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# **Particip'Action**

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## **LIGNE EDITORIALE DE PARTICIP'ACTION**

*Particip'Action* est une revue scientifique. Les textes que nous acceptons en français, anglais, allemand ou en espagnol sont sélectionnés par le comité scientifique et de lecture en raison de leur originalité, des intérêts qu'ils présentent aux plans africain et international et de leur rigueur scientifique. Les articles que notre revue publie doivent respecter les normes éditoriales suivantes :

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La Revue *Particip'Action* reçoit les projets de publication par voie électronique. Ceci permet de réduire les coûts d'opération et d'accélérer le processus de réception, de traitement et de mise en ligne de la revue. Les articles doivent être soumis à l'adresse suivante (ou conjointement) : [Participaction1@gmail.com](mailto:Participaction1@gmail.com)

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Un titre qui indique clairement le sujet de l'article, n'excédant pas 25 mots.

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Le prénom et le nom de ou des auteurs (es)

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Une courte présentation en note de bas de page des auteurs (es) ne devant pas dépasser 100 mots par auteur. On doit y retrouver obligatoirement le nom de l'auteur, le nom de l'institution d'origine, le statut professionnel et l'organisation dont il relève, et enfin, les adresses de courrier électronique du ou des auteurs. L'auteur peut aussi énumérer ses principaux champs de recherche et ses principales publications. La revue ne s'engage toutefois pas à diffuser tous ces éléments.

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Un résumé de l'article ne doit pas dépasser 160 mots. Le résumé doit être à la fois en français et en anglais (police Times new roman, taille 12, interligne 1,15).

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Une liste de cinq mots clés maximum décrivant l'objet de l'article.

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-La structure d'un article, doit être conforme aux règles de rédaction scientifique, selon que l'article est une contribution théorique ou résulte d'une recherche de terrain.

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Introduction (justification du sujet, problématique, hypothèses/objectifs scientifiques, approche), Développement articulé, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

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Titre,

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Résumé en français. Mots-clés, Abstract, Keywords,

Introduction, Méthodologie, Résultats et Discussion, Conclusion, Bibliographie.

Par exemple : Les articles conformes aux normes de présentation, doivent contenir les rubriques suivantes : introduction, problématique de l'étude, méthodologie adoptée, résultats de la recherche, perspectives pour recherche, conclusions, références bibliographiques.

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- A l'exception de l'introduction, de la conclusion, de la bibliographie, les articulations d'un article doivent être titrées, et numérotées par des chiffres (**exemples : 1. ; 1.1.; 1.2; 2. ; 2.2. ; 2.2.1 ; 2.2.2. ; 3. ; etc.**).

Les passages cités sont présentés en romain et entre guillemets. Lorsque la phrase citant et la citation dépassent trois lignes, il faut aller à la ligne, pour présenter la citation (interligne 1) en romain et en retrait, en diminuant la taille de police d'un point. Insérer la pagination et ne pas insérer d'information autre que le numéro de page dans l'en-tête et éviter les pieds de page.

Les figures et les tableaux doivent être intégrés au texte et présentés avec des marges d'au moins six centimètres à droite et à gauche. Les caractères dans ces figures et tableaux doivent aussi être en Times 12. Figures et tableaux doivent avoir chacun(e) un titre.

Les citations dans le corps du texte doivent être indiquées par un retrait avec tabulation 1 cm et le texte mis en taille 11.

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- (Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur, année de publication, pages citées) ; - Initiale (s) du Prénom ou des Prénoms de l'auteur. Nom de l'Auteur (année de publication, pages citées). Exemples :

- En effet, le but poursuivi par **M. Ascher (1998, p. 223)**, est « d'élargir l'histoire des mathématiques de telle sorte qu'elle acquière une perspective multiculturelle et globale (...), d'accroître le domaine des mathématiques : alors qu'elle s'est pour l'essentiel occupée du groupe professionnel occidental que l'on appelle les mathématiciens (...) ».

- Pour dire plus amplement ce qu'est cette capacité de la société civile, qui dans son déploiement effectif, atteste qu'elle peut porter le développement et l'histoire, S. B. Diagne (1991, p. 2) écrit :

Qu'on ne s'y trompe pas : de toute manière, les populations ont toujours su opposer à la philosophie de l'encadrement et à son volontarisme leurs propres stratégies de contournements. Celles-là, par exemple, sont lisibles dans le dynamisme, ou à tout le moins, dans la créativité dont sait preuve ce que l'on désigne sous le nom de secteur informel et à qui il faudra donner l'appellation positive d'économie populaire.

- Le philosophe ivoirien a raison, dans une certaine mesure, de lire, dans ce choc déstabilisateur, le processus du sous-développement. Ainsi qu'il le dit :

le processus du sous-développement résultant de ce choc est vécu concrètement par les populations concernées comme une crise globale : crise socio-économique (exploitation brutale, chômage permanent, exode accéléré et douloureux), mais aussi crise socio-culturelle et de civilisation traduisant une impréparation sociohistorique et une inadaptation des cultures et des comportements humains aux formes de vie imposées par les technologies étrangères. (S. Diakité, 1985, p. 105).

Pour les articles de deux ou trois auteurs, noter les initiales des prénoms, les noms et suivis de l'année (J. Batee et D. Maate, 2004 ou K. Moote, A. Pooul et E. Polim, 2000). Pour les articles ou ouvrages collectifs de plus de trois auteurs noter les initiales des prénoms, le nom du premier auteur et la mention "et al" (F. Loom et al, 2003). Lorsque plusieurs références sont utilisées pour la même information, celles-ci doivent être mises en ordre chronologique (R.Gool, 1998 et M.Goti, 2006).

**Les sources historiques, les références** d'informations orales et les notes explicatives sont numérotées en série continue et présentées en bas de page.

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**Les divers éléments d'une référence bibliographique** sont présentés comme suit : NOM et Prénom (s) de l'auteur, Année de publication, Zone titre, Lieu de publication, Zone Editeur, pages (p.) occupées par l'article dans la revue ou l'ouvrage collectif.

Dans la zone titre, le titre d'un article est présenté en romain et entre guillemets, celui d'un ouvrage, d'un mémoire ou d'une thèse, d'un rapport, d'une revue ou d'un journal est présenté en italique. Dans la zone Editeur, on indique la Maison d'édition (pour un ouvrage), le Nom et le numéro/volume de la revue (pour un article). Au cas où un ouvrage est une traduction et/ou une réédition, il faut préciser après le titre le nom du traducteur et/ou l'édition (ex : 2<sup>de</sup> éd.).

**Ne sont présentées dans les références bibliographiques que les références des documents cités.** Les références bibliographiques sont présentées par ordre alphabétique des noms d'auteur. Il convient de prêter une attention particulière à la qualité de l'expression. Le Comité scientifique de la revue se réserve le droit de réviser les textes, de demander des modifications (mineures ou majeures) ou de rejeter l'article de manière définitive ou provisoire (si des corrections majeures doivent préalablement y être apportées). L'auteur est consulté préalablement à la diffusion de son article lorsque le Comité scientifique apporte des modifications. Si les corrections ne sont pas prises en compte par l'auteur, la direction de la revue *Particip'Action* se donne le droit de ne pas publier l'article.

AMIN Samir, 1996, *Les défis de la mondialisation*, Paris, Le Harmattan.

AUDARD Cathérine, 2009, *Qu'est-ce que le libéralisme ? Ethique, politique, société*, Paris, Gallimard.

BERGER Gaston, 1967, *L'homme moderne et son éducation*, Paris, PUF.

DIAGNE Souleymane Bachir, 2003, « Islam et philosophie. Leçons d'une rencontre », *Diogenes*, 202, p. 145-151.

DIAKITE Sidiki, 1985, *Violence technologique et développement. La question africaine du développement*, Paris, Le Harmattan.

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**NB2** : La quête philosophique centrale de la revue *Particip'Action* reste : **Fluidité identitaire et construction du changement: approches pluri-et/ou transdisciplinaires.**

Les auteurs qui souhaitent se faire publier dans nos colonnes sont priés d'avoir cette philosophie comme fil directeur de leur réflexion.

**La Rédaction**

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**THE QUEST FOR FREEDOM IN SELECTED POEMS FROM DENNIS  
BRUTUS'S *A SIMPLE LUST* AND *STUBBORN HOPE***

**Koboè K. YOVO\***

**Abstract**

Through the study of some poems by Dennis Brutus, this paper analyses the different obstacles that can render freedom unattainable in view of establishing strategies to be used to overcome them. It notes that though torture, discrimination, imprisonment, and exile complexify the achievement of freedom, they can be transformed into opportunities that can hasten peace. Biographical criticism, which sustains that one should pay attention to authors and their historical context in the interpretation of their literary works, is the theoretical approach on which this paper is premised. The paper ends with a conclusion that torture, imprisonment, and exile are complications that can be transformed by freedom activists as strategic weapons to bring about freedom for a lasting social development.

**Keywords:** Freedom, Torture, Imprisonment, Exile, Development.

**Résumé**

A travers l'étude d'une sélection de poèmes de Dennis Brutus, cet article analyse les différents obstacles qui rendent la liberté inaccessible et met sur place des stratégies pour les surmonter. L'article note que bien que la torture, la discrimination, l'emprisonnement et l'exil compliquent la mise en œuvre de la liberté, ils peuvent être transformés en opportunités. La critique biographique, qui soutient que l'on doit prêter attention aux auteurs et leur contexte historique dans l'interprétation de leurs œuvres littéraires, est l'approche théorique sur laquelle repose cette étude. L'article se termine par la conclusion que la torture, l'emprisonnement et l'exil sont, certes, des complications mais ceux-ci peuvent être transformés en opportunité par des militants en vue d'atteindre la liberté pour un développement durable.

**Mot-clés :** Liberté, torture, emprisonnement, exil, développement.

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## **Introduction**

This paper attempts to study some selected poems by Dennis Brutus, a South African poet and freedom fighter, whose poems display the need for freedom in the building of a peaceful society. It aims at analyzing the different obstacles to freedom in the created world and out here in society with the view to establish strategies to overcome them. Attention will be drawn to the atrocities and the oppression meted out to black South Africans as they rose to free their land from imperial yoke and how they succeeded in transforming their miserable circumstances into strategies that help them to establish a more free society so as to trigger development.

In fact, many researchers such as Kontein Trinya, T. R. August, Tanure Ojaide, Gessler Moses Nkondo etc have already explored the poetry of Dennis Brutus with regard to racism, injustice, inequality, exile and the fight for freedom but not enough emphasis has been laid on misfortune as a strategy or a means that led to the liberation of the land of South Africa. In reading some of Brutus's poems which displays the history of South Africa and the fight for freedom one is tempted to say that there is no freedom without prior imprisonment, oppression, torture, injustice or what so hardship. It is in this context that this research work stands.

"It must be absolutely basic for a human being to be free; it is part of our psyche, our nature" (W. Thomson, 1983, p.76). The running statement sounds like that of a person who is complaining about the fact that some people are denied the right to be free in their thoughts, movements, activities and/or speech. Along with this, I also believe that, naturally, the desire of every human being is to be free. For, nobody wants to stay in bondage how short or long it may take. Aspiring to freedom is therefore evident and present in everyday life. Everyone wants to shelter from the influence of any threat. This is certainly the most fundamental aspiration of mankind in general and nations in particular.

Biographical criticism, which sustains that one should pay attention to authors and their historical context in the interpretation of their literary works, is the theoretical approach on which this paper is premised.

### **1. Freedom: Definitions and Restrictions as Displayed in the Selected Poems**

In essence, there is a genuine autonomy and freedom when, to some extent, there is no external power that would jeopardize the basic principles of freedom based on the fact that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and right.”<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, the whole Africa, South Africa in particular, has suffered the assault and battery of Europe in violation of this universal principle. History stands proof that this country – the Land of Nelson Mandela – was highly exploited and savaged by the ‘white man’ who deprived them of their freedom. The question now is: What is freedom? Or, what does it means to be free?

Freedom is the right to do what you want, yet in apartheid South Africa black people were good at sport and wanted to join the national team to hoist the name of their country worldwide but they were not accepted. They had the will but not the freedom to help their country. Even the South African Council on Sport (SACOS) have raised their voice to say no to discrimination and deracialise sport. Believing that sport transcends race and politics, SACOS’s leaders pursued the struggle to humanize and democratize South African Sports.

The poem “Let me say it” goes:

The diurnal reminders excoriate their souls  
Amid a million successes  
-the most valued on fronts where they were under attack-  
The grimace under the bitter taste of defeat

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<sup>13</sup> (Anonymous), <http://www.google.fr/gwt>, retrieved on January, 06 2013

Their great New Zeland rivals  
The Olympic panoply and Wembley roar  
For them these things are dead  
Are inaccessible  
Unattainable  
Nowhere else does apartheid exact so bitter a price  
Nowhere else does the world so demonstrate its disgust  
In nothing else are the deprivers so deprived

As it can be inferred in the above poem, Brutus, through the voice of the persona established the South African Non-racial Olympics Committee and lobbied to boycott the Olympics if the exclusively white South African team was allowed to participate. The South African white-only sports teams had got ready and were expecting to play against “their New Zeland rivals” at the beautifully and wonderfully decorated stadium of Wembley\_ in London, a venue where finals and major sport tournaments are held, hence the verse: “the Olympic panoply and Wembley roar”. Regrettably “for them these things are dead” because they were not allowed to participate in the Olympic. This is further shown through the use of adjectives like “deprived”, “inaccessible”, “unattainable” and “bitter”, “attacked and blasted” throughout the poem.

The following verses of the poem are more illustrative in this respect in that they further display, through the voice of the persona, Brutus’s deeds as the latter endeavored to free his country from bondage:

I have deprived them  
that which they hold most dear  
a prestige which they purchased with sweat  
and for which they yearn unassuagedly  
their sporting prowess and esteem  
this I have attacked and  
blasted  
unforgettably.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Dennis Brutus, *A Simple Lust: Collected Poems of South African Jail & Exile Including Letters to Martha* (New Hampshire: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973), pp. 89-90. All references to this edition are incorporated in the text with A.S.L. as the title of the Book, followed by page number.

The persona in the above extract can be identified with Brutus who was actively involved in the suspension of South Africa from certain Olympics.<sup>15</sup> This is illustrated through the use of first person singular personal pronoun “I” in the poem to display the commitment of Brutus in the struggle against apartheid. As shown in the above poem, his endeavor to minimise racism in South Africa helped him to use sports boycotts as a political weapon against his adversary and which has been capable of inflicting heavy casualties in the rank of apartheid perpetrators (B. M. Ssensalo, 1977, p.137).

Besides, freedom can be defined as the right to express one's opinions, yet because Dennis Brutus and other South Africans raised their voices against injustice, discrimination, racial segregation and so forth in South Africa, they were oppressed, shot, imprisoned, and forced to exile. Brutus's voice is not a mere voice which transmutes his people's wails into words, but that of a seer who foresees and proclaims relief beyond the current pains. It is thus important to note that the prophetic significance of Dennis Brutus' creative voice arises out of the poet's conscious conception of his role as that of granting his articulation to the “inarticulable woe” and his voice to their “wordless, endless wail” as it is seen in the poems “When they deprive me of the evenings” (*S.H.*, p.8) and “The sounds begin again” (*A.S.L.*,p.19). In such a public duty, the poet does not lose his personal identity which is strongly revealed through the speaking voice in the poems with a true human ‘presence’ and a soul that feels.

In addition, freedom is a situation whereby you are able to go where you want because you are not in prison or the ability to move or go where you want because there is nothing physically stopping you, yet the prison of Robben Island and the apartheid system itself prevented people from

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<sup>15</sup> (Anonymous), <http://africanactivist.msu.edu/organization.php?name=South+African+Non-Racial+Olympic+Committee>, retrieved on January 01, 2017.

enjoying free movement (M. Rundell and G. Fox eds., 2000, p.563). This is shown through the poem “A troubadour I traverse my land”. Right from the title, the use of the verb “traverse” brings to mind the idea of travelling the whole width and length of the country, hence the phrase “her wide flung parts” (A.S.L.,p.2). One should note that this journey is not a pleasant one. At the very moment the speaker is travelling around his country he is not allowed to do so but he has challenged the system put in place by infringing its laws or prohibitions. This underscores the arduousness of the quest. An extremely difficult task that can be highlighted through the second stanza of the poem:

and I have laughed, disdaining those who banned.  
inquiry and movement, delighting in the test  
of will when doomed by saracened arrest,  
choosing, like unarmed thumb, simply to stand (A.S.L. p.2)

The poem, “A troubadour, I traverse all my land”, and especially its second stanza which is quoted above, “concerns the adventurous clandestine life led by the persona before his arrest, defying banning orders, evading the saracen scout cars used by the police” K. Goodwin (1982, p.5). In fact, ‘those who have banned inquiry and movement’ in the country threaten to deal with whoever does not abide by this rule. Yet the poet’s delight to explore his land without fear, especially ‘her secret tickets’ is revealed in the word “zest” quoted from the first stanza wherein the reader is informed that the poet explores all the wide – flung parts with great interest: “I traverse all my land/exploring all her wide – flung parts with zest” (A.S.L., p.2)

Besides, the use of the word “test” gives much information about what the persona is going through. “Test”, as defined by *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, is “a series of actions that someone must perform to show how well they can do a particular activity; it is a difficult

situation that shows what qualities someone or something has” (M. Rundell and G. Fox eds., op. cit., p.1482). Considering the above definition and the present progressive of the verb “delight”, one can say that through this “test”, those who banned inquiry and movement will come to know those who actually love South Africa and are ready to give their lives for its liberation. Certainly, when banning movement on the land, the leaders of the apartheid regime are not just testing patriots but their intention was to prevent them from liberating their country, which is proof enough that the land was not free at all.

From all the above definitions of freedom, one can identify restriction to freedom of choice, freedom of speech, freedom of movement, the right to participate in the welfare of one’s society, the right to live in peace and even restriction to the right to be free. Still, what is it exactly that black South Africans should or need to be free from?

## **2. The Prison of Robben Island as an Impediment to Freedom**

A prison is a place wherein people are physically confined and usually deprived of a range of personal and collective rights and freedoms such as the freedom of speech, freedom of movement, the right to be free etc. It is believed to be the house woe and of moans; a place in which competition and quest for freedom, peace, justice and equality are wiped out. So, to stop or do away with rivalries, those in power simply put people who resist them in prison. Robben Island for instance has been used as a place where people were isolated, banished and exiled to<sup>16</sup>. It is a penal Island which was mostly occupied by black political prisoners who sought to build a land of freedom and equality. Among the most famous prisoners we can name the late Nelson Mandela, a committed black South African fighter, the poet Dennis Brutus and many others.

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<sup>16</sup>(Anonymous), <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/robben-island>, retrieved on July 08, 2021

The name “robben” is derived from the Dutch, meaning a seal,<sup>17</sup> that is a closure, a place where dreams end. The same way an island is surrounded by water, a system is built to engulf Black South Africans. From the symbolic point of view, the prison of Robben thus suggests a sociopolitical situation without a way out. It refers to the severity and wickedness of the white-only system that kept the Blacks in illegal bondage for so long with the intention to totally kill their dreams and ambitions. Clearly, “[Blacks] were simply prisoners of a system [they] had fought and still opposed” (A.S.L, p.64). Which means that till recently, black South Africans desperately continue fighting a racial system that has not ceased to oppress them.

The people who positioned themselves to free their country from coercion and unfairness were kept in this prison where they underwent tortures, miseries on the basis of some considerations, race for that matter. It is a horrible place for whoever stands for impartiality, unity, and liberty. Many people compare it to a “slave-ship” due to the fact that it constitutes a halt to freedom fighters’ endeavour to quench South Africa and the whole humanity’s yearning for freedom. In this sense, D. M. Zwelonke as quoted by Laura Linda Holland has the following to say:

a huge question mark hangs about the Island; (...) You, Islands, are a damned ship sailing the dangerous seas, through the typhoon. But you have souls on board, bondmen of the salve-ship, chained to the benches even during engagements with enemy ships. (D. M. Zwelonke, 1973, pp.40-41).

Definitely, this prison house is the epitome of freedom fighters suffering. It symbolizes the physical or psychological prison which the apartheid system has imposed upon Blacks.

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

What shocks most in the above statement by Zwelonke is the fact that the "souls on board" of the allegorical ship of Robben Island are still 'chained to the benches even during engagements with enemy ships'. In the last stanza of the 14<sup>th</sup> poem included in the sequence "Letters to Martha" the speaker states:

We were simply prisoners  
of a system we had fought  
and still opposed (*A.S.L.*,p.64)

The speaker acknowledges that he came to "embrace/ the status of prisoner" (*A.S.L.*,p.65) and declares that he and other South African prisoners nationwide fought and will by any means struggle to do away with the apartheid system that has held them in bondage for so long. In fact, this regime has incarcerated many black politicians with the intention to prevent them from raising the awareness about the downtrodden and enslaved the black race. Fundamentally, Black South Africans were determined to fight for the freedom of the Black but imprisonment has been used by the oppressors as a strategy to deter freedom fighters. The system has elevated repression and tortures to the position of policy in order to stifle and subdue insurrections and ever keep Blacks in slavery. It has then become a place of terror where all the political leaders that wanted to oppose the then biased system were banished and underwent all kinds of treatment. The intention was to destroy their noble ideas and fighting spirit in the process. The apartheid regime incarcerated Nelson Mandela and his buddies on Robben Island "with the express hope and belief that prison conditions would destroy their noble ideas and fighting spirit" (N. Mandela, 1990/1965, p.VIII) but they did not.

In prison, most freedom activists who were otherwise ignorant about political strategies have become strong-minded prisoners that developed ways and means to hasten freedom and bring about harmony and change. They soon learned how to continue fighting their enemies while they are still in prison. As Noel Solani pitily puts it, "men went to Robben Island



with a limited understanding of politics, except for their hatred of the apartheid system, and came out of Robben Island sophisticated politicians” (S. Lewis, 2006). Indeed, Robben Island can be said to be the symbol of the apartheid regime’s efforts to weaken its opponents but at the same time, over the years it became “Mandela U[niversity]”, due to the fact that its ‘graduates’ share an enhanced sense of common purpose and an enhanced aura of moral authority (S. Lewis, *Ibid.*, 2006) which helped them to keep up the fight against injustice. One can thus join his voice to that of the prisoners to declare that “it would be a good thing [...] if more intellectuals were imprisoned. First it would wake most of them from their illusions. And some of them might outlive jail to tell the world” (J. Mapanje, 2002, p.236).

As it has been said so far, even though it has been painful, prison has boosted up the struggle for freedom in that it has occasioned the gathering of freedom fighters. Prisons have been transmuted into hearths of resistance. Consequently, whenever the Zulu song “Nkosi Sikekela” was sung, it gathered, steered up and pushed freedom fighters ahead. The poem “Today in prison” says it all: “Nkosi Sikekela” (*A.S.L.*, p.109) which means “O Lord, guide the destiny of our land”.

### **3. Oppression as an Obstruction to Freedom**

There are many kinds of violence; many kinds of death and South Africa know them all. In his poetry, Brutus conveys the sight, sound and smell of black South Africans’ pain and death and, the white minority’s brutality and blood thirstiness. Many things happened to black people in South Africa. Some can be seen, others heard or felt. But no matter the medium through which attention is drawn to the manifestation of apartheid, one is taken aback by what a human being does to his fellow because of colour skin. The poem “But Mister you can’t imagine” said it all:

But Mister, you can’t imagine

in this place  
what elegancies  
what intrigues  
what exquisite cruelties  
what opulence of voluptuousness  
these quattrocento walls have seen (*S.H.*, p.38)

The speaker in the above extract is under a strong emotion: pain, surprise or indignation. He witnesses situations that takes him aback. He is thus saying something which can be put in the following way: 'But Mister, you can't imagine that such cruelties exist in this rich and beautiful place: it is really full of conspiracies against the black race', my own emphasis.

To make the poem vivid and true to life, the poet uses apostrophe, the figure of speech which is used in a piece of literature and that addresses a person, concept or object as though it were present before the speaker. This can be seen in the very first verse where "Mister" is being spoken to as if he were directly standing before the speaker.

In "this [very] place" where white people live in opulence, black people experience suffering. It is obvious that the place that the poem refers to is South Africa; a land of beauty and peace but rendered cruel by the white man. And the expression "quattrocento walls" refers to the fifteenth-century renaissance Italian period. The walls at this time witnessed cruelties. Nevertheless, the word "walls" is not just referring to buildings but especially to what happened at this particular period where one has witnessed "a sudden savage massacre during carnival in 1511 at Udine and the eruption across Friulan countryside of the most extensive popular uprising in Renaissance Italy".<sup>18</sup>

The phrase "quattrocento walls" is thus an analogy exploring the likeness or resemblance between violence under apartheid and violence during the Italian Renaissance. In the process, analogy makes it possible for the reader to compare apartheid and Italian Renaissance. The call, "But

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<sup>18</sup>(Anonymous), <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id>, retrieved on November 17, 2016.

Mister” and the direct address: “you can’t imagine”, create in the mind of the reader the image of two people discussing an issue. Thus, the reader is made to bear in mind the picture of someone who is narrating something to another person. It is a moment in which the ordeals in South Africa are disclosed for everybody to see. Under strong emotion, the speaker is overwhelmed by what he has witnessed to the point that he lacks words to describe things in detail hence, the expression: ‘you can’t imagine’.

Besides, the reader is informed that “walls have seen” all that has happened; nothing escapes them. Human qualities are given to objects to show the extent to which the problem has gone. To put it differently, the literary tool of personification used here helps to draw a particular attention to the fact that many evil actions have been committed in secret places where no one can tell. The sole witnesses were the concrete objects or inanimate things that were around. This also suggests that violence is perpetrated in homes where many people choose to hide. The scene that is described here does not happen in the streets but behind some ‘walls’ far from the sight of people and out of earshot.

The word “intrigues” which refers to secret plans intended to harm someone stands for the apartheid system’s deliberate choice to oppress, exploit, imprison, exile and kill black people and deprive them of their land.

As one reads through the poem, one ascertains that the tone used is serious, aghast and conversational. It is sad to realize that some people are pleased with seeing their human counterparts in trouble, hence the phrase “exquisite cruelties”. The worse is that they themselves happily make their counterparts suffer. It is certainly the reason why Brutus’s tone here suggests that one should worry about the sad conditions of our fellows instead of being pleased with them. This is definitely why the poet makes the tone also conversational for the reader to sense the importance of discussing social problems together and finding solution to them. As a matter of fact, one notices that the poem begins with a conversation between

two persons: “But Mister, you can’t imagine” (*S.H.*, p.38). The person starts this conversation because he cannot stand cruelty in his society, showing that, as a citizen of a country, it is everyone’s responsibility to fight injustice. ‘Mister’ here is used to designate a man whose name you do not know” (M. Rundell and G. Fox eds., op. cit., p.911). Its use here denotes a state of restlessness.

To paraphrase Ngugi, Africa should be ‘re-membered’. Our continent is torn by violence. The continent is full of shards. Nothing stands; everything collapses. In the poem “it was a sherded world I entered”, the reader is exposed to a chaogenous situation. The poem reads:  
It was a sherded world I entered:  
Of broken bottles, rusty tins and split rooftiles:  
The littered earth was full of menace  
with jagged edges waiting the naked feet:  
holes, trenches, ditches were scattered traps:  
and the broken land in waste plots our playing field: (*S.H.*, p.31)

The sherded world that the speaker enters is certainly the South Africa shrunk by violence. The persona’s responsibility is thus to restore it.

It was a beautiful and peaceful land which is now rendered unlovable. The phrases, “broken bottles” and “split rooftiles” suggest that something brutal has happened and has caused things to divide, separate or break. And, as it may be known to everybody, breaking something is not that easy. One needs a little or a lot of effort depending on what to break. Here, the expression “full of menace” and the image of bottles that are broken on the ground help conclude that there was cruelty almost everywhere in the speaker’s land. The “littered earth was full of menace” suggests that the land was at peace at the very beginning then someone has polluted it with all kinds of cruelties. There is therefore threat and danger everywhere.

Peace in the speaker’s world is threatened and it might soon lead to war because violence has become a common thing. “The broken land” with its “jagged edges waiting the naked feet” has nothing good to offer its citizens since “holes, trenches, ditches [have become] scattered traps” in

[their] “playing field”. This is to say that, under the oppression of the white minority, black people have no more peace in their own country.

The extract exemplifies the perpetual damage caused between whites and Blacks as we are reminded that “jagged edges” that is, the pain caused meted out to people today without tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation will hurt even the coming generation who will react to it hence, the phrase “waiting the naked feet”. If the coming generation is not armed enough with tolerance and forgiveness, the consequence of the rough treatment of Blacks will last long.

Many died under the boots of apartheid police just because they were black. This shows that racism is source violence in apartheid Africa and even in today’s society but it is stronger in South Africa:

Nowhere is racial dominance  
more, clearly defined  
nowhere the will to oppress  
more clearly demonstrated  
what the world whispers  
apartheid declares with snarling guns  
the blood the rich lust after  
South Africa spills in the dust (*S.H.*, p.89)

There is in some people the strong will to oppress or inflict suffering or pain on their human counterparts. Such people could be found in South Africa. They were so numerous that South Africa has become a land whereby you cannot escape violence.

In the poem one can infer that there is discrimination not only in South Africa but in other parts of the world yet, the case of ‘Madiba’s land’ is the worst hence, the verses: “Nowhere is racial dominance more clearly defined / nowhere the will to oppress/ more clearly demonstrated”. As it has been discussed earlier, there is discrimination almost everywhere but it is more clearly described and displayed in South Africa. The desire or decision to oppress coloured \_ “a person of mixed European (‘white’)

and African ('black') or Asian ancestry"<sup>19</sup> – and black people is manifest in the poem through expressions such as “will”, “declares with snarling guns” and “spills in the dust”. The word “will” shows that there is a deliberate intention to hurt black people. This is the evil that gnaws human society.

Owing to the fact that the Black is no more considered human being, any savagery can be leveled against him/her. So, in the oppressors' 'diabolical' determination, they use all kinds of weapons to injure, torture and kill Blacks as if it were a declaration of war. An example is what happened in Sharpeville as illustrated in the poem “Sharpeville”, but:

What is important  
About Sharpeville  
is not that seventy died:  
nor even that they were shot in the back  
retreating, unarmed, defenseless  
and certainly not  
the heavy calibre slug  
that tore through a mother's back  
and ripped through the child in her arms  
killing it (*S.H.*, p.88)

What is important and which is clearly demonstrated there is the will to oppress and deprive the black South Africans of their humanity. What is important is to notice how human beings are turned to beasts. The use of weapons against the Blacks is much like a hunting party whereby hunters look for wild animals in the bushes to shoot.

Metaphorically, the Blacks are therefore compared to wild animals to be hunted. It is clear from here that apartheid is an oppressive regime based on violence, torture, murder and all kinds of injustice. Whenever there is no justice in a society people are not in safety. Along with this, Carl Gustav Jung has made the observation that “whenever justice is uncertain and police spying and terror are at work, human beings fall into isolation

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<sup>19</sup> (Anonymous), <https://www.google.com/search?q=definition+coloured+people+in+south+africa> retrieved on 07/07/2021)

...”.<sup>20</sup> This suggests that human beings, Blacks for that matter, are given no human attention. They are considered as animals and sometimes even animals are better than them. Black people are looked down upon. The will of the oppressor is the total disappearance of the black race. This is why they used “heavy calibre slugs” to shoot baby and mother at the same time.

In the light of the foregoing comment, the poem draws attention to inhumanity, injustice and inequality in the world in general. Some people consider themselves more important than others whom they oppress and exploit by all means but it should not be so. The poet draws attention to the lack of humanity in the attitude and behaviour of white oppressors in particular, dictatorial governments in general. For more emphasis, the speaker in the poem under scrutiny wants the reader to:

Remember Sharpeville  
bullet-in-the-back day

Because it epitomized oppression  
and the nature of society  
more, clearly than anything else;  
it was the classic event (*S.H.*, p.89).

This part of the poem clearly and directly displays an important historical event. In one way or the other, the speaker calls attention to a historical fact that is, the massacre of non-white defenseless civilians who were just quietly manifesting their objection against laws which restricted movement hence the name “bullet –in- the- back day” which is given to that horrible historical day. As Mac Arthur observes, ““Brutus experiments with art as a means of transcending, the nightmare of colonial history [...] [His] beautiful, self-contained poetic icons are never historyless; history oozes, seeps into them”” (C. W. McLuckie and P. J. Colbert eds., 1995, p.82). In the poem, the place called “Sharpeville” and, especially, the day of the human massacre symbolize the reality of oppression in South Africa. “[...]”

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<sup>20</sup> Carl Jung. <https://www.azquotes.com/quote/907321>, retrieved on September 14, 2010.

it epitomized oppression/ and the nature of a society/ more clear than anything else”.

There is violence and oppression in every society. But for those who have never witnessed oppression, what happened in Sharpeville is the best example to keep in mind for, it is better displayed here than any other issue. As Karl Marx says, [society] is but a machine for the oppression of one class by another (K. Marx, 1937, p.19). What happened was thus the manifestation of the nature of society. Yet, something makes the South African case particular. It is the fact that it was extremely bad and likely to be remembered. This can be evidenced in the poem when the speaker affirms that the Sharpeville event was “the classic event”, which means that because it was too horrible and awful, it spread to many people in the world and is likely to remain in the mind of people as the worst of the things that happened in South Africa.

#### **4. Political Exile and the Quest for Freedom**

During the period of apartheid rule, many South Africans voluntarily chose or were forced to flee their country and go into exile. While some voluntarily left in order to start lives elsewhere as South Africa's expatriots, others left with the intention of returning one day to a liberated South African land. The reasons for leaving as well as the experiences of exile are as varied and numerous as the individuals who left.

The concept of ‘exile’ as defined by the *Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, is: “a situation in which you are forced to live in a foreign country because you cannot live in your own country, usually for political reasons” (M. Rundell and G. Fox eds., op. cit., p.481). It is the state of being banished from one's home or country. The poem “A Troubadour I traverse my land” is illustrative for that matter:



A troubadour, I traverse all my land  
Thus, quixoting till a cast-off of my land ... (A.S.L., p.2)

Here, attention is drawn to the poet as a troubadour who fights for a loved one against discrimination and injustice in his society. As the spokesman for his oppressed people, he calls attention to what he suffers as a fighter for justice and equality. He travelled across South Africa as an internal exile who has been forced to leave his home as he was forced to “traverse” the land.

Brutus explains the appeal of the troubadour image more clearly a few years later during a poetry reading in the UK in August 1971: “He [the troubadour] was first of all a soldier, he was a knight, he went to battle; secondly, he made up music, poetry – he fought and he sang” (T. R. August, 2014, p.52). The troubadours were composers who travelled widely to perform their compositions. However, the movement of the persona in this poem is not for joyful performance. But in his case, he cannot choose where he wants to go; the situation pushed him to go where he has to go for him to keep to the love he has for his ‘mistress’, which stands for South Africa, a ‘loved-one oppressed’ under white imperialism. As a soldier in a battle field he moves strategically so as to have advantage over his enemies. As August puts it, Brutus’ has ‘a wandering life and a desire for change’ (T. R. August, *Ibid.*, p.53) through his participation in anti-apartheid activities. Exile itself is a journey, a quest which corresponds to the wanderings of the poet “troubadour”, hence the following acknowledgment of Brutus’ persona:

I am the exile  
am the wanderer  
the troubadour (A.S.L, p.137)

Yes, he is of the types exiles who could work out solutions from their situations. He turns to his fellow exiles to whom attention is being drawn in

the poem “Our allies are exiles” so that they join their effort to bring about freedom. The poem reads:

Our allies are exiles  
dark flames beating  
on the rim of a dark world (S.H., p.84).

Once in exile, the speaker has shared his experience with other political exiles like Mandela, La Guma, Nkosi, Cosmos, Zeke etc and they design ways and means to secure freedom in their land. For the speaker, these people on whom black South Africans rely to help them achieve liberty are also “great victim[s]/ of the world’s racist plague” but they have taken advantage of their exile to bring about change in South Africa.

### **Conclusion**

Through his craft, Dennis Brutus implicitly takes his stand and has drawn attention to some socio-political ills for the members of the society to envisage the remedy they should resort to. As a matter of fact, many of his poems in *A Simple Lust* and *Stubborn Hope* have successfully drawn reader’s attention to actual racial and socio-political violence during the fight for freedom particularly in South Africa. More specifically, the poems in these collections attract the reader’s attention to the awfulness of the apartheid system and how South African freedom fighters have coped with rejection, discrimination, oppression, torture, imprisonment, and exile in their quest for justice and equality.

The purpose of this paper has been to scrutinize the different obstacles to freedom as displayed in some selected poems by Dennis Brutus, a South African poet and freedom fighter, with the view to establish strategies to overcome them. Attention has been drawn to the atrocities and the oppression meted out to black South Africans as they rose to free their land from imperial yoke and how they succeeded in transforming their

miserable conditions into stratagems that help them to establish a more free society so as to trigger development.

In the process, the work has shed more light on the concepts of freedom and constraints before dealing with the attitude of the persona in the poems under study during oppression, imprisonment and exile so as to underscore the necessity to endure violence and injustice stoically in the achievement of great patriotic dreams.

What this work actually boils into is the fact that racial segregation, torture, imprisonment, and exile has complicated the achievement of freedom, but they can be transformed into strategic weapons by freedom activists so as to hasten peace and bring about harmony and change for a lasting social development.

Beyond recording the truth; beyond protests and explanation of apartheid, Dennis Brutus' poetry is committed to creating endurance and hope for change and for a better life. Despite prison, exile and despair, the persona in Brutus' poems continues to voice alternatives.

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