

# READING PEPETELA'S *THE RETURN OF THE WATER SPIRIT* AS A PAMPHLET FOR REVOLUTION

N'guessan KOUAKOU

Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS) Abidjan

*docbeniansou@yahoo.fr*

## ABSTRACT

This study entitled “Reading Pepetela’s *The Return of the Water Spirit* as a Pamphlet for Revolution” aims at showing that Pepetela’s *The Return of the Water Spirit* is an appeal for revolution. To this end, it shows the core of this revolution and also demonstrates how this revolution is conducted. Given the class struggle that underlies the novel, we resort to Marxism to carry this study that reveals that revolution takes form at three levels. First, the analysis demonstrates that the environment is an important character with the seeds of revolution flowing in its veins. The social upheaval depicted in the book is then highlighted and the advent of a burgeoning society rooted in democracy and trying to rid itself of ethnic and gender divisions is finally discussed.

**Key words:** pamphlet, revolution, resurrection, subversion, uprising, social upheavals

## RÉSUMÉ

Cette étude intitulée “Reading Pepetela’s *The Return of the Water Spirit* as a Pamphlet for Revolution” vise à montrer que l’œuvre *The Return of the Water Spirit- L’esprit de l’eau* - de Pepetela est un appel à la révolution. Pour ce faire, elle montre la quintessence de cette révolution et démontre également comment cette révolution est menée. Etant donné la lutte des classes qui sous-tend l’œuvre nous avons recours au Marxisme pour mener à bien cette étude qui révèle que la révolution prend forme à trois niveaux : notre analyse montre tout d’abord l’environnement comme un personnage important ayant les graines de la révolution coulant dans ses veines. Ensuite, elle fait ressortir les remous sociaux présents dans l’œuvre et se termine par l’avènement d’une future société enracinée dans la démocratie et essayant de se débarrasser des divisions ethniques et de genre.

**Mots clés:** pamphlet, révolution, résurrection, subversion, soulèvement, remous sociaux.

## INTRODUCTION

Artur Carlos Mauricio Pestena alias Pepetela is “an inborn rebel” who sides with the people in their struggle for freedom. Indeed, as a key warrior of the MPLA that snatched independence from Portugal, he was so deceived by the dysfunctional government that he left his position as minister to vehemently pencil and cudgel the Angolan society in his works. Ogbeide underscores Pepetela’s grievances as follows: “The failed socialist promises, the widening gap between the rich and the poor as well as the imperceptible transition from the proverbial frying pan of Soviet dictatorship to the fire of abused capitalist democracy have constituted a huge butt of criticism in virtually all his oeuvre” (Ogbeide 2013: 163).

In *The Return of the Water Spirit* (published in 1995 as *O Desejo de Kianda*) Pepetela denounces leaders and shoulders the struggle of the population taken in the whirlwind of moral decay, exploitation and demeaning practices. As a matter of fact, this work is skillfully woven to integrate social realities that trigger collective consciousness and appeal for action. It will therefore not be a mistake to state that this satirical novel is a pamphlet whose particularity is to be infused with a blurred revolution project. To implement this project, Pepetela appeals to every living being and instills in them the necessary goodwill to be firebrands of upheavals ultimately aiming at a social change.

Quoting from Ellul, Pralhad Chengte writes that revolution is used interchangeably with other activities like outburst, upheaval, unrest, agitation, rebellion, revolt, coup d’état and the like which aim at changing the status quo” (Pralhad Chengte, 2016:34). As can be seen, the ultimate aim of a revolution is to change and better the established order.

What is the core of this revolution touted by Pepetela? How is this revolution conducted?

These questions call for a threefold answer: the author first infuses the environment with a rebellious mood so that, as a subversive character, it struggles to take back what it has been dispossessed of. Then, he imbues revolution in the society. The ultimate aim of such a revolutionary infusion is to trigger a new sociopolitical deal.

The backcloth of the novel under study is the Angolan society trapped in the jaws of neocolonialism and people’s subsequent struggle to free itself. This infers that there is an unquestionable class-struggle underlying this Marxist-oriented novel. We consequently resort to Marxism in the framework of this study. We are strengthened in this position with Terry Eagleton’s view: “the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression” (Eagleton, 1976: v).

## 1. NATURE AS A SUBVERSIVE CHARACTER

In his strong will to instill revolution in all social layers, Pepetela appeals to nature and gives it the aptitudes of a person who is rebel enough to stir up subversion. Subversion can be observed in the collapse of buildings and the resurgence of the river.

### 1.1. THE COLLAPSE OF BUILDINGS

One of the most spectacular events in the novel under scrutiny is the recurrent collapse of buildings that is obviously a way for Pepetela to end up with the flaws of the current society. The collapse of buildings testifies to the author’s goodwill to destroy the existing society in order to build a new one. Ogbeide construes the collapses as a byproduct of the early nineties earthquake that destroyed the Berlin wall and brought the Soviet bloc to naught: “Shortly, the Soviet Block starts crumbling, possibly under Gorbachev, and external pressures begin to mount on Angola to embrace democratic opening-

up (Ogbeide 2014, 46). As a matter of fact, the dismemberment of the hitherto unshakable Soviet bloc sounds the death knell of the MPLA's godfather and, as a consequence, Angola is obliged to adopt western governance. Two main reasons are put forwards to justify this destruction of buildings: the model society which was expected after a long period of sociopolitical crisis sometimes alimanted by exogenous protagonists is a deceitful European one. Europe is basically characterized by profit, exploitation, dehumanization and sins. Furthermore, this society is so deeply rooted in evil that it is assimilated to Sodom and Gomorrah, two biblical twin cities destroyed by God as a punishment aimed at cleansing them:

The apartment blocks just create conflicts; everyone lives on top of each other like the Europeans do; it doesn't go well with our African way of being. Even more so when they begin to fall down, it's just like Sodom and Gomorrah" (Pepetela, 2002: 34).

As it can be seen, the society that everybody dreamt of during the fight for independence has nothing to do with the one built by leaders. Despite its Marxist orientation, Angola has no Marxist foundation and is a mere replica of Europe and the sins of capitalism. What is more, independent Angola is a pyramidal society with its bourgeois living off the sweat of the underdogs. What is worse, the country is not a unified one. A glance at the history of the country shows that Luanda is run by the MPLA with the support of the USSR whereas the hinterland is managed by the UNITA of Jonas Savimbi backed by the USA and their traditional allies. Yet, for the sake of fiction, Pepetela makes no mention of the USA and the USSR anywhere. The country itself is a divided one wherein antagonistic Cold War agents intervene to protect their interests, evidencing the fact that Angola is the battlefield of exogenous rivals who manipulate and divide native Angolans.

Sodom and Gomorrah are two cities in the Holy Bible and today the term "Sodom and Gomorrah" has become a byword for destruction and desolation.

Sodom and Gomorrah, or the "cities of the plain", have been used historically and in modern discourse as metaphors for homosexuality, and are the origin of the English words *sodomite*, a pejorative term for male homosexuals, and *sodomy*, which is used in a legal context under the label "crimes against nature" to describe anal or oral sex (particularly homosexual) and bestiality. This is based upon exegesis of the biblical text interpreting divine judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah as punishment for the sin of homosexual sex. A number of contemporary scholars dispute this interpretation. Some Islamic societies incorporate punishments associated with Sodom and Gomorrah into sharia (Wikipedia accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2021)

The sins mentioned above flow in the very veins of Angolan citizens, including authorities and well-known people. As a matter of fact, when the first building collapses, it comes down with two men who are so busy making love that they do not even realize what is happening:

Something that was talked about a lot, although the press made no mention of it, concerned the huge bed that came tumbling down with a naked couple caught in the act of making love. There would be nothing remarkable about this if it were not for the fact that the two were men – well-known public figures, one in politics, the other in the world of arts (Pepetela 2002 : 4).

In traditional Africa, deviant sex is viewed as a strong sin and what is today referred to as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender/transsexual (LGBT) is viewed as the highest degree of perversion. A society wherein men are turned into women bears the seeds of its disappearance like Sodom and Gomorrah. Thus, by comparing Luanda to Sodom and Gomorrah, Pepetela gives an insight of the sins that have taken control of Angola and insists on the necessity to redeem it.

The first collapse of buildings seems to be an incident. Nevertheless, paging through the novel reveals that Pepetela is concerned with destroying the Angolan society which is a deceitful one and akin to a dunghill teeming with worms. References to collapsing buildings are numerous and are found in almost all the book as exemplified here: “Joao Evangelista was married on the day the first building fell” (p.1). “Years later a four-storey building fell” (p. 8). “Another building’s fallen down” (p. 8). “Another building tumbled down, close to where the first building had fallen” (p. 41). “As they drove up towards Kinaxixi, they saw that the building which had stood on the right edge of the square was lying on the ground” (p.63). “When the restaurant building fell, only Goatee was there to film the whole scene” (p. 68). “Ten minutes later the background noise from outside rose a notch higher than the usual purring of the air-conditioning, which indicates that another building had fallen... there were no more buildings in the square” (p. 89).

All these references are testimonies that the author concerns himself with doing away with the existing society which, with its buildings, is a mere replica of the western world. The collapse of buildings resonates with the collapse of the political system of the time following the disappearance of the Soviet bloc. The reader realizes later that the only entity responsible for the collapse of buildings is Kianda, the water spirit, who has been buried alive by human beings. Ogbeide pairs this situation with the government’s failure to lead the masses to the Promised Land as follows:

Pepetela’s artistic resort to the myth of Kianda is a poetic demonstration of betrayal by the sitting government in Angola. Indeed, the collapse of the buildings cannot be divorced from the failure of the socialist principles of the so-called revolutionary government and the expected egalitarian ideas (Ogbeide, 2013: 161).

What is being advocated here is that all the Marxist principles touted during the war for independence are but sugar-coated lies to entomb the population as it was done with the water spirit. Foreign untrustworthy ideologies should consequently be plunked down for local ones.

## **1.2. THE RESURGENCE OF THE RIVER**

The river behaves like a character suffering from the setbacks of urbanization. Dried up or Buried alive for the needs of accommodation and infrastructure, the river manages to take back its pristine space that was for a time absorbed by the extension of the city.

In order to fully make his readership understand the plight of the river Pepetela makes an account of the situation before the construction of the Square. This construction brought about the burial of the water spirit and the grabbing of the river’s territory.

Close to that spot must have been the place where, 30 years before, they cut down the tree of the Water Spirit, during the time when they built the square. The entire area had once been a lagoon and there had been a sacred tree which was cut down and which shed blood from its stump for an entire week (Pepetela 2002: 37).

The bleeding of the lagoon tree epitomizes that of the people who were activists both in the war for independence and the post-independence fratricidal and filicidal war. Indeed, these subversive individuals were for the most part slaughtered like animals during these hard times for the Angolan people. Sadly, however, the bloodshed reported here also echoes that of the innocent people slaughtered during the 1992 post-election crisis. And all through these woeful periods, the population, like the river, sing their plight.

The wails of the river are first heard by a girl, namely Cassandra, in the form of a song full of sorrows: “A song, soft yet sorrowful, was growing from within the green and decaying

water that for years had been allowed to spread next to a building under construction in Kinaxixi “(Pepetela, 2002: 8).

The sorrowful song is synonymous with the sorrow and discontent growing among the population that untrustworthy leaders have betrayed and led to a symbolic Sodom and Gomorrah. Apart from Cassandra the girl who proves to be the water spirit that has taken a human form, nobody can hear the song conveying sadness for a long time. In real life, brooding upheavals are never heard till they break out either in the form of violent conflicts or soft revolutions. In Africa social change and important events are always rhymed with songs that sometimes only the initiated can decipher. In Pepetela's fictional world, nobody could hear nor decipher the song despite its soaring sadness.

It was a soft and yet pained song that a child one day heard. She told her friends, and they scoffed at her (Pepetela, 2002: 45)... yet the song rose up more sorrowful still, from within the dark waters where the frogs and the river fish shared a home in the midst of the plants with the round leaves.

What Pepetela is advocating is that leaders, and by extension some wealthy persons, can never hear the yelling of the suffering masses. Worse, they are mocked and ridiculed as is the case with Cassandra, the personified river that everybody considers crazy. In his wish to dismantle the fictional Sodom and Gomorrah, Pepetela turns everybody deaf dumb and blind so that they could neither hear nor hush up the river's complaints until it takes back its natural riverbed.

In the wake of the collapse of the buildings hindering its way to the lagoon, the imprisoned water gets back its freedom and therefore runs to the riverbed, with such a strength that it destroys all obstacles on its way. And the hitherto sorrowful song changes its tempo. It becomes a battle song that finally shifts from the pristine dirge/mourning song to a victorious one. It shows that the forces impinging freedom and happiness have been overcome and that once freedom is conquered one can then get to the intended destination. Differently put, individual and collective goals can be achieved once freedom has been secured. This is the case with the river that can freely move once obstacles impeding its movements are removed.

The water was running down the pavement, dragging with it some of the leaves from the round waterplants that have grown on the surface of the lagoon and had fed the river fish and the toads (Pepetela, 2002: 64). The water carved holes in the tarmac. The brook was looking for its old riverbed and wanted to discharge into the bay (Pepetela, 2002: 65).

As evidenced, the once imprisoned water takes back its natural way obliterated by the tarmac which represents modernity. The author seems to indicate that whatever the obstacle, nature always has victory over it. In the same seam, he advocates an implicit return to previous living ways abandoned for the sake of civilization. Since it is in the nature of the river to flow, any artificial or manmade obstacle to hinder its flowing cannot last for eternity. Whatever the obstacles, the river overcomes them either rapidly or slowly as exemplified below:

It was Kianda's laments, just as they had previously guessed. He complained that for centuries, he had lived in perfect happiness in his lagoon until men decided to drain his lagoon and put cement and sand and tar on top of it, and build a square and buildings all around it. Kianda felt stifled with all that weight on top of him. He couldn't swim, and then he revolted against it. He sang until all the buildings fell down, one by one, slowly (Pepetela, 2002: 93)

From the above one could state that action is needed where and whenever injustice is given credence over justice. As a matter of fact, flabby laments can never trigger change if they are not coupled with

actions. In *The Return of the Water Spirit*, the brooding anger and the yelling for freedom of the river are coupled with the collapse of the buildings impending its way.

The plight and movements of the river are a strong metaphor Pepetela uses to characterize the predicament of the Angolan people. Like the river, this people has been dispossessed of the least they happen to have first by colonial forces and later on by indigenous leaders in cahoots with alien powers. The river epitomizes this people who shoulders the weight of colonialism and neocolonialism. The plight and laments of the river are therefore those of a whole people who cannot eke out a living because they are exploited, engaged and dehumanized both by endogenous and exogenous forces on the pretense of bringing them western civilization. This people's laments are never heard by leaders who "drive past all this misery in their cars refrigerated inside and with music playing at full so they won't hear the laments of the beggars who might just upset their spiritual wellbeing" (Pepetela 2002: 80). Beyond Angola, Pepetela exposes the hardships of Africa and by the same token indicates the way to end up with the inhumanity lorded on the people. In the same seam, he invites the suffering masses to shake the foundations of neocolonialism and conquer back their freedom. This conquest consists of true struggles and not mere laments and dirge songs. Ogbeide is consequently right to indicate revolution as the only exit:

The organic revolution of Kianda which causes the destruction of the buildings thereby restoring the original landscape of Luanda is a metaphor for the Angolan people to do away with all the foreign ideologies which have only come to destroy the country (Ogbeide 2013: 166-67).

Ogbeide is urging the people to conquer back their identity by throwing away western world-view. The struggle of the river to retake its pristine space parallels the burning revolution within the masses and downtrodden who have also been denied the least to survive and whose laments have never been heard by leaders turned deaf-dumb. Its resurgence is therefore synonymous with social resurrection triggered by revolution. I consequently go along with Ogbeide who opines that "the triumph of the water spirit becomes a metaphor for the eventual triumph of the revolution which will eventually bring about a new Angola where virtue is truly stronger because it is united" (Ogbeide, 2014: 45).

## 2. SOCIAL REVOLUTION

Revolutions always go in pairs with human societies. Indeed, while weaving their daily history, all societies feel the need to adapt or change either smoothly or through upheavals. In *The Return of the Water Spirit*, this change is multifaceted. For the sake of analysis, we will pinpoint two aspects of this revolution: the civil war and the naked revolution.

### 2.1. THE CIVIL WAR AND NATIONAL UNITY PRESERVATION

Angola has a long tradition of civil war somewhat revived by foreign agents on behalf of the Cold War. In 1992, after general elections supposed to bring peace in the country, the dormant war reopens and continues till the death of Jonas Savimbi. Pepetela recalls some portions of this war in his work. Yet, in his will to build a true united nation in his fictional world, he hides some bloody episodes and avoids ethnic clashes observed in the Angolan history.

The war is rendered visible first in the dream of Joao Evangelista then as a byproduct of failed elections.

In his dream, Joao Evangelista is taken to a battle site where he discovers destroyed buildings and numberless "bodies lying on the ground" (Pepetela, 2002: 31). He also eyewitnesses soldiers running to avoid being killed. This dream prefigures real war and its end foretells the author's will to end up

with the so long war that has impeded Angola's development. Joao's efforts to save a woman he takes for dead equates with efforts to withdraw the country from the jaws of this fratricidal war.

As a byproduct of failed elections, the war breaks out as a post-election crisis before gaining momentum to become a nationwide war. A glance at the Angolan history indicates that Pepetela is referring to the 27<sup>th</sup> September 1992 elections that confirm the victory of José Eduardo Dos Santos on the ground. Yet, even before the announcement of the results Savimbi declares that he would not accept them because they are rigged. As a former member of the Luanda government, Pepetela refuses to overtly point to Savimbi as the responsible for the war. He rather qualifies him and his rebels as the responsible for this new bloodshed:

The defeated party had not accepted the election results and once again war had broken out. At first it was low-intensity affair. For months the rebels marched on the district commissioners who were favorable to the party that had won the elections. And then, for three days, it all blew up in Luanda, and with great violence at that (Pepetela 2002: 39).

The author parallels the collapse of buildings with the destruction of buildings as a consequence of the post-election war. This destruction must be construed as the rejection of the existing sinful society and its obsolete ideologies and practices that verge on immoralities.

The preceding lines testify to the author's willpower to break the backbone of the existing society that he labels Sodom and Gomorrah through Luanda which is a microcosm of Angola that has fallen in the pitfalls of depravity. Indeed, as if the natural collapse of buildings were not efficient to cleanse the sins of the population, the people themselves actively partake in the destruction of that society. Alongside this destruction are ethnic prejudices that are often exploited to foster wars. But the author does not stop at the only level of the destruction brought about by these ethnic prejudices. Here, the evocation of ethnic prejudices opens an avenue to ethnic tolerance and consolidation of national unity that Pepetela advocates for.

The appeal for unity is observed through a conversation between Joao and his spouse Carmina. It goes as follows:

'That was my father. He says everything's calm in his neighbourhood, but he's worried. Rumour has it that some of the Umbundu people are being persecuted by the locals. Some had to leave their houses and flee (Pepetela 2002: 43).

'What did they expect?' said Carmina. 'Didn't the Umbundu vote for our enemies? Now they will suffer.'

'They didn't all vote that way', said her husband. 'The results are there to prove it. And they are also part of the people – have you forgotten the old lessons? It's important to defend national unity: one People, one Nation.'

'They are Umbundu. They have ceased to be part of the People!'

'I am also Umbundu and I am part of the People.'

The conversation later reveals that Joao is both Umbundu and Kimbundu. He is consequently an Angolan with a dual or hybrid identity. Knowledge of this very fact curbs Carmina's fanaticism who ends up labelling her husband "National Unity". With this ethnic status that he has, Joao represents indeed the bridge between the two main antagonistic ethnic groups that have waged the bloody war that had not spared other ethnic groups in the past.

To avoid a repetition of history, Joao's pressure on his wife to make an appeal for national unity is somehow understood by authorities who "warned that no persecution of civilians would be tolerated" (Pepetela 2002: 44).

The war can be construed as a means for Pepetela to demolish society and cleanse it. By not giving a real death toll, the author kills any feeling of fear within the masses and urges them to get united and fight for their rights. Such a fight can be observed in the naked revolution.

## 2.2. THE NAKED REVOLUTION

In the wake of the collapse of the buildings, many citizens become homeless and experience the harshness of dire poverty. Crushed by the weight of destitution and left to themselves in refugee camps in their own country, the only way they find to voice out their predicament is nakedness that turns out to be a struggle and claim weapon necessary to fuel revolution for an egalitarian Angola.

Characters' nakedness is an aesthetics of shock aimed at baring the inhumanity of the society depicted by Pepetela. It is in connection with the violent outbursts that characterize most revolutions. Moving naked around is a protest strategy that brings humanity to the state of nature where everybody is on equal footing. Returning to the state of nature is a way of denouncing and rejecting manmade injustice and exploitation. In other words, the naked revolution targets the established order in Angola. This order, like the people, is naked, that is, it is devoid of the least humanity. The people's nakedness is paired with that of the water that is daily soiled by the waste of society. The river has successfully managed to get free from the prison where it was locked for the sake of urbanization. For the population, the naked revolution is an opportunity to move from the margins to the center of society and fill in their destiny according to their needs and dreams. Showing their nakedness is a clarion call for action. By this very movement, they become agents of history and not mere subjects that one can crush and reduce to silence.

Marx once said: "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" (Marx, 2010: 82). This means that living conditions shape our behavior. When these conditions are no longer bearable, actions is needed. The call for action implies an endogenous rebellion to gear reactions from the government. Pepetela's protest targets African leaders who perpetuate oppression and deprivation as colonial legacy. Goldstone contends that "One view widely held among laymen is that "misery breeds revolt." He adds that "when oppression becomes too much to bear, the masses will rise up against their oppressors" (Goldstone, 1982: 187). This idea applies to Angolans whose uprisings target their dysfunctional government who does not care about the disaster-stricken and destitute population.

The homeless in Kinaxixi are protesting against a government which does nothing for them. Nakedness is our new national garb, the one that's in accordance with the standard of living of our people. We can't even walk around in a loincloth. A loincloth is a middle-class luxury (Pepetela, 2002: 94).

As can be seen, 'being dressed in nakedness' is a way of whipping class struggle and jettisoning obsolete western ideologies. Moving naked therefore testifies to Pepetela's rejection of the middle-class' values and morals for the reappropriation of the ones of the proletariat. This reappropriation implies the denunciation of all the suffering and pauperism lorded on the masses by the haves. Suffering and pauperism are byproducts of devaluation, soaring prices and stagnation of salaries that impede decent life. For the have-nots, dressing properly is a way of giving a free hand to the ruling class to better deprive them of the least they happen to possess.

Pepetela hardly hides his Marxist orientation in his work. One of the characters even mentions Marx by saying: "They tried to kill Marx before his time and now he's on his way back to avenge himself" (Pepetela 2002: 96). Resorting to Marx is an invitation to effectively get involved in the class struggle to "impose social equality by force, that is to tear off the clothes of the rich" (Pepetela 2002: 96).



The naked revolution does not sideline women. Indeed, instead of shoehorning them into trivial and demeaning roles, the author turns them into prime movers of the revolution. In other terms they are at the firing squad of revolution. Their nakedness echoes that of the *Femen*, three young women who showed their naked body as a way of protesting against state injustice in Tunisia in 2011. The *Femen* movement was actually a freedom and solidarity movement on the behalf of another lady who was arrested for showing her nakedness on the Internet. In Pepetela's fictional world too, freedom and solidarity underlie the naked revolution: "it is also a collective effort and it implies solidarity" (Pepetela, 2002: 97). This functional solidarity recalls Marx's appeal to all the proletarians of the world to get united in their fight to weaken and dismantle the bourgeoisie. In Marxist parlance, "oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes" (Marx, 2010: 14). Pepetela avoids this common ruin and preconizes collective actions of plebeians to topple the bourgeoisie and give another direction to the Angolan society. As posited by Ogbeide, "organized action rather than individual messianism is celebrated as capable of reversing the ugly African condition" (Ogbeide, 2014: 46). What Ogbeide means here is that one must shift from individual to collective hero to be effectively efficient.

Quoting from Leon Trotsky, Eagleton writes that "there are many people in this world who think as revolutionists and feel as philistines; but Marx and Engels were not of this number" (Eagleton, 1976: 1). The same is true of Pepetela who dares to rebel against the International Monetary Fund that can be seen as a hungering institution. Even though helping institutions claim that "the most significant aspect of the adjustment efforts of sub-Saharan African countries during 1986-92 was the progress they made toward liberalizing their economies, with a view to enhancing incentives and the efficient utilization of scarce resources" (Saleh M. Nsouli, 1993 :21), they only worsen the situation of poor countries. Breton Wood institutions are targeted because their structural adjustment policies imposed on third world countries in the nineties have been bottlenecks that have buried alive the already agonizing masses.

These masses went from poverty to destitution. The solutions imposed to African countries by financial institutions are more harmful than the problems these institutions want to solve: 'We want to foment a rebellion that will force the State to ignore the dictates of the IMF which are making us all the poor to benefit of the foreigners and some corrupt people' (Pepetela, 2002: 98). Grievance towards the IMF is paired with that towards a handful of leaders who concentrate the wealth of the country in their hands. Speculating on the reasons of the Angolan war, Ben Rosie writes: "In the shadow of the colonial struggle and the rampant deprivation experienced by a significant portion of the population there were certainly grievances enough to explain the advent of rebellion" (Ben Rosie, 2020: 2).

From the above, it can be inferred that the naked revolution invites the government to get free of the trenchant jaws of westerners turned into fake helping institutions to maintain poor countries into absolute poverty that dehumanizes and frustrates any manhood. It also demands the curbing of deprivation for the birth of a society whose foundations are grounded in the struggles for independence.

Nakedness as observed here does not imply weakness, marginalization or vulnerability. It is a rather strong weapon to demand political and social reshuffling for a fair and equitable distribution of the richness of independent Angola. It is therefore the inchoative stage of a much larger upcoming revolution for equality. This equality is achieved through nakedness according to Ogbeide who writes: "The new uprising in Angola is gender-blind and truly class-less since, in the final analysis, human beings are all actually naked and therefore, genuinely egalitarian" (Ogbeide, 2014: 47). Revolutions often bring about a new economic and political deal.

### 3. TOWARDS A NEW ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEAL

The brooding revolution in Pepetela's work can also be observed on the economic and political agenda. These two key sectors are reshuffled and their dynamism brings about the market economy and the culture of democracy that are prime movers of radical change in the fictional Angolan society.

#### 3.1. THE ADVENT OF THE MARKET ECONOMY

Economy is one of the cornerstones of any nation. One of the most noticeable events of the early nineties is the opening-up of national economies to the private sector under the dictation of Breton Wood institutions. Pepetela records some episodes of this opening-up in his novel with the creation of small and medium-sized businesses by the local people.

Before the opening-up of the economy, there was no difference between politics and economy. The economic sector was handled by the rival movements, namely MPLA and UNITA, waging war in the country. As a matter of fact "Coastal resources, previously controlled by the Portuguese, allowed the MPLA to implement and maintain a system of patrimonial governance. This blended the economic with the political and the political with the personal, distorting the mode of wealth creation" (Médard 1982). This is an indication that even the Marxist-oriented MPLA has never been rooted in Marxism. On the contrary, it behaves like oligarchies that threaten the masses as Tyson puts it:

Communist societies, though they claim to be based on the principles developed by Karl Marx (1818–1883), have been, in reality, oligarchies in which a small group of leaders controls the money and the guns and forces its policies on a population kept in line through physical intimidation (Tyson, 2006: 53).

The above suggests that there were no clear-cut distinction between personnel belongings and national ones. It also indicates that the economy belongs to strong leaders who divert and stash money in private accounts and so the advent of the market economy could curb this practice and allow everybody to create wealth.

The involvement of local actors in the economy of Angola is exemplified by the case of Carmina. Indeed, she takes the liberalization of the economy as an opportunity to make money. She quickly turns into a businesswoman who hustles and bustles to build an economic empire. Even though she uses fraudulent ways, she succeeds in setting an import-export company specialized in the sale of arms that permits her to rake in the economy of war-time. As a consequence, she rises to the highest social level and is now "an habitué of the luxurious boutiques (Pepetela, 2002: 55). Yet, given that Carmina now belongs to the exploiting class, she develops rugged individualism coupled with capitalistic attitudes and does not tolerate uprisings, which is a rejection of Marxism that she once fiercely touted. Rugged individualism, in Marxist parlance, is an oppressive ideology that impinges collective wealth. Paraphrasing Marx, one can say that the society that "has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones" (Marx, 2010:14). Class struggle is consequently a never-ending struggle.

True enough, market economy has favoured the emergence of a middle and high-class society. However, with the example of Carmina, it triggers a rush for individual properties and the exploitation of laymen who find their solutions in the creation of restaurants.

One of the thriving businesses following the liberalization of economy is restaurants with a daily upward impetus. And it is in one of those restaurants that Carmina invites her husband Joao Evangelista to discuss business. "She invited him to go out for dinner to one of the many restaurants that were opening up every day now, the first sign that the country was moving towards the so-called market

economy” (Pepetela 2002: 13). And this can boost the economy as it is proven that the participation of the private sector to the economy always whips the economy.

The creation of restaurants handled by native could imply a decrease of unemployment. It also infers that Angolans can order and consume local dishes. Even though this could be interpreted as a sign of the existence of a market economy, it is highly ideological. Indeed, beyond the mere will to create and manage restaurants lies the author's willpower to end up with the blind consumption of western-made goods. In the same seam, he somehow throws away foreign ideologies that have proved inefficient in the western world but which are still imposed on third-world countries. An ideological struggle consequently lies behind the creation of restaurants.

The advent of the market economy is an opportunity to foster the creation of local businesses that could fuel a local economy that could raise the living standard of the people. Yet, it does not stop class antagonism. Class antagonism can varnish once people are rid of poverty and when they can easily and righteously get together to cultivate democracy.

### **3.2. THE CULTURE OF DEMOCRACY?**

A democratic culture shook the whole world with the ‘wind of democracy’ flowing from ancient USSR countries in the early nineties. The most visible consequence of this democracy wind is the birth of numberless political parties in Africa. In his will to partake in the rooting of democracy, Pepetela makes his fictive world witness the creation and animation of political parties, which is one of the basic principles of democracy whereby power is vested in the people.

The democratic mood is perceived through the opening pages of the novel where one reads that “The political régime really was going to change despite Carmina’s loud protests as the leader of the radical wing of the Y. It was made public that there had been official contacts with members of the armed opposition” (Pepetela 2002: 11). And despite the strong opposition of leaders of the Youth epitomized by Carmina who go berserk and try to stir up open rebellion, there is the “democratic open-up”. Carmina’s fit of temper changes nothing and contacts with the members of the armed opposition is the first step of a long process that leads to the first multipartite election.

Opening-up to democracy fuels the birth of parties that “grew like the plants in the new lagoon of Kinaxixi” (Pepetela 2002: 12). The creation of political parties implies political tolerance and is a golden occasion to flash angry eyes on the behavior of native leaders turned wolves in a sheepfold. Pepetela hides behind a political leader to club the government which is not responsible to the people. Owing to this lack of accountability towards the people, there is no social policy. Government dysfunction is coupled with a crying lack of accommodation and infrastructure as is the case in developing and underdeveloped countries. What is worse, cabinet members behave like highway criminals and are involved in embezzlement. Yet, under the single-party government, everybody shies in making the least criticism. This is surely one of the reasons why Pepetela abandoned his position as minister to devote his time to writing. Leaving the government allows him to better denounce the sins handed to Angola as a colonial legacy. Writing thus becomes another way of resuming his activism as a fighter for independence and justice. Differently put, Pepetela creates and animates political parties whose members are his readers. In his political meetings he delivers fireballs targeting the government that he holds responsible for the destitution and moral decay of the society. This clear-cut attitude towards the government “presages a reluctance of elite leaders to suppress popular uprisings, and even more often portend elite revolts against the regime” (Goldstone, 1982: 190). He could therefore be assimilated to:

The speaker from a newly-created political party who accused the single-party government

of being responsible for this catastrophe for it had contributed nothing towards the upkeep of the buildings. Any and everything could be used as election propaganda for the elections were drawing close (Pepetela 2002: 35).

What the author is stressing through this fire-and-brimstone sermon is that the government has failed to build and consolidate a true society wherein they take care of the nation and its properties. The lack of upkeep of the buildings equates that of the whole country that could not properly be managed because it is victim of inner and external division. Division is contrary to Marxist principles that call for unity and is the proof that leaders' Marxism never goes beyond the level of propaganda. For Ogbeide, leaders "have never been committed to the Marxist ideology which they see as just a smokescreen to hoodwink the people" (Ogbeide 2013: 164). With the new democratic wind, gone are the ghosts of division coupled with external orders.

True democracy is lived thanks to what Pepetela simply terms the movement, a movement that functions on the basis of a party deeply rooted in democratic principles. A furtive glance at the background of this movement shows that power and decision emanate from the masses. Moreover they seem to have a clear ideology that underlies their political theory and program. This political ideology is not imported from the western world. It is rather created by Angolans for Angolans. Selden Raman states that "the literary result is not merely a reflection of other ideological discourses but a special *production* of ideology (Raman Selden & al. 2005: 101). What is at stake here is that literature should influence reality by telling to readers how to organize themselves. In practice, decisions are made by everybody, not by a handful of leaders as is the case with parties that merely copy western governance. Decision-making by the people for the people implies active participation in the writing of human history: "we are creating history because we are inventing our own ways. It's time to stop copying our formulas from overseas. We have to invent our own methods of struggle" (Pepetela 2002: 99). Pepetela shoulders the burden of actively taking part in the writing of Angolan history which still has many virgin pages waiting to be filled up by Angolans. For this he loses no occasion to trigger the awareness of the masses for the culture of true democracy that will exorcize the sins of the Cold War period. He is recognizable in Honorio who is metamorphosed after his involvement in the movement. Despite the latter's shabby appearance, "He was a popular leader; no longer was he a naked man in another person's house, but he was on stage in some public square making a speech that would inflame the masses" (Pepetela, 2002:99) like Pepetela himself in front of his readers.

True enough, democratic principles can be observed in Pepetela's efforts to build a modern society based on justice and equity. Yet it is helpful to recognize that democracy is still on shaking legs; reason why even the author rather talks about "so-called democratic opening-up" (Pepetela 2002: 10). In one word, democracy, even though now frozen, will fully be implemented in the upcoming period.

## CONCLUSION

Paging though *The Return of the Water Spirit* ultimately convinces Pepetela's readership that this novel bears the stamp of revolution which "has become a means to create nations, change the social order, and collapse colonial occupiers" ( Mohsen Abdollahi 2018: 8). The author is paving his way through the difficulties that will trigger the birth of the Angolan nation. Despite the hardship of the moment, Angola will go ahead and overcome all the obstacles that led the country to earthly hell. The nation-state that will be born from the ashes of the previous and sinful one seems to be the carbon copy of a rainbow nation that expels the evils of ethnic division and integrates all its sons and daughters into the different social spheres. This upcoming society could be "a truly participatory, more democratic, less racist and sexist society" (John Foran, 1997:813).

Through his literary acumen, Pepetela subtly empowers the masses through the metaphor of the water spirit whose victory over society foretells that of the downtrodden. Like the water spirit, the people is so fed-up with injustice, lack of freedom, privation, greed, corruption and all sorts of sins that armed with their only courage and empty-handed, they try to shake the very foundation of the rotten society that nurtures on the sweat of indigent people. The lesson to be drawn from the naked revolution – though it is frozen- and the new deal is that oppressed Angolans in particular and proletariat in general must always have the audacity to initiate and get involved in revolutions aiming at definitely freeing themselves and putting an end to the numberless plagues and evils of today. In this process, Pepetela advocates for a reconstruction of independent Angola earmarked by a native ideology and not foreign ones that proved to be reverse somersaults in the construction of Angola.

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