

Echo of Poesy in South Africa's Politics: Form and Resistance in Dennis Brutus' "Simple Lust" and "Letters to Martha"

Kalu, Kalu Obasi¹

¹ Veritas university Abuja, The Catholic University of Nigeria, Nigeria

Correspondence: Kalu, Kalu Obasi, Veritas University Abuja, The Catholic University of Nigeria, Nigeria

Received: August 24, 2017

Accepted: November 23, 2017

Online Published: November 27, 2017

doi:10.5430/elr.v6n4p25

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/elr.v6n4p25>

Abstract

Apartheid in South Africa began in 1948 AD with the introduction of separatist rule that introduced draconian principles in government. This made formation of associations impossible. There was no free movement of the Blacks. Pass laws were imposed to prevent the Blacks from free movement. This approach brought protest among reasonable people of the World. Within the literary circle, protest literature ensued and emerged to join forces with organizations to clamp down on the draconian system operatives in South Africa. From the 1950s through the 60s and 80s witnessed a plethora of protest literature against the system of government in South Africa. This paper entitled "Echo of Poesy in South Africa Politics: Form and Resistance in Dennis Brutus' *Letters to Martha* and *A Simple Lust* examined South Africa's protest literature with particular reference to Dennis Brutus's poetry of resistance showing the various circumstances which Dennis Brutus offers his poetry of resistance.

Keywords: Echo, Poesy, Politics, Resistance, Form

1. Introduction

South African politics has been bedecked with controversies since the institutionalizing of apartheid in 1948. It has been politics of opulence and suppression, violence and protests from polarities of white dominance and black resistance. Without doubt, apartheid raised a wide range of controversies the world over, prompting concerns from well meaning individuals from all quarters of human philosophy, psychology and humanity. Concerned individuals published their views expressed in various forms such as music, history and literature. There were World-wide campaigns for the elimination of apartheid. Apartheid was seen as sin against humanity, nature and God put together. The existence of this polarity generated a lot of protests which were usually suppressed with arms, detentions and pogroms. Many literatures were mounted against the calamitous existence of inhumanity among God's creatures. The literary works of Njabulo Ndebele's *Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1991), La Guma's *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories* (1968), Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead and the Island* (1972), and many other writers wrote to express and publish their disgust and opinions against the stigmatized hammer called apartheid in South Africa. Many musicians in the tunes of reggae songs expressed the evils of apartheid. Notable among these singers were late Bob Nesta Marley, King Yellow Man, late Peter MarkinTosh among others. Also many historians chronicled the existence of apartheid and its evil in South Africa.

In literary art, many prose writers and poets alike expressed their concerns and emotional outburst against apartheid rule in South Africa. These writers were harassed and visited with detention, threats, and all manners of assault. Among these poets was late Dennis Brutus (1924-2009), who was harassed, chased into self exile, detained, imprisoned and even physically assaulted with a knife cut in the back while trying to escape through a fence. This paper is domicile within the poetry of Dennis Brutus. It attempts to examine the waves his numerous poems, drawn from *Stubborn Hope, Selected Poems of South Africa and a Wider World Including China Poems* (1978) and *A Simple Lust, Collected Poems of South African Jail and Exile Including Letters to Martha*, (1973) created in the politics of South Africa during the apartheid era.

The interest of this paper in the subject is based on the fact that, apart from the politics of apartheid, the several echoes of protest from various quarters and dimensions, Dennis Brutus remains a single figure whose poetry penetrated deeply in the viscera of South African politics. His works stand him out as a poet, teacher, solicitor and a critic. His works portray him as a dedicated person to the cause of South Africa and South Africans. His works will serve as a good reminder to the purportedly introduced new and pure democracy of Black voice in the politics of

South Africa. Again, this paper attempts to put in a voice in the form of protest and resistance literature that were prevalent during the apartheid period as expressed by Dennis Brutus. Notwithstanding his *Stubborn Hope* (1978), a documented hope that apartheid will one day become a thing of the past, history in South Africa, emphatically his *A Simple Lust and Letters to Martha* (1973) speak volumes of his dedication to his dear country, his protest and resistance of violent knuckles and boots of apartheid. Lekan Oyegoke in his essay “‘Renaissance’ & South African Writing”, in *South & Southern African Literature* (23), notes that “...history is not only a record of events but also the events themselves”(1). Also, Ritske Zuidema in his essay “The Changing Role of Poetry in the Struggle for Freedom, Justice and Equality in South Africa” presents the various ways poetry has been used as a source of resistance and fight for freedom from oppression, subjugation and psychological, economic and mental harassment. Citing Don Mattera’s “No Time, Black Man” (1971) and James Maltheu’s *Freedom’s Child*, (1971) give the analogy of the role of poetry in the struggles against slavery, oppression and subjugation and its use in freedom fight. They were particular about its use as a source of encouragement and resistance in South Africa during the apartheid era.

It is interesting to note that poetic works and music were very common in the South African society more than any other method of social expression. To the vast majority of South Africans, these art forms were often the only means of expressing their suppressed situation during the apartheid rule. The seizure and stamped on the rights and freedom of South Africa by the White settlers were initially resisted with local weapons which were no match to the sophisticated weapons of the Whites. Hence the Blacks became marginally suppressed and oppressed on their own soil. The Blacks were thus subjects of oppression and all manners of in human treatment. Laws were formulated to recruit Blacks into forced labour to work in mines and agricultural settlement of the Whites.

Literature is articulated for the consumption of man in society. It is a social tool for the expression of activities in any social setting. Hence literature has artistic bearing and psychological frame work and categorization. This artistic mode produce what Jung calls “psychological and visionary (poesy), novels” (Adams 809). Jung posits that:

The psychological mode deals with materials drawn from the realm of human consciousness that constitutes the conscious life of man. The visionary mode deals with unfamiliar circumstances, supernatural forces and metaphysical tendencies. It is a complete reversion of the psychological mode (810).

The writer does write in vacuum. The writer cannot divorce himself from societal influence, and these influences, more other than not, manifest themselves in his work.

Dennis Brutus’s, poetry is a manifestation of things, events, horrors and various tendencies that have occurred or occurs in South Africa. His poetic works shake amiable hands with other works of protest literature geared toward the exposition and dismantling of apartheid government in South Africa.

Literature and politics have become married together in most recent times in African that the two are seen as twins. This gain credence by the declaration of Leopold Sedar Senghor at the “first international congress of Negro Writers and Artist at the Sorbome” in 1950 when he said “contemporary Africa Poetry and novels are conditioned by the colonial presence” (1956).

African literary scholars have indeed regarded their works as a weapon against colonial presence and oppression. African writers have produced numerous works categorized as protest literature; among this protest literature, among this protest literature, Drams work poetes d’ expression francaise, which was published in 1947. This work blazed the trail in the political literature in 1947.

Damas lived between 1912- 1978). He says:

The time of repression and inhibition has given way to a different age: One where the colonial subject realizes his rights and duties as an author, novelist, short story writer, essayist or poet. Poverty, illiteracy, the exportation of man by man, social and political racism weighing on the Black and Yellow races, forced labour.... Shirked crimes committed in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity, these are the subjects of this naive poetry expressed in French (13).

He goes further to say that “more than ever before, politics and literature are becoming inter woven more and more obvious in the works of representatives of the new school” (16).

Henri Krea is also among the leading protest writers. A Portuguese Negro poet he posits that:

There is no need to comment on the attitude of the new black African poets: this is expressed unequivocally in their works. In all of them, the central theme is arranged around the fight to dispel the dark night of colonial oppression (65).

Nditsouna expresses this militant position in one sentence in his work “Fleurs de laterite” (1954). This is translated to mean, “I am not a poet, I want to be a fighter” (5)

Revolt against colonial rule, resentment at racial dissemination and the terrible bitterness left by memories of slave trade influence African writers at the beginning of their literary disposition. Slavery and dissemination, apartheid, oppression and racism inspired African writers and inevitably African literary genres in their expression and works across all domains of African.

Other poets like: Agostino Neto (1922- 1979) of Angola; Louis Gama of Brazil (1880 – 1982); and Nicolas Guillan of Cuba (1902 – 1989) are also significant. Dennis Brutus of South Africa in his “Simple Lust” and “Letters to Marths” also form the litany of protest writers in African literary disposition. The list of protest writers in African literary disposition is quite inexhaustible.

2. Echo of Poesy in South African Politics

South African political terrain has been dotted with challenges giving rise to dimensions of literary off – shoot and movements. The literary movement of the 1950s has retrospectively been described and designated by South African writers as the “Sophia Town Renaissances” this was actually a turbulent period in the literary epoch of South African historical terrain. The Sophia Town Renaissance is defined by the campaign of 1952 after the birth of apartheid and the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, which developed cultural relations and planted philosophical positions which made a nourishing foundation and taproot in the literary genres of the world of the century. At this time, the Sophia Town Renaissance writers were vibrant that the works also appeared in the “Drum Magazine”. Hence they were also called “Drum” Writers. These include the list of such writers as Can Themba, Lewis Nkosi, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Bloke William Modisane, Arthur Mainmane, Henry Nxumalo, Peter Magubane, and Bob Gosani. It was the combination of these writers that formed one of South African’s brilliant literary schools.

Although in practical terms, all these scholars of the Renaissance were short story writers, some of whom dabbled into the writing of poetry. Two critical works of Lewis Nkosi *Home and Exile* (1962) and Mphahlele Ezekiel *The African Image* (1965) respectively are seen as the representatives of the literary period at the time. *The African Image* and *Home and Exile* remarkably defined and articulated the cultural awareness that was a veritable mark of identity within this time of literary creation. Taking his cue from the American Harlem Renaissance, Mphahlele protested against apartheid hegemony just in the way Claude McKay, Counter Cullen, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and other Harlem Renaissance writers lamented the condition of the Black Americans.

Also of importance in the South African politics and literature was the emergence of three Writers: James Mathews, Richard Rive and Alex La Guma. This group of writers was primarily concerned with literary works in protest against apartheid in the form of short story or in the form of poetry. Mathews’ dislike of apartheid rule and its oppressive structures in South Africa was evident in his work “Azikwelwa” and “The Park” (1974), these were found in the Anthology, *The Park and Other Stories* (1974). These works are classed as South African protest literature. Richard Rive’s short stories in *African Songs* (1963), are also classic protest literature. Alex La Guma’s work, *A Walk in the Night* (1962) was quite remarkable in the area of protest literature in South Africa. He was later to be joined by others in the portrayal of literature of resistance in the political history of South Africa. Again, the Staff Rider Literary School was also on as protest writers featuring prominent writers as Mongane Serote; Nat Nakaba; Mafika Gwala, Njabulo Ndebele and Mbulelo Mzamane.

The period of the 1980s witnessed an upsurge of literary outburst in the area of dramatic genre in the forms of literary blues expressed as Black theatre in the English Language, which had practically been absent for many years; the establishment of a Black publishing house, Scottaville. This period also witnessed the springing up of female writers such as Laretta Ngevbo, Miriam Tlah and Gladys Thomas. Also of importance in the history and politics of South African was the emergence of workers’ theatre performed in the African Language this was combined with a poetic movement known as “Black Mamba Rising” (1986) these two formed the tremendous part of a greater cultural movement.

These are however, a remarkable note of the list of echoes of protests in literary forms in South African Political history, the list is really inexhaustible, but for the sake and purpose of this paper I beg for it to suffice.

3. Form and Resistance in Dennis Brutus *Simple Lust* and *Letters to Martha*

The collection of poems in *A Simple Lust* and *Letters to Martha* (1973) is divided into parts. Part 1 contains “Sirens Knuckle Boots and Other Early poems” which has a total of forty poems. Part 2 has *Letters to Martha*. These are arranged under:

1. "Early poems" with a total of 8 poems
2. "Letters to Martha" which has 18 fragmented letters and four other poems
3. "Under house arrest" which contains sixteen poems
4. "Into Exile" has two poems.

Part 3 of this collection contains "After Exile" which has a total of 38 poems. Within part 3 are also 'Poems from Algiers' – 8 poems; 'Sequence' I–VII which has 9 poems while 'Sequence for Luthuli' has 8 poems.

In these poems Brutus in strong terms exhibits a feeling of disgust reflecting on the nature of human abuse. In "Erosion: Transkei", he presents a pragmatic feature of brutality, assault and even physical harm. The reader is agape with the suppressed and oppressed conditions of human beings suffering defeat, shame and abuse right in endowed home. He says:

Under green drapes the scars scream
Red wounds wail soundlessly,
Beg for assuaging, satiation;
Warm life dribbles seawards with the streams (*A Simple Lust, 16*)

This presents the image of assault and bodily harm. The 'scars' are so pronounced and wide that they are described as screaming, the same image is rendered in 'red wounds' 'wailing' 'soundlessly' and blood flows freely in streams letting out life from the assaulted people. He laments the state of his dear land that has become ravaged and abused by the enclave of white authorities. His invention of the word 'Erosion' is symbolic of the brutality that is common and prevalent in his dear country by the white regime under the institutionalized apartheid. The helpless situations the blacks find themselves is just like the helpless condition of land under the attack and ravishing of erosion. This helpless situation is further rendered thus:

Dear my land, open for my possessing'
Ravaged and dumbly submissive to our will,
in curved and uplands my sensual delight
mounts, and mixed with fury is amassing
torrents, tumescent with love and pain... (*A SL., 16*).

In "At a Funeral" Brutus laments the death and burial of a young Black killed by White brutal authorities. The image is presented in ".... In bride's white, nun's white veils the nurses gush their bounty...salute! Then pounder all this hollow panoply" (*A SL, 17*). Again "Nightsong: City" presents yet another troubling situation in South Africa and to Brutus as laments the lifeless corpse of a Black. He says:

Sleep well,
my love, sleep well; the harbor lights glaze over restless docks
police cars cockroach through the tunnel streets;
from the shanties creaking iron-sheets
violence like a bug-infected rags is tossed
and fear is immanent as sound in the wind-swung bell...my land, my love, sleep well (*A SL.18*).

Brutus presents a pathetic situation here. The image described here is that of licensed killing of a Black. Though being buried and mourned, the people are in fear as the police encroach on their yet depressed mood. This mourning is done in suppressed emotion without the expected expression of a deep loss among the blacks concerned. The image of vandalism is presented in the lines. Also frustration and anger are mingled with this situation. "Mirror Sermon" is a rendition that is so long that it takes 8 pages. This shows the brooding and longing for freedom by Black natives of South Africa, to be free from oppressive tendencies of the apartheid hegemony. They witness sermons about God from the same white oppressors and hope that God will eventually free them from the shackles. He says "Ghouls, bloodless, bodiless, unsouled/ these wraiths unfolds, grotesque, in writhing arabesques"(21). Again, Brutus features the senseless homosexual exploits among prison inmates, their bestiality and amorous tendencies are portrayed, which to Brutus is the result of the political strides of apartheid. The sight stirs him to action and he

renders his anger thus; “Oh all you frustrate ones, powers tombed in dirt, Aborted, not by Death but carrion books of birth Arise!...” (A SL.17).

In these early poems, particularly “A Troubadour I Traverse” Brutus is in a frenzy to save South Africa from the evil hands of apartheid. But he is handicapped in his effort to fight for her freedom by the forces the white authorities. He thus uses his pen through his poems to fight and protest against these authorities. He states:

But here and here remain the scalds
a sudden turn or breath may ache,
and walk soft on cindered pasts
for thought or hope(what else) can break (A SL.3)

He laments and remembers the pain from inflicted wounds which cause him to walk deliberately so that he may not aggravate it and cause more pain. He believes that only thought and hope can cure this hazard. He scorns and laughs at the attempts of the white authorities to ban international movement and arrest him for contravening their law. His pen speaks for him and with it he can fight even more doggedly the cause of his dear country.

Brutus expresses great despair in the political structures of South Africa. Apartheid is not humane reels rolls of angst. This produces catharsis in the emotional temperament of Brutus. This emotion is expressed in “More Terrible than Any Beast” when he recounts white brutality against their black neighbours. He describes their action as “... the iron monster of the world” (A SL.7) He is helpless and is swallowed by the white devils whose laws are excruciatingly pinning him down in a helpless situation. Though strong fragile like butterfly, he cannot withstand their gun and boots. “Out of the Granite Day” presents the predicament of the blacks who work in the mines. They work underground for months and lose their sight and sense of recognition. He says; “Out of the granite day/a stream of sunlight thrusts/ spills over sombre dust/ brightness afar/cascades images/of someone bright and dear/and far away” (A SL.8). He expresses his noises against inhumanity to man and recognizes that the white oppressors who deal out these hard realities on the Black population do not at all recognize or seem to have forgotten the issue of legitimacy. They thus operate from living reality, and it is this reality, the stark facts which weigh down the present and the future of the Black population of both men and women, young and old.

“No Banyan, only” presents a picture of humane abuse, particularly the wives of Black South African men who toil and labour in the mines for the economic and social benefits of the White population. He presents that “...carnality, in this our carnal world/ is all Bamboo and iron having sealed/ our mundane eyes to views of time and peace...” (A SL.14). But his courage has made him brace up with the violent conditions. The image of nakedness which promotes carnality is presented in the word “Banyan”(14). Brutus’ consciousness of the evils of apartheid was high that he felt debased and dehumanized in the face of such brutality. The situation is aptly presented as:

...Under no banyan tree I strip no onion skin
To find a neant kernel at the still centre:
A little winter love in a dark corner?... (14),

The he recoils and states, “No love (for chris sake no) no love, no sin, but secular situation...(14)

Brutality was thus no sin for the white but a common situation. Kindness was not recognized as a human virtue and such situations reduced the Blacks to the status of slaves in their own God given land. Frans Fanon abhors such a situation and this makes him to state that, “...hunger with dignity is preferable to bread eaten in slavery” (167). These brutal tendencies are also obviated by Ali A. Mazrui in “ Colonialism as an Episode as he states that:

What follows from this is the conclusion that European colonization(annexation) of Africa was not the only way of Africa’s entry into the global system of the period. Africa could have made such entry without suffering either the agonies of the slave trade, or the exploitation of colonialism or the humiliation of European racism (14)

These statements by Fanon and Mazrui are in tandem with the attitude of Brutus on the South African cause. Colonialism is the root of white oppressive tendencies among African countries. “The Mob” presents a gory spectacle as Blacks were attacked by a White crowd for protesting against the City Hall steps over the sabotage Bill. Brutus in this poem laments the lives wasted and abused. He laments :

These are the faceless horrors
that people my nightmares

from whom I turn to wakefulness
 for comforting...
 O my people
 O my people (48).

This bizarre situation is enormous to Brutus like a crowd of people. It wells up his anxiety and he pours out his desperation in anguish. The same anguish catches his imagination in "Train Journey" as he encounters the plight of children walking miles to school in worn out wear. They wave in salute to the passengers on the train. He says "A long the miles of steel/that span my land/ threadbare children stand/... on their reely legs/ their empty hungry hands/lifted as if in prayer" (49). The poems present a picture of horror that was attendant upon Black, young and old, male and female. He could only but express his anger and hate on the authorities through his poems.

Brutus in "Poems About Prison" relates the experiences of the inmates in the Robben Island prison where he was detained. "Cold" describes the excruciating situation in the prison. Situated in the Robben Island surrounded by water, the environment was cold for bearing of any normal human being. He describes the sucking of pap by the inmates and become sexually aroused and resort to sodomy, a bestial attitude. The prison warders do not care about the internal ranklings of the inmates as they dismiss this with the statement that "Things like these/ I have no time for..."(53). The inmates are in chains and pains and suffer pain and ignominy. These instruments of torture make them have awkward movement and composure. They find themselves in a helpless situation coupled with anguish which they have to face squarely and have no one to complain to. They cannot either escape from the situation they find themselves.

Brutus in "abolish laughter first" reacts to the ban of movement and other activities against the Blacks and warns that the White authorities should ban laughter first else their effort will be in vain. In this poem, he draws up imagery of White oppressors in "jackboots/sirens' wail/wolfwind barks"(A SL44-45). He says, " put out this flame, this heart, this laugh? Never! The self at its secret hearth/nurses its smoulder/saves its heat/ while oppression's power is charred to dust" (A SL.44). In 'Longing' he pours out his disappointment and distress over the ravishing of his dear country by the White oppressors under the pressure of apartheid and hopes that it will change one day. "Night Song: Country" expresses his anger for apartheid and disgust and hope for a better day. His evocation is packed with angst as shown in 'undulant earth/heaves up to me/ voluptuously- submissively;/ primal and rank/ the pungent exudation of fecund growth/ ascends sibilant clamorously/ voice of the night-land.../rising, shimmering/mixing most intimately/ with my own murmuring"(47), he continues his evocation in 'we merge, embrace and cling: who now gives shelter, who begs sheltering?'(47).This is a depiction of when Blacks meet to share their experiences in agony and vain wishes.

Letters to Martha is one piece of letter fragmented into 18 paragraphs rendered in an episodic form. It outlines a process, continuation and experiences of the prison inmates in the Robben Island prison. The letters are strong personal information in Brutus presents his prison experiences to his in-law named Martha. He relates to her his travails from the beginning, soon after the sentence and his prison term. The prison situation is pathetic but helpless. This is actually a rule chronicle of the political atmosphere in prison by inmates in the Robben Island prison. In the prison inmates acquire enduring temperament, take the challenges that confront them without complain. These prison experiences expose inmates to criminal tendencies of skewing money, nails and screws through the anus to the lower part of the abdomen, the rectum. These materials are not allowed to be carried into the prison but handed in to the prison officers before they are checked in. he informs Martha that:

...and seeing them shaped and sharpened
 One is chilled, appalled
 to see how vicious it can be... and when these knives suddenly flash
 -produced perhaps from some disciplined anus – one gasps at once the steel-bright horror
 in the morning air...(LM.54-55).

These are weapons used by the inmates in antagonism and assault, usually in envy of pragmatic sodomy. The attack is also for prestige and exultation of power. Inmates also use money to buy away their freedom. Prayer sessions are held to read the Bible and commune with God. Fragment '5' of the Letter reveals the sodomic horrors of decays, dirt and homosexuality. In this prison state, Brutus reveals much of his experiences with horror and lamentation. In this horror, he points out pitiable conditions of two men in the midst of many cases where danger and fear encompassed. However, out of this horror some also loved and begged for it. It was a ludicrous predicament that the inmates had to

endure. Fragment '8' of the Letter presents the most popular of the sexual exploits of the inmates, "Blue Champaign" (LM.58). He is described as the most popular 'girl' in the prison. He satisfies every person who desires to sleep with him. Fragment '9' is what Brutus uses to pour out his mind to his in-law Martha. It is what Brutus uses to pour out his feelings to his in-law Martha. It is the part of the revelation to express these various experiences as witnessed by the prison inmates. He says:

The not-knowing
is perhaps the worst part of the agony
for those outside....
And knowledge,
even when it is knowledge of ugliness
seems to be preferable,
can be better endured...(LM.59)

the Letters are described as "fragments/random pebbles/ from the landscape of my own experience..." (LM.60).

Prison life is not all about horrors and lamentations. Some benefits are also derived and achieved. In fragment '10' of the Letters Brutus explains his benefits while serving as prison inmate. This implies that prison life is not all horror but some good experiences are also derived. In prison he relates that new contacts are got, you also gain some new experiences with fellow men, political prisoners and other fellows in contact in prison. Again, you have personal discipline to gain in prison, skill acquisition and mental, as well as social awareness. Sometimes too, the mind is exhilarated and you are happy with yourself. Nelson Mandela was one of the political prisoners who waited for liberation at change of leadership. He also learns the patience of the inmates like himself who committed no offence than the protest against apartheid structures in South Africa. He thus hopes that patience will heal all the afflictions and wounds suffered.

A lover of music Brutus abhors the absence of music which makes him sad. He recounts people who also were lovers of music like "Fiks and Jeff and Nevills and the others..."(LM, 62). Some music of interest like Eine Kleine Nachmusik, the Royal Fire works, the New World, the Emperor and Eroica, liven him up as the "...joy of man's desiring"(LM,62.), the hidden sound and vibration of these music bring great joy to him and his comrades. The impracticability of this situation he states makes him resolve to endure the situation he finds himself. No heroic temper was shared but a resolution as prisoners for a common cause – the freedom of South Africa from apartheid rule. Their consolation is a wishful hope for change. This situation makes it dawn on him that he was a prisoner. He must adapt to the situation and horror in the prison yard. The horrors of the prison yard were such that the inmates are kept out of the universe and cannot see the sky or the outside environment, except the lacerations on the fence that exposes the outside. He says; Mister; this is prison;...(65). They do not have knowledge of the sky, cloud or the birds. All these now assume a special importance in the lives of the inmates. He narrates:

... - there can be no hope
of seeing the stars:
the arcs and fluorescents
have blotted them out - ...
the complex aeronautics
of the birds
and their exuberant acrobatics
become matters for intrigues, speculations
and wonderment (LM,66).

Dennis Brutus' poems stand out among others in the protest against apartheid, the white minority rule in South African of the (1950's,60s and up to the "80s). The relics of his poems continue to echo and strike meaning and sympathy even today, despite the end of apartheid. His fight, very tacit and strong, against apartheid is quite meaningful and will continue to remain in books of records. Dennis Brutus, like most other writers expresses his dissension of apartheid using the poetic genre. The significance of this form does not lie in the rendition or form of presentation but the fact that he was hunted, imprisoned and exiled for his literary temper and struggles against

apartheid. This poetic form which Brutus adopts is quite unconventional. Its mode notwithstanding, still strikes magnificent impression among scholars. His poems, coming in the form of letters to a lover, present a constructive point of view than the representation of a discussion in a normal poetic rendition. According to John F. Povey in his essay “Beneath the Knife of Love. The first collection of the poetry of Dennis Brutus – Sirens Knuckles Booths” (1968), “Dennis Brutus achieved something of the status of a legend; poet, professor, critic, lecturer, and above all activist, working on an international scale to challenge the iniquitous racism of the South African regime” (critical perspectives on Dennis Brutus, 41). Though the poems in *Letters to Martha* and *A Simple Lust* may have conversational interludes, they are in the main letters sent to a dear one in times of dire desire and need. The poems in *A Simple Lust and Letters to Martha*... The poems are out flows of desires and rendered to explain different philosophical doctrines violated by the regime of the White minority rule. The contents have some obvious restrictions because of the nature and state of Brutus at the time of writing and communication. This is because of the particular condition under which the poems are rendered. Being put in prison for his purportedly violating restriction rules, he communicates to his sister –in- law Martha. The poems, eighteen in number are emotion packed.

Apart from writing in prison, Brutus was hunted and restricted in several dimensions. His poems in whatever forms they come are written in anxiety and fear. Not, however, fear of arrest but that of destroying such document. The Letters cover a wide range of issues communicated to the in- law, Martha. This is meant to create awareness of the dimensions of oppression in South African. He sends “Fragments” ; Random Pebbles” “from the landscape of my own experience”.

Brutus experiences some anxiety after he receives the sentence in embarrassment as he states:

After the sentence
Mingled feelings;
Sick relief,
the load of the approaching day’s apprehension –
the hints of brutality
have a depth of personal meaning (LM54)

He is consoled with the fact that he is not alone in such baffling situation. There have been others who have had to endure more harsh conditions. He is resolved that his imprisonment is after all a kind of “exaltation” a “sense of challenge” and most importantly “vague heroism”. He also is made to feel full and strong emotionally as he recognizes the presence of political prisoners, who are not worst for it. None takes any exceptions but are seen simply as prisoners. These are but “prisoners; of a system we had fought; and still opposed” (LM54). He lets the World to know that life in prison is dreadful but is not all terror, and deprivation. Homosexuality is, however, common in prison, even vengeful violence of dominion and possession; there is also some element of good relationship, understanding and humour that is achievable, which he achieves with “fellow men” (LM60). This good relationship makes his mind relaxed and recuperated. He feels exhilarated and at home as in normal life situation. He describes the situation as rather like “the full calm morning sea” (60)

Brutus also notes periods of hostility among in-mates, especially those who have been in incarceration for criminal offences, search for “nails”, screws; and other sizable bits of metal” to design dangerous weapons with which to seek revenge or exercise exuberance and power among the in- mates. Brutus is rather flabbergasted to discover the brutality of a South African by a fellows South African. He laments:

Why did this man stab this man for that man?
What was the nature of the emotion and
How did it grow? (LM55)

Brutus continues his inquisition on the cause of the brutality, whether it is because of a “desire for prestige or lust for power? “or more strangely because of a homosexuality love gone sour” (55).

The issues of homosexuality are grievously and exhaustively discussed in Letters 6-8. Prisoners are exposed to bizarre experiences of sodomy. Men (prisoners) become sexual pets of their masters for protection. This is horror to the poet who lament:

But it has seemed to me
One of the most terrible

Most rendingly pathetic

Of all a prisoner's predicament(LM58).

He refers to "two men" who he knew "among many cases". He says one of them "gave up smoking" as he was forced to commit "Sodomy" (58). The second man "sought escape... in fainting fits and asthma" until he "finally fled into insecurity" there are however men after long period of resisting the act "... Beg for it...who beg for sexual assault" (LM58). Letter (8) describes the best in the act as "Blue Champaign" (LM 58) who becomes a sexist and prison harlot

"Blue Champaign begins his prison life as " a youthful, curvy inmate who soon becomes the "most popular "girl" in the place"(Abraham Cecil in CPDB 52)

... He would sleep with several (men) each night

And song once popular on the hit parade

Became his nick name. (LM 59).

The whole prison experience for the poet in particular is endured because of the helpless situation he finds himself. Surprisingly, as the most desired servant of the in-mates begins to grow old and wanes off he comes becomes the most perverse and brutal "man" among homosexuals. Survival in prison is achieved through acceptance of your lot without reservation. Brutus also laments the lack of music in prison which robs him of his social emotions and reminiscences as he states:

Nothing was sadder

There was no more saddening want

Than the deadly lack

of music (LM 62)

He cures this emotion through whistling well known classical tunes which give him the same feeling and response from other in-mates.

A Simple Lust is a collection of poems which continues and extends Brutus' experiences in apartheid South Africa depicting his resistance and fight for freedom. Each poem in the collection shows his vibrant attack and exposition of the evils of humanity to man by the structure called apartheid. The work has three parts. Part one of *A Simple Lust* has "Sirens Knuckle Boots, while *Letters to Martha* forms part II of the collection of poems. Part III is entitled "After Exile" with 65 poems.

In "A troubadour I traverse" which Brutus uses to open part I of *A Simple Lust* through his use of imagery draws a picture of life and experiences of South African Blacks in the hands of the oppressive White minority government.

Brutus in this poem sees himself as a troubadour. With a well thought out image of South Africa as a lady, a belaboured lady in that matter, Brutus assumes the status of a troubadour who fights the causes of his mistress. He is seen not just as a fighter but also as a love who stakes his entire life for the the benefit and services of the mistress, the one he loves. This is enunciated by Tanure Ojaide in the article "The Troubadour: The poet's Person in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus

He says; "The troubadour suggests not only the figure as a fighter, but also a lover, one who dedicates his life to service of a lady, usually called a mistress" (56). The lady here is symbolic of South Africa that has the troubadour, a eunuch lover. Though in lust to consummate love cannot perform because of his predicament, is helpless. This situation reveals a clear picture of Brutus who fights for the liberation of South Africa from apartheid rule but is in chain tethered in a stake and cannot express his desires. In this rendition:

A troubadour, I traverse all my land

exploring all her wide-flung parts with zest

probing in motion sweeter far than rest...

her secret thickets with an amorous hand...(Siren 2)

This presents a very high sexual image with "...wide-flung parts with zest...(Siren 2). This depicts the zeal with which Brutus is concerned with the struggle for the freedom of South Africa. He longs for such freedom and in doing so he feels compassion and pity which he purges though his poems. The structures and structures of government prevents him from exercising his zeal and will. The "Boots" and "Knuckles" prevent him from acting from the

incessant hunting, harassment and arrest. Brutus presents his handicap situation to free South Africa from apartheid rule. This situation is further buttressed in the poems he writes in exile as he states:

I have been bedded
in London and Paris
Amsterdam and Rotherdam,
in Munich and Rome –
and still my heart cries out for home (96)

these represents the various system employed by the apartheid regime to suppress the efforts of Black South African from fighting to affirm themselves on their land.

Restrictions imposed on Blacks show the level of apartheid in South Africa. Also the fruitless protests and demonstrations of the Blacks are portrayed in the image of Don Quixote:

... thus quixoting till a cast off
of my land I sing and fare,
person to loved one pressed, braced
for this pressure and the captors
hand that snaps off-service like a
weathered strand (Siren 2).

The helpless image of the female, regarded as a weaker sex or gender goes on in Brutus' poems. He gives pictures of "ravishments, and delights, but she is often victimized. He says in "Stubborn Hope" that:

I can understand
how the shopgirls lust
to spread eagle themselves
before such brute efficiency;
even the dust of my wounded land
endures their boots submissively (65)

Dennis Brutus in "The Sun on this Rubble" gives a picture of the situation. It is a meditation on the ways of nature as the "sun" symbolizes nature's periodic blessing and offers hope of temporary respite to oppressed man. The Sharpeville massacre saw the recuperation of the torture and oppression to plan alternative measures to liberate themselves

Under sack boots our bones and spirits crunch
Forced into sweat-tear-sodden slush
Now glow- lipped by this sudden touch
...but now our pride-died mouths are wide in wordless supplication
...are grateful for the least relief from pain. (21)

He uses the symbols of 'sun' and 'rain' to describe the sordid nature of the blacks, the massacre as God sent messiah to wipe away their tears and for recuperation.

Dennis Brutus skillfully followed the events and trends in the South African history. Being part of the experience of torture in prison, ban in literary presentation of South Africa in any form he was richly endowed. In "Erosion: Transkei". He describes the killing of innocent students who were protesting the unhealthy education given to them by white racist. He adroitly uses metaphor and personification to describe events in South Africa.

Under green drapes the scares cream
Red wounds wail soundlessly
Beg for assuaging, situation...."(52)

He laments the total possession of his fatherland and wishes that the land becomes theirs again. It is in their rich agricultural land that they are being slavishly ravished. But he expresses hope of freedom one day as many militia men were receiving training abroad for a full stage of combat to dismantle apartheid regime. As the white regime devised ways severally to suppress black uprising, increased military training and Guerilla warfare were set up by the blacks all to resist the oppressive measures. These were matched with stiff opposition and increase in Black Death tool.

“At the funeral” Brutus laments the death of a black who died after qualifying as a doctor, even the whites banned black funeral because it was arenas used to plan resistance.

“Letters to Martha” are prison poems where Brutus focuses on the evocation of the imprisoned life of most political prisoners in South Africa. This focus moves from the conviction of the prisoner to the acclimatization of the prisoners to the conditions of the prison. These letters, eighteen in number, were used to give background information about the circumstances that led to their imprisonment and the atrocities and inhuman treatment of the apartheid system in South Africa. On release from prison Brutus was served with banning orders which made nit criminal to write anything, including poetry which might be published.

In “Cold” Brutus vividly describe the prison condition of the political prisoners who were detained for one protest offense or another.

The dammy cement
Sucks our naked feet
A rheumy yellow bulb
Lights a damp grey wall
... We sit on the concrete
Stuff with our fingers the sugarless pap.... (A SL,52)

The homosexual picture of the inmates another inhuman behaviour, the result of prison presented were:

Then labor erect:
Form lines
Steel ourselves into fortitude
Or accept an image of ourselves” (A SL,52)

They are in chains and pairs and are often shot and killed in prison. The eighteen letters to Martha express the various experiences the political prisoners and other inmates of black prisoner had in the various prisons particularly the Robber Island prison where Brutus was imprisoned. Letter (I) expressed the condition of the inmate when introduced to the prison. They soon learn everything that happens to the prisoners. Both the treatment meted on them by their senior inmates and the brutality of the prison officers. They learn to be homosexuals and pet to be protected by the senior inmates who become a master. This is a horror to the poet and he say;

... but it has seemed to me
One of the most terrible
Most rendingly pathetic
Of all a prisoner’ predicament (LM,58)

Letter (8) describes the best in the act as “Blue Champaign” who becomes a sexist and prison harlot.

The whole experience in the prison was endured because of their helpless nature. In these letters Brutus uses his literary skills to give the whole picture of the prison life he experienced, encountered, the endurance admitted and their determination to continue the struggle for resistance against such inhumanity to man. The isolation from family and home was most distressful but all had to be endured.

The experience which Brutus puts down are not just for terror but to express such desires and deprivations which come to man in times of distress. These experiences sharpen and shape the life of the prisoners and make them have hope. This is because the state of torture aggravate pity and the formation of unions meant to fight for the emancipation of their lots.

The prison situations of the prisoners led to the formation of more opposition groups of the blacks against the apartheid regime. Other black communities supported armed struggles and other local and regional organization united on a national basis to oppose the government; religious organization, women organization, as well as civic, resident personnel organized against the apartheid regime. In letter (11) he declares.

Events have a fresh dimension
For all things can affect the pace
Of political development (LM,61)

But how fast this becomes is uncertain as the change is most desirous in their life.

While in prison with the continuous black resistance and the apartheid desire for suppression, black prisoners were incessantly shot and killed in large numbers

Oh there was occasional heroic posturing
mainly from the immature
-and a dash of demagogic bloodthirstiness, (LM,64).

Dennis uses the poetic devices such as metaphor, simile and personification without rhetoric and ambivalence to evocate and relate the experience and devices of the whites to suppress black determination to be set in all forms of it. He also uses the same medium to explore the various strategies of the blacks to remind themselves repeatedly, despite all odds, of the needs to fight relentlessly for their freedom and regain their rights and land. His descriptions of the inventions of the apartheid in such words as

‘Hostile authority. The complex aeronautics
The arc and fluorescent
Exuberant acrobatics. (LM 66)

Seems to suggest their methods to suppress black uprising. But the ‘music’ ‘the graceful unimpeded motion of the clouds’ a kind of music, poetry, dance, seem to predict the eventual pleasure of liberation which their resistance moves shall prefer.

Letter (18) like 17 continues the shooting and killing in prison of the prisoners by the white security men. Wounds inflicted on the prisoners cannot stop their struggles and impede their hope of liberation. With these poems Dennis Brutus discreetly followed the events in South Africa in poetic analogy and put down through personal experience and history to create an enduring history of the political situation of South Africa during the apartheid period. The poems of Brutus and other literary works of South Africa are a masterpiece of the cogent history of apartheid South Africa.

South African society is not self-willed to this condition but out of frustration is subject of victimization, harassment in all facets of human existence. Though inhuman laws and suppression are meted on them unjustly, they still have a consolidation and belief that South Africa shall be free just in the same way as a man in coital encounter becomes exhausted and falls out. The struggles, however, have yielded fruit in the demise of apartheid in South Africa, in 1990 Nelson Mandela, a Black was elected as the president of South Africa. It is interesting to note that the political freedom in South Africa is without economic verve. Most of the structures of apartheid are still visible in South Africa today.

4. Conclusion

In all these Black resistance and protest dragged on for long through many ways and means. Brutus’ use of his poems depicts his love and struggles as well as his desires for the freedom of his beloved country, South Africa from the apartheid rule and incessant oppression by the structures of apartheid. The journey to political emancipation was not achieved through the strength of a fiber but by hard work and much human sacrifice.

References

- *A Simple Lust, Collected Poems of South African Jail & Exile Including Letters to Martha*. London: Heinemann, 1973.
- Abraham, Cecil. (1995). Greening of Dennis Brutus: Letters to Martha in Craig W. McLuckie and Patrick J. Colbert (Eds) *Critical Perspectives on Dennis Brutus*. Colorado springs Three continents press, 49-59.

- Brutus, Dennis. (1978). *Stubborn Hope. Selected Poems of South Africa & a Wider World; Including China Poems*. London: Heinemann.
- Dama, Leon G. (1948). *Poetes d' Expression francaise* London Pengun.
- Fanon, Franz. (1985). *The Wretched of the Earth: the Classics of Third World Politics*. Harmonsworth : Penguin.
- Hill – Lubin, Mildred. Every Troubadour has a Mistress; the image of the female in Dennis.
- Jones, Eldred Durosimi & Jones, Marjorie. (2002). Eds *South & Southern African Literature (23)*. England: James Currey.
- Jung, Curl G. (1971). On the Relationship of Analytical Psychology to Poetry; (Ed) *Hazard Adams Critical Theory Since Plato* New York: Harcourt Brace. 1971 – 809 – 810.
- Kill am, G. Douglas. (1995). A simple Lust: selection Structure, and style; (Eds) Craig W. Mcluckie and Patrick J. Colbert. *Critical Perspective on Dennis Brutus*. Colorado Springs; Three continents press, 86 – 98.
- Krea, Henri. (1958). *La Revolution etal Poesie Sont une Mene Chose*. London: Penguin.
- Mazrui, Ali Al' Amin. (1986). *The Africans: A triple Heritage*. Canada: Little Brown & Company.
- Mlama, Muhandi. (1978). *Poets of the People; Revolutionary Poetry in South Africa*. London: University press.
- Mphalele, Ezekiel. (1965). *The African Image*. London: Penguin.
- Nditsona, Francesca. *Fleurs de Latente*. (1954). New York: Heinemann.
- Nkosi, Lewis. (1962). *Home and Exile*. London: Routledge.
- Ojaide, Tanure. (1976). *The Troubadour; The Poetry of Dennis Brutus*. London; Penguin.
- Oyegoke, Lekan. (2002). *Renaissance & South African Writing* (eds) Jones, Eldred Durosimi & Jones Marjorie *South & Southern African Literature (23)*. England: James Currey.
- Povey, John F. (1968). *Beneath the Knife of Love. The First Collection of the Poetry of Dennis*. London Ruthledge.
- Rive, Richard. (1963). *African Songs. Berlin*. Seven Sea Publishers.
- Senhor, Leopold Sedar. (1956). *Negritude and Maxism*. A paper presented at the “First International Congress of Negro Writers and Artists” The Sorborne.
- Zuidema, Ritske. (2002). *The Changing Role of Poetry in the Struggle for Freedom, Justice & Equality in South Africa* (eds) Jones, Eldred Durosimi & Jones Marjorie *South & Southern African Literature, (23)*. England: James Currey.