrated the cunningness of multinational corporations and banks brought to Africa by the West.

It must be noted that the violence of poverty and unbearable living conditions in the developing world has oftentimes been laid on the doorstep of the west. Much as similar sentiments have been evinced in this paper, for me, at least, what I find to be the cardinal sin is not the developing world's relationship with the West, or the latter's manipulative tendencies in its insatiable lust for more profit. The fundamental wrong is the kind of shallow relativism that the Third World cannot attain what the developed world has done even

if another half century were to be added to the former's development or economic recovery plan. The grievous harm done to African democracies is the limited, if not parochial, thinking – often propelled by a clueless leadership at the top – that African economies cannot grow on their own without a 'Big Push' or transformational drive from elsewhere. Once Africans recant this view, the rest is as predictable as it is regrettable.

Works Cited

Altbach, P.G. (1995). Education and neocolonialism. In B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, & H. Tiffin (Eds), *The Post-colonial studies reader* (pp. 452-456). London and New York: Routledge.

Armah, A.K. (2010). *Remembering the dismembered continent: Seedtime essays*. Popenguine: Per Ankh.

Armah, A.K. (2006). *The eloquence of the scribes: A memoir of the sources and resources of African literature*. Popenguine: Per Ankh.

Armah, A.K. (2002). *KMT: In the house of life - An epistemic novel*. Popenguine: Per Ankh.

Barnes, S.T. (2005). Global flows: Terror, oil, and strategic philanthropy. *Review of African political economy*, 104(5), 235-252.

Eagleton, T. (1976). *Marxism and literary criticism*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press.

George, S. (1988). *A fate worse than debt: A radical new analysis of Africa debt crisis*. New York: Grove Press.

Jefferess, D. (2008). *Postcolonial resistance: Culture, liberation and transformation*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Mapanje, J. (2007). *Beasts of nalunga*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe Books.

Mbah, S., & I.E. Igariwey. (1997). *African anarchism: The history of a movement*. Tucson, AZ: See Sharp Press.

Mnthali, F. (1985). The riddles of change. In F.M. Chipasula (Ed), *When my brothers come home: Poems from central and southern Africa* (pp. 86-87). Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Mnthali, F. (2011). Neo-colonialism. In S. Mvona, & H. Aipira (Eds), *The time traveller of Malawi: New poetry from Malawi* (pp.136-137). Blantyre: Malawi Writers Union.

Molande, B. (in press). In the name of the people. In *Tragic songs and other poems*.

Molande, B. (2010). After the last sky: Literature, education and endogenous

development in Malawi. Public lecture delivered at the Catholic University of Malawi, 20 October.

Moyo, D. (2009). *Dead aid: Why Africa is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Mthatiwa, S.D.M. (2011). Human-animal relationships and ecocriticism: A study of the representation of animals in poetry from Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Witwatersrand.

Munthali, T. (2004). The impact of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) on manufacturing growth in Malawi. (Unpublished Master's thesis). Leeds University Business School.

Nag, S. K. (2013). Fighting neocolonialism: A case study of the selected novels of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Epiphany: Journal of transdisciplinary studies*, 6(1), 136-150.

Nkrumah, K. (1965). *Neo-colonialism: The last stage of imperialism*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd.

Ojaide, T. (1995). New trends in modern African poetry. *Research in African literatures*, 26(1), 4-21.

Perkins, J. (2006). *Confessions of an economic hit man: The shocking inside story of how America really took over the world*. London: Ebury Press.

Riddell, J.B. (1992). Things fall apart again: Structural adjustment programmes in sub-Saharan Africa. *The journal of modern African studies*, 30(1), 53-68.

Rubadiri, D. (1985). Begging A.I.D. In F.M. Chipasula (Ed), *When my brothers come home: Poems from central and southern Africa* (pp. 96-97). Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

Soyinka, W. (1968). The writer in a modern African state. In P. Wästberg (Ed), *The writer in modern Africa* (pp. 14.21). Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute for African Studies.

wa Thiong'o, N. (1998). *Penpoints, Gunpoints and Dreams*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Woods, T. (2003). Giving and receiving: Nuruddin Farah's *Gifts*, or, the postcolonial logic of third world aid. *Journal of commonwealth literature*, 38(1), 91-112.

Young, R.J.C. (1995). *Colonial desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race*. London: Routledge.