

Soyinka's Unrelenting Quest for an African Spring

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ABSTRACT

The article 'Soyinka's Unrelenting Quest for an African Spring' is a review on *Harmattan Haze on an African Spring*. This book was earlier published by Yale under the Title 'Of Africa'. It focuses on Africa's post-colonial experience in the new millennium. It highlights Soyinka's position on the contradictions on the continent and he takes the question of development to the individual.

KEYWORDS

Harmattan haze; Postcolonialism; Soyinka.

One of Africa's foremost thinkers of the 21st century, the Nobel laureate Prof. Wole Soyinka blames Africa's decades of underdevelopment on the twin evils of slavery and colonialism inflicted by the Western world. The literary icon said that lack of vision from African leaders have further compounded the problems of the African continent and have failed their people when it comes to the business of governance. People now use religion as weapon of mass destruction instead of using it to advance development in Africa. He also implores African leaders to use technology for the advancement of the continent.

While exploring Africa's truest assets, Soyinka seeks to understand how the continent's history is entwined with that of others. Soyinka's exploration of Africa relocates the continent in the reader's imagination, and maps a course toward an African future of peace and affirmation"

Soyinka has spent a substantial part of his eventful life fighting injustice and human indignity wherever and whenever it reared its head irrespective of race or faith which even led to his imprisonment.

He has continued writing on these aspects even in the post-colonial period where he displays his dissatisfaction at the government policies, corruption and most importantly, racism and slavery. Now at the age of 79, he still affirms the significance of history in understanding the challenges of contemporary Africa warning of the dangers of sweeping the lessons of our bitter history under the carpet. For him, the colonially devised boundaries of contemporary Africa are elaborate fictions that have failed to evolve into enduring, cohering realities and African leaders must summon the moral and self-sacrificial courage to make radical adjustments more in tune with the continent's natural socio-cultural contours. For Soyinka, slavery was one of the most heinous crimes against humanity. The barbarity, humiliation and dehumanization of slavery have vividly come alive in his writings. His writings from the 1950's to the present 2013, reflect the author's obsession with race that marked the apartheid regime, his concern of the African Diaspora with apartheid, which was felt to be an affront to the entire race and his now familiar concerns about

the vagaries of African politics. He seems to be desperate since a long time for a quest for true restitution for all the moral and material wrongs done to Africa, whether through slavery or colonialism, whether by the West or the East.

His latest book *Harmattan Haze on an African Spring* presented on 18th December 2012, is a collection of essays, which focuses on Africa's post-colonial experience in the new millennium and shows his concern and passionate commitment for Africa and its never-ending corruption, and racism with no scope for the development of the country. In line with his concern with history, Soyinka takes a detailed look at the savage phenomenon of slavery and the slave trade and its continuing negative implications for the African psyche. In the interview during the launch of the book he said "..... I wrote the book as a response to that individual who made the racist statement."

Soyinka's new book touches on many aspects of African literature, colonialism, slavery, religion, racism, that have been long debated. It focuses on Africa's post-colonial experience in the new millennium. It highlights Soyinka's position on the contradictions on the continent and he take the question of development to the individual. "What's the essence of the Africa human being? Development is an old process the book forces everyone to interrogate. Is there a process of development that we have been alienated from as a race?" He relates African development to the law of gravity where nothing goes up, only comes down. His rationale is that the impediment to Africa's development was largely because of its history of slavery and colonialism. He states:

"My mouth has gone sore about talking poor leadership. You can't talk about development in Africa without taking into consideration slavery and colonialism. These are still dragging

us down and we have not been able to overcome this."

Soyinka condemns the portraits of Africa given by an assortment of foreign explorers, writers and thinkers, who had little or no understanding of the people and cultures they purported so authoritatively to portray to the world." He is equally fierce in condemning the antics of dictatorial and corrupt African leaders whose conduct only serve to confirm the earlier distortion of the continent's history by external voices and interests. Soyinka takes a hard look at the African predicament and dares to ask painful questions. Soyinka denounces the racist view of the West about Africa in a different way.

The upper crust of both the business world the literary world and people from all walks of life attended the launch of the book. . *Harmattan Haze on an African Spring* was discussed by Ezekwesili, Utomi, Ajayi and Soyinka himself. As a response to Soyinka's view on colonialism and slavery in the present generation, Ezekwesili argued that most young people on the continent have lost touch with colonialism and slavery. "More young people in Africa are losing touch with colonialism and slavery. When it comes to development there should be a space for convergence, between the old and the new, to enable a never again commitment from them.

On his part, Utomi argues that corruption in the country is synonymous with Abiku because there have been no consequences for such act. "One of the challenges of living in Nigeria is doing something without consequence. There is a tendency to do it if there are no consequences for an action. Nigeria is reputed to be the tenth internet user in the world but how have we used this to create a new spring like the Arab spring? It is time for Africa to arise.

Soyinka has aptly titled the book at a time when dark clouds of uncertainty have

covered Africa. There may be no hope of a vibrant spring like that of Arab although there have been sparks of protest here and there on the continent about inefficient leadership. He ardently desires for a change in the fortunes of one of the most abused and humiliated geographical delineations in history. His larger commitment to humanity is indelibly

captured in his famous credo: 'Justice is the first condition of humanity'. ". The book speaks about language, spirituality, the conflict between Christian and Islam and suggests that the traditional form of worship is the way forward for a colonized continent.

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