



“Fake Graduates” and the Fate of the African Society: Camillus Ukah’s *When the Wind Blows* and Rasaki Ojo Bakare’s *Once upon a Tower*

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Abstract

This article contends that every generation has its challenges and that the first sets of people that wrestle with the challenges are the youths. In each generation, African writers make the challenges of the youths their major concerns. Like other generations, the youths of the contemporary generation are facing new societal challenges. For instance, in this generation, many youths graduate from the university without being able to demonstrate mastery of the courses they spent years to study. Using Camillus Ukah’s *When the Wind Blows* (2007) and Ojo Rasaki Bakare’s *Once Upon a Tower* (2000) these are demonstrated. Through these works, the ugly situation that has so eaten into the fabric of contemporary African society is focused on. The works both stress the fact that more and more youths of this generation are graduating from African universities without being able to demonstrate mastery of their courses of study. While Rasaki Ojo Baraka’s *Once Upon a Tower* is used to expose the reality of some African graduates of gynaecology who learned the wrong way, Camillus Ukah’s *When the Wind Blows* is used to expose some other African graduates of Medical Laboratory Science who cannot carry out simple blood tests. The paper concludes by revealing the causes of the problem and suggesting ways in which the problems can be solved.

Subject Areas

Literature

Keywords

Youths, Graduates, “Fake Graduates”, Generation, Survival, Camillus Ukah, Bakare Ojo Rasaki

1. Introduction

The world is full of problems and the challenges of how to tackle the problems. Every generation of people in the world grows up to encounter one problem or the other; hence they are also expected to confront the problem. Of course, the first sets of people that wrestle with the challenges of generational problems are the youths. If the generational challenges are positive, the youths are the first to experience them and vice versa. Unfortunately, African, being part of the world, has always been confronted with generational challenges that have never been positive. Africa has always passed from one terrible generational experience to another. For instance, since 1950s when most African countries started gaining their independence, Africa has been faced with such challenges as colonialism, independence problem, apartheid, poor leadership, corruption, and rigging just to mention a few. These challenges are not just limited to one generation. As a matter of fact some have been experienced by the different generations that make up the modern African society. Since from 1950s to date Africa has produced three generations, this also goes to state that Africa has traversed three generations of problems: colonialism, leadership problem, poverty, among others.

In order to capture the youths' experiences during each of these generational problems, African writers take extra pains to refract the society. For each of these generations, African writers make the challenges of the youths their major concerns. This is because according to Charles Nnolim, it is the duty of the writers to confront "the burning issues in its society and wrestle with them" (2012: 158) [1]. For instance, the writers of the first generation such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ferdinand Oyono, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ngugiwa Thiong'o, Denis Brutus, Alex La Guma and Peter Abrahams wrestled with the issues of colonialism, independence and apartheid and depicted how these affected the youths. The writers of the second generation such as Femi Osofisan, Sowande, Festus Iyayi, Omotosho, Nawel El Saadawi, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Sembene Ousmane, on the other hand, "fought ideological battles for social equality" (158) and "condemned or at least were critical of the mess Africans made of the post independence" and how these also affected the youths of that generation (2009: 229) [2].

The contemporary African youths and writers "belong to the third generation" (Nnolim, 2009: 228). Like the two generations before it, the youths of the third generation are faced with new societal challenges. The challenges have been captured in varieties of expressions by different scholars. Among these scholars are Shuaibu Abdul Raheem, Charles Nnolim, RemiRaji and Ben Okri. In his essay captioned "Reconstructing the Road Map of Nigerian Literature: Reflections on Recent Fiction Writing", Shuaibu Abdul Raheem describes contemporary generation as a generation confronted with—

[...] varieties of life and growth, awe-inspiring and full of breath-taking surprises, where it is no longer possible to tell the trees from the shrubs, the

climbers from the creepers or the thorns from the bushes. It is the spectre of unregulated growth which has not only induced perfunctory nods from but also constituted the challenge to a bemused critical establishment over the closing years of the twentieth century. (50) [3]

To Shuaibu Abdul Raheem, the contemporary generation is a generation where anything goes. This is also to say that the youths of the generation are used to that kind of life style. However, Charles Nnolim's argument is in agreement with Shuaibu Abdul Raheem's assertion, especially when he writes that the youths of the third generation "depicted a people adrift, hedonistic, cowed finally by the long incursion of the military in the body politics" (2009: 229). He further describes Africa of the third generation as a "society without direction, operating on the principle of catchment, geographical spread, federal character, disadvantaged states where [the youth] is irreligious, debauched and thinks with his crotch. Women took to whoring as business where they are either trafficked by a syndicate or quite often traffic themselves by migrating to the flesh pots of Europe" (2012: 158). In his collection, *Love song for my Wasteland* Remi Raji uses words to tactically describe the youths of the third generation as a "wasted individuals" and the generation itself as a "wasted generation" [4]. And through the use of his protagonist, Omovo, in the novel entitled *The Landscapes Within*, Ben Okri makes a statement that corroborates the assertions of both Shuaibu Abdul Raheem, Remi Raji and Charles Nnolim, thus: "I think ours is another damned generation of loss." [5]

Like other generation before it, the third generation is faced with so many problems. Unlike other generations, the problems before this generation is out of proportion—it is faced with problems that are bigger than what the generation can handle. Also unlike earlier generations where the youths join in the verge of finding lasting solutions to their generational problems, the youths of the third generation are in themselves parts of the generation's problems. For instance, it has never been portrayed in African literature of any of the earlier generations that an African youth graduated from an African university without being able to demonstrate mastery of the course he spent years to study or that an African youth graduated from an African university and is unable to neither read nor write. In this generation, such literatures abound (see Ukah's *When the Wind Blows*, 2007 [6]; Bakare's *Once upon a Tower*, 2000 [7]; Ibezute's *The Consequences of Evil*, 2000 [8]). Youths now graduate from African universities with good grades but without being able to read or write talk more of to demonstrate mastery of their courses of study. The situation is so terrible that for lack of appropriate word, in his essay entitled "A New Writer in a New Context: Camillus Ukah's *When the Wind Blows*", Charles Nnolim describes all such graduates as being armed with "fake certificates", hence they should be regarded as "fake graduates". Camillus Ukah himself, through his protagonist, Adaku describes all such graduates as being only "paper-qualified".

In his article entitled "New Tongues: Spy of Nigerian Literature" Pius Ade-

sanmi reveals the reason why a thing like this is prevalent in contemporary African society. According to him, it is simply because there is what he called “state terror” and to him, “state terror was not the only problem [...] (it is also because) our very survival as a generation was continually threatened by poverty” (27) [9]. Hence in order to survive, the youths of the third generation go extra-miles to do anything. Unlike the youths of other generations who would rather make do with other means of survival—since the society of those generations provided equal playing grounds for both the educated who has mastery of his course of study and the uneducated skilled individual who also has mastery of his skill and allow them to grow hand in hand—the youths of the third generation would do anything to meander their ways to go to school even when they are mentally unprepared. The reason is that African society of the third generation lays too much emphasis on “paper qualification” at the neglect of the “in thing”—the knowledge. It is not as if there are no other alternative to survival in this generation, the difference now is whether the youth wants to “just survive” or wants to “really survive”. To “just survive” the youth must be ready to manage poverty while to “really survive” he must be able to live above poverty. Those who choose to learn one skill or the other in this generation seems to have already decided to “just survive” while those who choose to go to the university seems to have decided to “really survive”. As the knowledge of this distinction dawns on the youths of this generation, majority of them choose to “really survive” at all cost—even those that can barely read.

Employers are not also helping the situation. Their only interest is whether the young graduate is armed with a certificate. Nobody cares whether he has got the knowledge. Most of the time, the graduate individual’s course of study is not taken into account. This is the reason, in this generation a graduate is employed to do a job other than what he studied in the university. For instance, in this generation, it is common to see a graduate who studied Nursing in the university to be employed as an Accountant in the bank. It is also common to see a graduate who studied Engineering to be employed as Pharmacist in contemporary African hospital. The situation is so bad that it is now the reigning thing. Parents too no longer bother about the courses their children study in the university and the youths themselves are not ready to be properly guided in the course they should take. The reason is simply that they believe that in Africa of this generation people are not employed based on the course they studied but hugely because of who they know. And nothing is being done about the situation because those who are supposed to do something about it are gaining from it. Among these set of individuals are the rich few and the middle class. These rich few are also the employers. They are driven by the desire to make quick gain at the detriment of the society. They prefer to employ a Laboratory Scientist for the post of an Accountant in order to make money and create artificial job scarcity. The middle class individuals, on the other hand, are mostly civil servants. In order to create space for their own in the ministries, they do everything in their power to

bend the rules. They bring in their brothers, sisters, cousins and nephews who studied Sociology, for instance, to fill in vacant positions that are meant for Nurses. The youths who are disadvantaged in this generation are those whose parents are neither rich nor among the middle class. In order to “really survive” they go extra-miles. When they manage to get into university, they resort to “sorting”¹. The female ones among them take to whoring on campus in order to meander their ways.

2. “Fake Graduate” in Ukah’s *When the Wind Blows* and Bakare’s *Once upon a Tower*

Since these are the situations in which this generation is mired, the writers are left with no choice than to refract it. It is not as if the writers of this generation enjoy telling this kind of stories. The fact is, as Pius Adesanmi has rightly observed, the African states make the entire continent “unsafe even for a generation as young as ours”, the writers, on the other hands, “had no option but evolve” what he referred “to as aesthetics of pain”. Consequently, the writers wrote works of “pains of hopes and dreams tragically atrophied” by the African system (27). Hence using their different works, *When the Wind Blows* and *Once Upon a Tower*, Camillus Ukah and Rasaki Ojo Bakare capture this ugly situation that has so eaten into the fabric of Africa of the third generation and has damaged it beyond repair. They both depict the fact that more and more youths of this generation are graduating from African universities without being able to read or write or demonstrate mastery of their courses of study. And as Aderemi Bamikunle rightly observed, this goes a long way to reveal “the processes of systematic crippling of the educational system, and its consequence on the new generation [...] are maimed” (i) [10].

However, of great importance also is the fact that these writers show how this ugly generational situation has also crippled our medical departments so much so that the medical graduates from African universities could barely demonstrate mastery of the medical fields in which they were trained. The resultant effect of this is the states of contemporary African hospitals. This is the more reason, in his poem entitled “My silent vow now a covenant prayer”, Hyginus Ekwuazi expresses a level of fear and compares visiting African hospital as an act tantamount to signing one’s death warrant:

They who go through this gate—who go in to take a bed...

Do they not approach this gate with dread in their heart?

- dread of a failed & ailing health-care delivery system
- dread of the spidery holes in the ceiling into which the hospital’s supplies all disappear
- dread of medical personnel who siphon patients & resources to their own private businesses
- dread of outmoded, badly refurbished, totally unreliable life support &

¹“Sorting” is commonly used in Nigeria to mean the act of bribing a university lecturer for marks.

diagnostic equipment bought & installed at a higher cost than the modern and the new... (15) [11]

Nkosi once wrote in one of his articles that “a new instability and incoherence are threatening African communities” (61) [12]. With the situation before us, it is becoming clear what these new instability and incoherence are. However, the perception of the African society of the contemporary generation in this instance does not end in Nkosi’s article, there is a similar lamentation in Ukah’s novel:

I weep for this generation. I weep for a generation hunted by its own machination and ensnared by its own trap. I weep for a generation that squirms with the poison of its own concoction. Look at how a wasteful and backward looking generation has cut itself off from the source of life giving water. You can see that that water was designed to flow from the old formidable buildings to water the new buildings. But now the chasm has created a gap. (166)

Ukah demonstrates the situation through beaming his light of criticism on the protagonist of the novel, Adaku, during her youth. This is in consonance with Michel Zeraffa observation that “it is through its formal character and through the techniques used to create that formal character” that a writer’s art “exposes reality” (10) [13]. Through the novel *When the Wind Blows* Ukah not only captures African educational and medical systems in its verge of collapse, he reflects how these have so affected the youths. He recounts the travail of African youths in the face of corrupting situation, hence seek for the urgent resuscitation of the entire continents. Unlike RasakiOjo Baraka’s *Once upon a Tower* that exposes the reality of African graduates of Gynaecology, Camillus Ukah’s *When the Wind Blows* exposes African graduates of Medical Laboratory Science. This expose is made through Adaku, a graduate of Medical Laboratory Science, who could not carry out a simple blood test. Her inability to carry out the test is as a result of her corrupt life-style in the university and even before her university days. Before she gained admission to study in the university, her parents helped in destroying her by paying a “machinary”² who wrote examination for her. When she found herself on the university campus, she took to whoring and “sorting” in order to pass her courses. It was until after her graduation the wind began to blow.

During his discussion of the novel, it is also for this reason Nnolim says that the novel is “a weeping novel, a lamentation at the depths into which corruption in [Africa] has descended even in its educational engagements where parents and educators assist their children to thoroughly corrupt the system whose probity they are supposed and expected to uphold” (160). However, what worries is not the fact that corruption has bedevilled the society’s educational system, it is the monster it has created out of the youths of the generation and its disastrous consequences on the society’s progress and development. Another

²In Nigerian parlance, a “machinery” is an impersonator during examination.

point that intensified the tension in the novel is the fact that Adaku is a “fake graduate” in a medical related course. This does not mean that it is good to have a “fake graduate” in other courses. The seriousness of the situation is even stressed in the novel through the assertions of Mr Nwosu (the lawyer) in Adaku’s schizophrenic regret:

“We are all on the danger list because such cases as we have today abound. Many have died and are done within the same manner, and in the manner of miscarriage of justice earlier meted against the dead man in question. ...” (187)

Through the novel, it is also revealed that amidst the corrupting generational situation, there are youths who managed to be upright. Ukah used Ken to represent all such graduates. As an undergraduate Ken studied and graduated in flying colours. After graduation he was able to demonstrate and defend the course he studied in the university. This is the more reason why when it was him who was on the danger list, the tension in the novel heightened. The criticality of having such a good character on the danger list further exposes the level of degradation that has gone into African society. For instance, this helps us to see that many socio-systems in Africa are near collapse and many other systems are already dead. A typical example is the communication network that failed severally when it is needed to save Ken’s life. This is evident in Adaku’s assertion thus:

I began to dial the number of my husband’s Senior Partner more frantically to ascertain the state of the arrangement with ELLEN. Forty-five minutes had gone since he called. I had expected a quicker response. His number wasn’t going through. I had tried several times earlier, each time the screen would display: “Network busy, retry.” I used another network and tried. That one nailed my last hope with the dreadful response; “the number dialled is not reachable.” (122)

Adaku had to harden up and try to see if she can have her way through the faulty network. This is because she was left with no choice. Even if Adaku is to be left with any choice, she knows she does not have the moral right to judge the network providers. The network providers have failed the people of the generation no doubt but sometimes the network pull-through. Unlike the network providers, Adaku is a huge failure. This is the extent the situation has degenerated. The situation, as JOJ Nwachukwu-Agbada states it, “is taking us breathtakingly to the threshold of death in which everyone is guilty, everyone is a partaker of the ensuing evil and damnation” (see back page comment). Everyone seems to have lost the courage to speak because in one way or the other they have all erred. It is this problem that kept our hospitals where they are—in a state where they now make do with the crude medical method of treatment. Ideally, our medical graduates should be able to use the crude method even well, since that is the method in which they are trained. A situation where the graduate cannot administer treatment even through the crude method and equipment,

with which he is trained, comes the disaster.

The problem of Adaku's case is not the crudeness in the method she was taught in the university. It is simply that Adaku is an educated illiterate—an educated monster created by everyone's joint effort. This is the reason we did not have pity on her first victim, Mr Eze. Mr Eze is a typical example of he who ignited the thunder that killed them. Mr Eze's wife had a hand in creating the monster in Adaku. This is the more reason, Adaku continues to express her hate over Mr Eze and his wife, the Headmistress, even after Mr Eze's death:

Hatred welled from the pit of my stomach against them. The dreadful sting of anger in me began to share out generously to them. I wished I could go back to that day and fight against my initiation into a practice that had become my undoing. Their well-intended help assumed the stature of barbaric savagery. I hated them all the more.

Then a note of tragic coincidence struck me. The Headmistress, Mrs Eze, was the one whose husband died as a result of my incompetence. I remembered a saying that if one sees a fowl scratching at faeces, the person should chase it away because nobody knows who will eat the leg that had scratched the shit. How would she have known that the seed of incompetence she helped to sow would cause the untimely death of her husband? (127)

Adaku regretted having passed through the University the wrong way but that was not until she found herself in a situation where she was supposed to save her husband's life. Many of her kind would rather lock up and then find excuses for their inability to carry out the test. Adaku says nothing but opens her mind to regrets. This is because the time of reckoning was before her. She held her "second class upper division" university certificate and it was a shame for her to behold.

This is always the situation that confronts all "fake graduates." After meandering their ways to get good university certificates, it ends up becoming a thing of shame in their hands. This is what happened to Adaku and even to Pedro in Bakare's *Once upon a Tower*. Unlike Adaku who forced others to create the monster out of her, Pedro is only a victim of circumstances. He was a promising undergraduate who would have graduated a sound gynaecologist but his fate was thwarted by quakes such as Prof Kurumbete, Dr Ugolo, and Dr Yemi, who in the bid to be in control of the future made a mess of his career. This is evident in the scene where Dr Ugolo, the head of department of gynaecology and Prof Kurumbete, the provost of the college of medicine were engaged in the plot to incriminate Dr Akitikori, the sound, hard working and disciplined lecturer in the department of gynaecology:

Ugolo: Remember the extra-ordinarily brilliant part 4 student, Omowaye Pedro—whose genius we hope Akitikori will help to specially develop. Yemi will definitely not be able to offer the kind of stuff a brain like Omowaye needs to blossom.

Kurumbete: There you go again. Who tells you i even support the idea of a well enriched special training programme for Omowaye Pedro? That wizard? Even without any special training, he is already competing with part six students. People like him should be intellectually disempowered if we must own the future. And don't call me evil, I see nothing evil in what I am saying. Self preservation, they say, is the first human instinct. (38)

How then would Pedro graduate a sound gynaecologist if such university lecturers as Prof Kurumbete, who seeks to disempower every other person in order to own the future, Dr Ugolo who seeks to be life head of department and to get cheap favour from Kurumbete or Dr Yemi, an academically weak lecturer who was “transform(ed) from a laboratory attendant to a medical doctor” because he is a “long standing boy” of Prof Kurumbete (31) were his teacher. Prof. Kurumbete Ijakadi, “the first graduate of gynaecology in Nigeriana, fellow, world institute of gynaecology, three times recipient of Willie’s Award, former visiting professor to oxford and Birmingham, a biographer of who is who in world gynaecology, the first African to be appointed life provost of a medical college, even on contract after retirement” (22), the chief culprit of false education, thinks only of himself and does not care even about the system. When told that the system will suffer, Prof Kurumbete says “to hell with the system suffering. [...] It is merchandise. The system is not only suffering already but bleeding. So what difference will another kick make?” (36-7). He does not also believe in the future of the youths he teaches. In order to make the “long standing boy” of his a lecturer in the department, he mortgaged the future of Pedro and other students of the department. This is because as he says during his dialogue with Dr Ugolo, “Who cares? Is he going to teach your child? Look my dear, make no mistake about allowing your child to study in [here]. [...] send your children to Europe for university education” (37). Through the play, Baraka is as well making claims that the problem is not that of the graduates alone but depends on the quality of staff on ground in the universities. In the play when Dr Akitikori was in the department, the students have hope of learning the real things. In order to always have their ways Prof Kurumbete and Dr Ugolo plotted against him and have him removed from the university. This is in order to compensate Yemi for “being a long serving junior staff” of the department and would be a good replacement for Dr Akitikori because he “will pose no threat” to them since he knows he is weak—he will therefore “be gentle, submissive, ask no questions and continue to be ... good boy” (38). Prof Kurumbete and Dr Ugolo know that Dr Akitikori is no trouble maker yet they want him out, all the same, to have their ways. This is evident in the dialogue that ensued between Dr Ugolo and Prof Kurumbete:

Ugolo: Em... Prof. Between you and me, he is not a trouble maker. Just that he is a downright non-conformist. He is too bold and vocal, can die for justice and never wants to be cowed. But the young man knows his job.

Kurumbete: You are only confirming the fact that he is dangerous. When a bold, justice-loving non conformist also has the advantage of intelligence

and professional relevance, then he is too dangerous. Look, that boy is dangerous to my future. He is in my area of specialization, well positioned to break my monopoly. He is also dangerous to your future. Brilliant and active, he is a threat to your long stay as the head of department. We have to get him out of the system. (36)

This later showed off when Pedro relied on his lecture notebook and all other things he was taught by putting them into practice. One other embarrassing thing about the situation is that Pedro was the best graduating student of the department of gynaecology. What this means is that as the best, Pedro stood out in learning all the false practices in gynaecology. If the best, African universities can produce is a gynaecologist like Pedro then there is need to take a second look at the going-ons in African universities.

The lecturers are not the only culprits in the play. The politicians are also linked to the whole situation. Senator Abdul Rahamon Ikeanobi, “the chairman house committee on education at the senate who used his position to corner the contract of supplying the chemicals and other facilities with which the students should use for practical” (70) is one big culprit in this situation. This is the reason according to Pedro: “I remember specifically, that most of the chemicals I started seeing in the hospitals after my graduation were things I was not opportune to be familiar with when I was a student here just because the university couldn’t make them available. I remember that at a time we were even doing what my HOD here called dry practicals. You just wrote chemicals instead of actually mixing them” (70). This is the reason when the senator’s daughter, Khadijat, became Pedro’s victim—in the course of an abortion—our grief is to certain degree. Like Mr Eze in Ukah’s *When the Wind Blows*, Senator Abdul Rahamon Ikeanobi represents those who created the monster that besieged them.

3. Conclusions

The two works reflect the times of reckoning (emphasis mine). In Ukah’s *When the Wind Blows* the time of reckon was that time when Adaku was supposed to carry out a blood test to save her dying husband. In *Once upon a Tower* the time of reckoning is when Pedro puts what he was taught to practice and ends up when killing his patient who is also his lover. Through the two works, the writers have succeeded in revealing what Pius Adesanmi described as “state terror” on the youths of this generation. And from the situations in the texts we have come to see that the survival of the youths of this generation is generally threatened by poverty of different kinds. First is the poverty of the pocket while the other is poverty of the mind. Poverty of the pocket may be more bearable than poverty of the mind. Hence, it is important to note that in a generation where poverty of the mind takes preeminence, what happened in Bakare’s *Once upon a Tower* and Ukah’s *When the Wind Blows* reign supremely. In such generation the youths would do anything to survive.

The two writers know that there just must be a way out of the situation. Hence they put forward their own solutions to the problem. In *When the Wind Blows*, Adaku regretted and secretly destroyed her certificate. But the fact that nobody knows the truth about her educational background is also a thing of worry. The situation in *Once upon a Tower* is entirely different and harsh. Pedro avenged what was done to him. He succeeded in killing all those who had a hand in creating a monster out of his educational career. Prof Kurumbete, Dr Yemi and Senator Abdul Rahamon Ikeanobi did not escape the jungle justice—they were lured to the Vice Chancellor’s office and killed. The band led by Miss Julie, the medical student who later turned a musician played so many songs that reiterates the point that Pedro tried to make to the Vice Chancellor, *that all those who are helping to bring shame and disgrace to this generation and who go extra-miles to ruin the future of all African youths should not go unpunished* (emphasis mine). As a matter of fact they should all be punished by the way that Pedro punished Prof Kurumbete and other culprits.

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