

Social Realism in *The Sun by Night*-

A Novel by Benjamin Kwakye

By Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo

Department of Sociology, University of Ghana

Abstract

Drawing on Benjamin Kwakye's *The Sun by Night* this paper presents a sociological analysis of the Ghanaian society as presented in the literature produced by its members. Communication, verbal or non-verbal, is a sine qua non in human interaction. Human groups and societies depend on communication to perpetuate themselves. By analysing human communication, therefore, in this case the written literature of a society, knowledge is ultimately generated on the kind of social interaction characteristic of human groups and their way of life. Literature is a society's sublime means of self-expression that exposes its make-up and is, thus, essentially sociological. The paper suggests that the Ghanaian social milieu is the womb, which conceives and ultimately externalises it through literary works such as *The Sun by Night*. The novel depicts writing as intervention, active in society, spanning the Ghanaian experience of freedom and repression, wealth and poverty, the spiritual and the secular, being themes explored in the novel.

Key Words

Ghanaian experience, self-expression, sociological analysis, literature.

Introduction

The specifically human form of communication that enables culture can be referred to as interpretative interaction. That is to say, culture is determined by communication. It depends on an effective system of transmitting and disseminating information. Attitudes, values, rules, laws, traditions, myths and taboos, to mention a few, reflect the society's culture through the channels of communication that a society establishes. In a simple society, in sociological terms, culture is mainly transmitted by direct contact through an all-embracing process of personal interaction among members of the society. In such a situation, however, the channel of communication could only serve a sparse population with a minimum of social differentiation. As society becomes more and more complex so also do the means of transmitting information become sophisticated.

The emergence of print that ended in the publication of books, therefore, constitutes a revolutionary event in the transformation of society because, by this means, a larger population is reached, even if this were only the reading populace. It is however true to say that, prior to the invention of printing, the rudimentary records of scribes disseminated the message of the written word. The development of printing in the fifteenth century, and later publishing, has moved the process forward. When human thoughts and feelings are committed to writing, a rapid circulation of cultural ideas and messages that sweep through society at an incredible speed is promoted.

African literature, particularly the African novel, is a literary form loaded with social implications. The same can be said of literature anywhere in the world. The truth of this assertion will be ascertained, using Benjamin Kwakye's *The Sun by Night*, which this paper primarily focuses on, as a case in point. The African novel principally communicates the African milieu's experiences in its historical setting. The main focus here is the character of the African novel as intervention; the novel depicts fiction's composition as intervention in society. It is active in the world, as in the socio-cultural intricacies emanating from Africa's political and socio-economic landscape.

This paper takes a post high theory (post Marxist) position and views literature as a form of knowledge that breaks the silence in society. In this sense the novel as a literary form can live as several times; it is omniscience of all time. The novel is a form appropriate to face to face intervention in society, presents a flash back and even possesses imaginative ability to shape social life.

For example, *The Sun by Night* is a story about the death of an Accra prostitute, Akwele Oddoi. Set around a court case involving Koo Manu, a respectable and wealthy businessman suspected of the murder, the story is a gripping tale of murder, courtroom shenanigans, and intense societal conflicts. Koo Manu himself and his family depict some realities about family life such as his polygamy that stained his relationship with his first wife, Akua Nsiah, and their children. Then also was his problem child, Kubi. Kubi Manu, who later confesses his guilt in the murder case, had been involved with prostitutes and preyed on them. He took drugs with his mentor, Colonel Duah, who was also his contemporary in secondary school, but now risen to power through a revolution and later became Member of Parliament in a democracy. Their circle includes Zogami, a drug dealer, and Araba, a prostitute who constantly would blackmail Colonel Duah for money. But other prostitutes like Ama Badu, the juror-prostitute who turns down Kubi's proposal of marriage, are involved in the trade. Madam Beatrice established her brothel, where all these characters operate; escaping the eyes of the law due to the complicity of police officers she pays to protect her and her trade.

The novel explores, among others, themes and tensions of familial and traditional commitments, individual freedom, marriage and love and class exploitation. The story unfolds in a revolutionary period that claimed to cleanse the mess of previous regimes' corruption and exploitation. However, the revolutionaries' own rottenness, thanks to some of its architects like Colonel Duah, will later be exposed in a constitutional democracy. The said rottenness includes the revolutionaries' own degeneration into the very corruption they sought to wipe out and the imposition of a culture of silence, stifling dissenting voices through detention without trial and even execution. So journalists, characterised by Nii Lamptey, and politicians, such as the businessman-turned-politician, Koo Manu, in the novel, are detained.

The story is set in Ghana, a country that is still grappling with the heavy legacies of the colonial experience. Hence the novel combines old and new experiences to demonstrate that the quest for truth and justice belongs to each individual social actor, represented by the various characters in the book. Pastor-Lawyer Amoah, for example, depicts the increasing popularity religion has assumed in Ghanaian society, despite the individual religious members' own strengths and weaknesses portrayed in Pastor Amoah's stern warnings about fornication but committing it himself right in the church.

This paper attempts a social analysis on *The Sun by Night*. Basically, sociology delves into the interaction among social actors, which invariably depicts the social realities of the actors' society. The paper seeks, therefore, to discover to what extent *The Sun by Night* portrays realities of Ghanaian life to readers. The central point in this exposition, then, is the resulting structure of social relationships among Ghanaians in the light of the country's socio-political trajectory. Such relationships may be comparable to what obtains in other parts of Africa, as constituted by social interaction, coloured by the social realities on this continent. The social facts here include a continent in transition, wracked by political and economic instability, poverty and disease. Such social structures run through a good number of African novels. By way of interpreting principally fictional works within a sound theoretical frame, novels can be shown to be social realities. This is the atmosphere in which literature thrives, particularly with reference to literature's function of exposing societies in the context of everyday experiences.

Africa can be said to be going through a crisis resulting from the colonial experience, a crisis that seems to mark the post-independent African socio-political and economic landscape. Some African novels exploit this subject of crisis as their theme. Such is the reality depicted in *The Sun by Night*, a new literary success which exposes the Ghanaian experience so vividly, that this paper seeks to examine it using the novel as a take-off point.

The Sun by Night portrays the vicissitudes of the day-to-day life of Ghanaians, particularly in the revolutionary era between 1978 and 1992. The book gives a vivid account of the curtailment of individual freedom as depicted in the political detention of opponents, the confiscation of individuals' property and freezing of bank accounts, all in the name of wiping out corruption, which had become rampant in Ghanaian society. The story develops around contrasting

realities of the everyday life of people, such as deepening poverty in the face of wealth that is increasingly ill gotten. There is the cultural conflict in the choice of one's wife, for example, whether a man should marry the woman he loves or allow his parents to choose one they believe to be the ideal woman for him. So too, in the religious question, is there a struggle between being a Christian and practising traditional religion, exhibited in the churchgoer consulting the 'traditional-priest'. In depicting the symbiosis between spirituality and materiality, Christians here do not translate the tenets of their faith in daily life that rejects non-Christian practices.

Kwakye's narrative style, which uses the first, second and third persons at the same time seems to suggest that no one point of view dominates the book. For example, in the novel *Koo Manu* relates his story in the first and third persons: 'I was working for Mr. Oppong in those days. He was a wealthy man with a big business' (Kwakye 121). In referring to the Juror-prostitute, however, the novel employs the second person 'you' such as: 'As you left your bungalow that night you felt gripped by an overwhelming and ravishing force' (Kwakye 15). On the one hand, *Koo Manu's* story is a straightforward character portrait. On the other hand, in a bid to hide her own identity, the Juror-prostitute is never allowed to speak in the first person. The narrative structure, thus, succeeds in making different people speak to us on a life that affects us all.

Sociology of African Literature

It is important to situate this paper within the framework of social literary theory. Social realism is time bound, such as the revolutionary era discussed in *The Sun by Night*. The concept has to do with what is true to a society at a particular point in time. It seeks to understand the revelation of the said point in time. The aspect of social realism this novel captures spans the Ghanaian experience of freedom and repression, wealth and poverty, the spiritual and the secular as has already been suggested.

There is a difference between naturalism and realism. To illustrate with an example from photography, the developed picture is real, unlike the negative. An X-ray picture is naturalistic, showing the part photographed from inside while a picture of a person portrays his/her outward looks. To say that there is social realism in Kwakye's novel, then, means that he looks at the

Ghanaian society from the inside. He is himself a victim of this reality. And his is a historical realism. A historical novel coincides with some historical truth about the narrative.

This is why it is true to say that social realism characterizes *The Sun by Night*, making what is primarily a work of art a sociological investigation.

A reconstruction of African history can be complemented by literary art. Slavery, colonial exploitation and imperialism were the salient parts of social reality in Ghana. The consequence of slavery was the deportation of people. We must remember that over four long centuries people of this continent were simply uprooted from their social world. Some of the deportees were people with the physical and mental strength required for any meaningful development. Their removal created a break in the development of Africa. But what really truncated the growth of the continent was that suddenly everything became available on this continent. The Africans did not need to do anything. If they did not have the good things of life all of a sudden they would have been forced to produce their needs. Thus, the availability of the good things of life stunted the growth of any development of ideas. The concomitant result is the serious break Africa has suffered in the continuity of its development, and from which this continent has not yet recovered. The continuity of a development was, thus, lastingly interrupted; even the needed and common forms of socialisation or social learning were destroyed. The African society appears to have been decapitated, as it were, deprived of its cultural points of reference, its economic resources (Okyerefo 25).

Colonialism and imperialism are intrinsically linked, particularly in their exploitative nature, although some distinction could be drawn between the two concepts. In executing colonialism, the colonialists are physically present in the colony to carry through their dream, resulting in settler colonies in East Africa and South Africa, for example. And sometimes colonialism means to cultivate a people to be like the colonialists, such as making the colonised assimilate the culture of the coloniser. Novel forms of this can be variously explained by means of the terms neo-colonialism and acculturation. Imperialism too is cultural hegemony. However, imperialists could be remote but control affairs where they have interests. Through these historic events of colonialism and imperialism the West has exploited Africa. The result has been the conflict

between civilisations. For example, from some Africans' point of view Christianity and occidental civilisation appear to be a homogeneous whole since European colonisers had to make the African feel pagan, uncivilised, uncultivated and in need of Western deliverance. Thus, some degree of 'westernisation' was useful to achieve this.

Westernisation summarily seemed to have been the one and only solution to being connected to the other world through language, for instance. Or, in order to be linked to the world economic order, African societies have had to embrace a foreign and imposed monetary economy. Such change in the African social structure is perhaps the reason why Africans do not seem to know, up to the present day, where they belong. In other words, African development has not had the opportunity to take its own course but tries to tread the path carved by western countries. This experience is not without consequences for Africans and their development; they are an example of the cultural lag, as described by William Ogburn (1950). If Africans profess the patterns of the West, i.e., modernisation and development, they relapse into the pattern of their colonial experience. They seem to fulfil Europe's and the USA's social paradigms with superficiality. In other words, African development has been forced to follow western models, leading to a loss of their cultural identity in respect of their traditions. Basically one could define these circumstances as social facts, as Durkheim has done in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1958). Durkheim used the term 'social fact' to describe social phenomena that are external to the individual yet constrain his or her actions. Social facts are external to individuals, coercive and objective, i.e., not merely a product of subjective definitions. Law provides a good illustration of social facts. For example, when I fulfil my duty as a teacher I fulfil obligations that are fulfilled in law and contract that are external to myself. Even if they coincide with my own sentiments about my work these laws and contract coerce me into performing my duty since I have not prescribed them for myself. Durkheim defined the task of sociology as the study of these social facts, which devalue explanations of social action in terms of individual free will.

In the light of Durkheim one can say that Africa's encounter with the West and the latter's impact on African culture is a social fact. For example, the forms of government many African countries practise today, or even their official languages, emanate from this encounter. This experience and its aftermath also inform African literature. Much of African literature speaks to and comments

on this social fact, i.e., the reality colonial history has created in Africa. Thus, African literature owes a lot to the continent's encounter with the West, which has moulded the African consciousness so intensely that the experience of cultural crisis resulting from this meeting has time and again been described in African literary prose. The term 'conscience collective' played an important part in the sociology of Durkheim. While the notion of 'conscience' typically refers to the moral attitudes of the *individual*, for Durkheim *conscience collective* was essentially social and exterior to the individual. It refers to an external normative order or social fact, which coerces members of the group to behave and think in certain ways. This means that the shared collective experience of colonialism and its influence on Africa shapes African literary thought and expression greatly. For example, a shared 'collective consciousness' in African literature is depicted in the fact that the African colonial episode and its aftermath is constantly described in novels. It is an experience whose starting point has mainly been the world of colonial experience. Part of the African socio-political history charted through the British principle of 'indirect rule', or the French 'assimilation' policy is given expression in African literature. So too does literature depict the current political situation with the depressing closeness of African politicians to the functions of the former colonial administration (neo-colonialism again). Some of these copycats have been doomed to failure, it is true, but they still direct the political course in many countries. And, from the novels, we also discern indications as to the state of the economy and the hardships people endure (Okyerefo 30-31).

To understand a work of art completely it is important to understand the society or culture from which it derives. Literature is about life and not all literature is limited to the above characteristics. The sociology of African literature can, however, examine African literary works in the light of these characteristics. The examples cited by Benedict Anderson, Norbert Elias or Georg Lukacs show that the reconstruction of societies on the model of their culture and literature is possible, although Anderson points out that nation building is a recent phenomenon in history and to a large extent an 'imagined' entity (Anderson 1983). Culture and literature form part of what Elias calls historical processes that lead to the reconstruction of society. In *The Civilizing Process* Elias shows that sociology depends on the insightful interpretation of history. Elias traces in this work the 'civilizing' of manners and personality in Western Europe since the

late Middle Ages, showing how this was related to the formation of states and the monopolization of power within them. For Elias, 'historical processes, ... consisting of nothing but the actions of individual people, nevertheless give rise to institutions and formations which were neither intended nor planned by any single individual in the form they actually take' (Elias xv). Elias's attempt to contain the social and the individual within a unified scheme of sociological analysis underpins the fact that the literary works of individuals within society project the nature of society. And Georg Lukacs shows in *The Theory of the Novel* that the human being, history, and the art are tied closely in their development. This fact is not limited to any one society although this paper focuses on an African novel and its social context.

Generally, novels depicting the African social milieu primarily consider the social-psychological conditions of people in these societies, such as Kwakye's illustration of some Christians shuttling between Christianity and traditional religion; some Christians consult oracles since God seems too slow in answering their prayers. Thus, the novels reflect real circumstances, intent on realism with the aid of which the behavioural changes and modifications in the interaction between the described persons are objectified. The novels attempt to communicate social facts, just like on-the-spot reports or commentaries, broach concerns, expectations and hopes. But they also show the relatively oppressing situation of the absence of perspectives, with the result that the reproduction of past history only seemingly makes reference to the continuity of a life world, and in reality exacerbates the crisis.

The socio-cultural expositions depicted in the African literary works span through

1. Novels that portray the social structure of African communities prior to foreign invasion and the changes the West inflicts on the said communities after the encounter. Examples include Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart*.
2. Novels, which depict the African resistance to the new dispensation, e.g., Ngugi's *Wa Thiong'o's Weep Not Child* and *The River Between*.
3. Novels that epitomise the resulting landscape of post-independent Africa with her social, political and economic problems as corollaries to colonialism. For example, Ayi Kwei

Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari*. Benjamin Kwakye's *The Sun by Night* falls into this category.

In short, the novel can be seen as presenting sociological knowledge and political intervention. Thus, prose in Africa combines reality and meta-reality, individual fortunes and hopes, the world to live in without continuity or history, and social need without any prospect of improvement. Literature is the very instrument needed to express the fact that serious sociology must remain dependent on the insightful interpretation of history of just the kind African society provides. The sociology of literature should render plausible the functional prerequisite of literature as a mirror of social reality. The novels encode a decidedly beleaguered social milieu, the African society that has been denigrated, not exalted. One has to remember, however, that art is creative and not only mimetic of reality. Sometimes the society so created may be a figment of the writer's imagination but close enough to mirror the 'social fact'.

The Sun by Night

In the light of the above, Benjamin Kwakye's novel, *The Sun by Night*, which has won popular acclaim and the Commonwealth Writers' Prize of 'Best Book' almost immediately after its publication in 2006 is rich in sociological imagination. Kwakye's first novel, *The Clothes of Nakedness*, also won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize of 'Best First Book' for the Africa Region soon after its publication in 1999.

In many ways, both novels touch on themes that are fundamental to life in Ghanaian society. *The Clothes of Nakedness* is perhaps more socio-economic in emphasis while *The Sun by Night* has a socio-political bent. The former is a grim portrait of the relationship between the rich and the poor and the seductive power of corruption, while the latter surveys the Ghanaian political landscape.

On the whole one can say that *The Sun by Night* is a historical, socio-political novel, which is informed by the Ghanaian experience in the not too distant past. Kwakye, in this novel, depicts,

among other day-to-day realities, a nation's humanity that is abused through idols, ostensibly like a prostitute's fornication (Kwakye 60). Metaphorically, idols are all the wrong things worshipped such as money, power and women. Here, episodes recounted in fiction depict the harrowing and dehumanising real life stories of individuals, groups and indeed an entire people, reminiscent of eras of repressive military regimes (Kwakye 62). Indeed, the term *fiction* embraces today a broader spectrum of reality, not simply an imaginary tale or an illusion, In fact, creative writing could expound truth by means of fiction, thereby creating a thin line between fact and fiction, which demands that one should tread carefully in the interpretation of literary works. *Faction* is a literary device that blends fact and fiction whereby fictional narrative or dramatization are used as a basis for real events. *The Sun by Night* generally employs faction.

One would wonder why Ama Badu, the juror-prostitute, in *The Sun by Night* should be a prostitute, considering her social standing as juror and the fact that her engagement in the trade was not economically driven, until the narrative reveals she was abused as a child. Her case illustrates that the abuse a child suffers could have life-long debilitating consequences on him/her. In the same vein, the social ills of society such as corruption, prostitution, poverty and repressive regimes take a lasting toll on individuals, groups and societies as a whole. *The Sun by Night* delves brilliantly into these realities, which reflect the *conscience collective* of the Ghanaian society, resulting from its common experience.

Kwakye is forthright with his novel - a novel that he himself points out right in the beginning (prologue) - as one 'of social meaning and political shenanigans, economic strain and spiritual jests' (Kwakye 3). The social underpinnings of the Ghanaian experience portrayed by Kwakye are embedded in ordinary day-to-day lives of individual social actors, groups and the nation.

Hence, the novel's characters include prostitutes and public servants, the employed and unemployed, rich and poor. The main setting in this case is the city, with all its joys and sorrows, strengths and weaknesses, security and conspiracy. For example, the dreaded fear of coups d'etat, which have ravaged Ghana, looms over the heads of characters in the novel all the time: \. I too had heard rumours that some members of the military were planning a coup' (Kwakye 26), Ghana has had 5 successful coups d'etat since independence and innumerable attempted ones. 'In 1966, the first military intervention dismissed the country's first president; in 1972, the second

coup sacked the prime minister' (*TheKwakyee 182*). These are historical facts buttressing the realism employed in the novel. Ghana has had 6 military regimes, all of which claimed to liberate or redeem the country from her ills. Ever since Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, was celebrated as the 'Osagyefo' (Redeemer), the country has consistently seemed to need redemption. These military regimes, their dates in power and leaders are arranged chronologically as follows:

| <u>Regimeⁱ</u> | <u>Date in Power</u> | <u>Leader of Regime</u> | <u>Type of Government</u> |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| NLC | 24 Feb. 1966-1969 | Gen. J.A. Ankrah/Gen. A.A. Afrifa | Military cum Police |
| NRC | 1972-1975 | Gen. I.K. Acheampong | Military |
| SMCI | 1975-1978 | Gen. I.K. Acheampong | Military |
| SMCI1 | 5 July 1978-June 3, 1979 | Gen. F.W.K. Akuffo | Military |
| AFRC | 4 June 1979-24 Sept 1979 | Fl. Lt. J.J. Rawlings | Military |
| PNDC | 31 Dec. 1981-7 Dec. 1992 | Fl. Lt. J.J. Rawlings | Military |

What this means is that one after another these military regimes toppled their predecessor military or democratically elected governments, and thus destabilised Ghana's development process, with lasting economic and socio-political consequences.

Generally, opinions are divided on the legacy of military regimes in Ghana. Some Ghanaians believe military regimes came to relieve downtrodden Ghanaians during difficult times. For example, Fl. Lt. J.J. Rawlings' 4 June 'Revolution' was greeted by many Ghanaians as a welcome gift to free the country from the yoke of the SMC era. University students were at the forefront of such support of the AFRC and later PNDC, clamouring for the execution of some past military rulers in the famous phrase, let the blood flow'. At the same time, others believe, as evident during the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) hearings in Ghana, 2002 - 2004, that military periods are reminders, to various degrees, of atrocities committed against individuals, groups and the nation as a whole. For example, according to Naomi Chazan (1), the era of the SMCI was 'one of economic crisis, administrative breakdown, and civil disorder'. These crises characterised the 'pessimism of the 1970s' (Chazan 4), 'a decade in which civil liberties were trampled upon at will' (Chazan 3). This was a time when university students who went on demonstration were shot at, resulting in some deaths. But it was not the only political

era that saw student protests. In AFRC/PNDC times soldiers gave some students severe beating to whip them into line.

According to Paul Nugent, the SMC era was the time when corruption was widely christened 'Kalabule', a term referring 'broadly to profiteering either by manipulation of the state machinery or merely by evasion of official controls' (Nugent 27). In fact, in Ninsin's view, during SMCI 'the level of prostitution, divorce, juvenile delinquency and unemployment increased sharply; and so did the lust for wealth through the most unfair and corrupt means reach epidemic proportions' (Hansen & Ninsin 9). As pointed out earlier the common denominator of the military regimes was 'to change' the 'appalling living conditions and the tragic sense of social insecurity' of Ghanaians, a claim that, according to Ninsin, they successively failed to achieve (Hansen & Ninsin 2). In such instances civil society has longed for a return to democracy as evident in the words of Madam Beatrice in the novel: 'I thought elections would soon be underway ... you soldiers are leaving politics and going back to the barracks' (Kwakye 34).

Whatever people's opinions, military regimes partly inform the shared *conscience collective* of Ghanaians and *The Sun by Night* emanates from this collective consciousness. The novel depicts the social ills of the nation that are legacies of the successive military governments but especially the most recent ones, the AFRC and PNDC. Coups d'etat have always had an impact on people's lives both as individuals and as a nation. In the novel, the detention of Nii Lamptey (journalist) and Koo Manu (businessman turned politician) illustrates the curtailment of freedom of speech and the injustices people have had to suffer because they were in a previous government, even if they committed no offence personally. The rule of law is always dispensed with, making even innocent people victims during such era. The injustices meted out to people, sometimes perpetrated by individuals seeking to settle personal scores, is a mark of the breakdown of the rule of law and the abuse of civil liberty.

Again, the fact that *The Sun by Night* draws on history as a catalyst for social change can be seen in the blend between fact and fiction, constituting fiction as we have already seen. This endeavour lends a historical flavour to the novel. Events are usually based on human experiences, which are the stuff of history. Thus, the novel's use of a contemporary situation as

the basis of creative art means that literature attempts to create reality. It is based on what has come and gone, on historicity itself. The following assertion is a good illustration: 'With three months to the end of the Military Council's rule, do we need another military government? The Revolutionary Council's intervention cannot be anything but a derailment of the process towards constitutional democracy. We demand the immediate dismantling of this new bogus military apparatus in favor of civilian rule' (Kwakye 49).

In fact, the names of the military regimes in the passage are reminiscent of, and shortened versions of, real names of military governments Ghana has had, hence, Military Council for Supreme Military Council and Revolutionary Council for Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. The effect of this is that real 'characters' are used in the novel as imaginary creations. It is a historical fact that the AFRC supplanted SMCII. And this happened at a time when SMCII was about to return the country to civilian rule; in fact, it was *three months* to the said time when the AFRC forcefully seized power. Even though that coup d'etat seemed to have won the popular support of Ghanaians at the time, there were some who felt uneasy about such developments, especially when the killings were escalating. It was a climate in which Yumors started circulating that arrested journalists and officials of the erstwhile government were being molested or even executed in detention, ... three former Heads of State were shot by firing squad; ... other officials of the toppled government faced the same fate' (Kwakye 50). The social realism in the novel is illustrated in the creation of real life characters identifiable by all who have had to put up with gruesome treatment and the general roughness of the times in question.

In reality, the new dispensation, however, did not seem to have ended the corruption it sought to fight because if people were killed for having 'two toilets' in their homes some of the perpetrators themselves went after those very luxuries, if not more. This fact is buttressed by the novel. Ama Badu (juror-prostitute) had been married to Nii Lamptey (journalist). It was after their divorce that Ama entered the trade of prostitution. When she hears that Nii is in detention she feels the need to get him released. Ama Badu could only achieve this through Madam Beatrice who in turn gets Colonel Duah to help. But the process reveals the corruption of the new dispensation itself: 'A day later, Madam Beatrice said Colonel Duah could help, but some people had to be paid off first. ...I got the money ...' (Kwakye 50). And so even the revolutionary era could not

cleanse the rottenness, otherwise corruption in Ghanaian society would have been minimised today, if not eradicated. It is important to note also that corruption is not the preserve of government, the state apparatus or government officials alone. The citizenry also are not exempt in any era as depicted in Akua Nsiah's encounter with her son Kubi's headmaster. Akua Nsiah, the businessman Koo Manu's wife, visits her son Kubi's school to plead with the headmaster not to expel her son. The ensuing encounter shows how the citizenry corrupt and are corrupted: "Teacher, is there anything I can do to make you change your mind?" He was silent when I said that, eyeing Kubi instead. I asked Kubi to leave the office. When I was alone with the headmaster I took some money and gave it to him. He counted it and said, "Now you have spoken, madam. As you will understand, I too must eat...." (Kwakye 167).

It is possible that even during the revolutionary times the government was innocent of some of the atrocities attributed to it in view of the settlement of personal scores by over-zealous 'soldiers, who took advantage of the national curfew to molest or rape or even kill those caught abroad in its forbidden hours' (Kwakye 52). It was simply a despicable socio-political situation expressed in the neologism 'tamat!'ⁱⁱ It was the period of revolution that touched ail individual lives, even young people. The beating of elderly people and the general disrespect for peoples' rights were so gruelling that the word 'tamat' that appears to spew forth this disgust out of the mouth was coined. In the words of the novel those 'were days of fear and intimidation, when soldiers with grievances took advantage of the charge in the atmosphere to settle old scores' (Kwakye 57). Ordinarily, the gun, the whip, freezing of people's assets and detention instilled fear and trepidation in a citizenry that became pushed into a long silence to be broken today with accounts like *The Sun by Night*, depicting fiction as breaking the silence. These are not times for the rule of law. These are times for the rule of the gun. You need to know someone in the military, someone with access to power' (Kwakye 185). It was an era of a new kind of suffering redolent with the suffocating effect of kangaroo courts portrayed in the novel. Arbitrary judgment and summary executions were passed in such courts. '... I was beaten again. I felt numb, I was taken back to my cell. I nearly died ... Two of my buildings (at Tesano) were confiscated to the state. I was fined a huge chunk of money. But I survived' (Kwakye 133). This new suffering replaced the proverbial 'We have suffered for far too long' (Kwakye 73) that accounted for the toppling of the former regime.

The Spirit of Survival

The human spirit is great indeed. Against the backdrop of the beleaguered nation, people still managed to put their lives together in their daily activities. They loved and married; they worked and had fun; they were hungry and had parties. And why not? Social facts are found in normal day-to-day activities. In fact, it would appear people were so unbelievably poised and controlled in such a near death daily situation in the revolutionary era. This ironical observation about people's daily lives would seem to lend credence to Kwakye's sarcasm that 'it rains snow in the land of the sun' (Kwakye 193). Military intervention upon military intervention has not solved the political and socio-economic needs of the nation. Rising poverty in the face of filthy wealth for a few people, even those who had preached equality for all, became the norm. Armed robbery could partly be said to have resulted from the deep chasm between the rich and the poor, symbolised by what sociologists call the 'gated communities' that provide security for the rich, and the slums or the 'septic fringe' (Giddens 589) that spawn armed robbers. Our society, particularly the cities, fosters such a situation. Sociologists use the concept 'septic fringe' to denote the areas around the edges of cities in developing countries where migrants congregate, usually in shanty dwellings wherever there is little space. This is the concept of the ghetto. On the other hand, the rich tend to have huge buildings with high walls around them. Sometimes there is a cluster of such buildings in an entirely walled community of middle or upper class sections in urban areas, hence the appellation 'gated communities'. Walled buildings depict the insecurity of their owners; they are constantly on guard against invasion from the other side by robbers, an act that is usually believed, sometimes erroneously, to be carried out by the disadvantaged in society. In any case, that is the 'reality of walled buildings and fenceless ones' (Kwakye 40), the former consumed with the need to guard against 'a group of mean-looking young men who were rumored to be thieves' and 'who plagued wealthy neighbourhoods for items they could resell' (Kwakye 32-33).

Class struggle is certainly a reality in Ghana. As history shows with regard to communism, for example, a classless society is a Utopia. Experience in Ghana has shown that social classes cannot be eradicated altogether but that their levels of inequality may be reduced. After the 4 June 1979 revolution some revolutionary cadre came to address students in our secondary

school. He pointed out how Ghana had become a well-stratified class society comparable to a triangle with a few rich people occupying the apex. The revolution, he said, was to reverse this development, turn down the triangle on its pinnacle so that the base would point upwards. 'It was high time', he said, 'the majority poor who occupied the base refused to sit down to be cheated'. I still remember questioning my young mind how it would be possible for a triangle to stand on one of its pointed angles. I thought it would surely tilt and land on another of its sides, thereby creating yet another base and a new apex. The only difference will be that different people would occupy the apex and the base. Today, this reflection has been vindicated because social classes continue to exist in Ghana. Social classes exist in society irrespective of whether the form of government is a military dictatorship or a democratic dispensation.

Class struggle in Ghanaian society, however, appears to tolerate a fluid movement from one social class to another and individuals are free to choose what path to tread to success. Some of the characters in the novel can be used to illustrate this point. Some of the paths to success are education as exemplified in the lives of Lawyers Amoah and Dadzie in the novel, business entrepreneurship that makes Koo Manu a respected man, and religion through which Lawyer Amoah doubles as a pastor thereby earning the title 'Pastor-Lawyer' Amoah. Others are armed robbery, by which Quartey makes a living, and prostitution, through which Madam Beatrice has built a successful business enclave. As Madam Beatrice observes, 'I was born into a poor home, you know' (Kwakye 42) and yet she has moved up to create an enterprise. Her means of survival and economic success is prostitution. For some other people religion is the means to guarantee such hope materially or spiritually. This accounts mainly for the proliferation of religious movements in Ghana today: 'Churches these days are as abundant as flies' (Kwakye 152). Indeed, religion seems to thrive in response to difficult situations in order to give hope to the hopeless.

In the midst of all the failures, the abuse and degradation, *The Sun by Night* sees light at the end of the tunnel. Therefore, the title of the book suggests that there is hope; all is not lost for 'the roads are widening New ones are being constructed New possibilities opening up...' (Kwakye 181), True to such optimism the 'elections were over and the civilians had taken over. The country sighed collectively with the exhalation of new relief, the luster of the self-arrogated

revolutionaries dimmed by night, although the electrifying shock of the Revolutionary Council's short reign still hung its specter over the new regime. On a more personal scale, Colonel Duah had defeated Ekow Dadzie for a seat in the new parliament. The official result was shocking in that Ekow Dadzie had not received a single vote. I mean ZERO, which would indicate that neither he nor anyone else had voted for him, which was outrageous to believe. I had voted for him; at the very least, he should have had one vote' (Kwakye 235). On that dramatic note one becomes aware that the democratisation process will need time to polish the rough edges. This is evident in the fact that the election itself, which was meant to lead the country from military to democratic rule, was not without corruption.

Erving Goffman's (1959) 'dramaturgical' approach to the study of social interaction is based on the idea that in interaction people put on a 'show' for each other, stage-managing the impressions that others receive. Social roles are, therefore, analogous to those in a theatre. Indeed, literary characters are like actors on the social stage of society. 'All the world's a stage', as Shakespeare says. In a good many instances like those Kwakye so creatively portrays, these characters mirror real life situations of individuals and their social environment as such to readers. For example, the journalist Nii Lamptey and businessman-politician Koo Manu, speak to Ghanaians who have undergone political detention. In the same vein, Kubi Manu depicts the reality of the menacing effect of drugs on the lives of some young people in Ghana today.

In some personal comments on his first book, *The Clothes of Nakedness*, Kwakye says he is 'not necessarily interested in presenting "reality", for reality itself can be a facade for something lurking deeper that escapes casual observation'. However, he is himself interested in all the different interpretations others will give his work. The fact is that both of Kwakye's works so far, which share similar themes of 'wealth and poverty' and 'political turmoil' are influenced by his growing up experiences in the Ghana of the 1970s. His father was a member of SMCII, which was toppled in the bloody coup of the AFRC in 1979. He certainly had a personal experience of the vicissitudes of the times. No wonder he is able to create characters to reflect the historicity of the period and depict a picturesque imagery that is based on his experiences rather than made up. His is a repertoire of real life situations with which one can easily identify, although his closeness to an SMCII leader should alert readers also that Kwakye's narrative is based on his

location and personal experiences of the particular history his novel espouses. At the same time, however, his experiences could have influenced his responses to this history.

This notwithstanding, characters project images of themselves, usually in ways that best serve their own ends and those of their social setting, because such information helps to define the situation and create appropriate expectations. Goffman was concerned with the sociology of everyday life. To grasp the orderliness of such meetings, Goffman employed drama as an analogy for the staging of social meetings in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). For him, social order is always precarious because it is disrupted by embarrassment, withdrawal, and the breakdown of communication. *The Sun by Night* has shown that what is true of drama can be true of prose as well, meaning that creative literary art gives us a credible insight into society. If life is theatre, theatre is life.

Conclusion

This paper sought to show that by means of fiction, *The Sun by Night* delves into social realism. The novel serves as a mirror reflecting social reality in Ghanaian society. It depicts, to a very large extent, what is true about Ghanaian society, especially in the revolutionary era portrayed, with particular reference to people's experiences of freedom and repression, wealth and poverty, the spiritual and the secularⁱⁱⁱ. What Kwakye does is not entirely new; maybe his style is new, employing the first, second and third persons at the same time. As pointed out earlier, such a style signifies that the narrative brings together every individual in the society. But above all he helps us gain an insight into Ghanaian society at a definite point in time by means of its *conscience collective*.

The Ghanaian socio-political arena is as tortuous as the zigzag path it has traversed, now as a military dictatorship, now as a democratic dispensation. Whatever the case and at every point it is people's lives that are affected as individuals, groups or the larger society. The literature a society produces attests to this. Kwakye's certainly does. Literature is about life, employing language, which is the key to all human achievements, in fascinating ways. Life is led in society, making literature a social phenomenon that intervenes in it.

Notes

- i. NLC - National Liberation Council
NRC - National Redemption Council
SMC - Supreme Military Council
AFRC - Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
PNDC - Provisional National Defence Council
- ii. **tamat:** *adj.*, & *adv.* - *adj.* **1a** the awfully disgusting state of a thing (*a tamat meeting; a tamat situation*), **b** an act or behaviour of a person (*tamat driving*). **2** description of the thing or person in the said state (*a tamat journal; a tamat man*). **3 adjectival phrase** (*a tamatly conceived idea; a tamatly executed plan*) - *adv.* **1** tamatly (*he spoke tamatly this afternoon*). **1** form of exclamation expressing awful disgust (*tamat!*). [Original thought]. Coined 1979 by Michael P.K. Okyerefo.
- iii The spiritual and the secular have been touched on in another paper this author is working on: 'Christianizing Africa: A Portrait by Some African Novelists'.

References

- Achebe, Chinua. Arrow of God. New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1994
- Achebe, Chinua. No Longer At Ease. New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1994
- Achebe, Chinua. Things Fall Apart. New York: Anchor Books Doubleday, 1994
- Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso, 1993
- Armah, Ayi Kwei. The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1988
- Chazan, Naomi. An Anatomy of Ghanaian Politics. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983
- Durkheim, Emil. The Rules of Sociological Method. Glencoe: Free Press, 1958
- Elias, Norbert. The Symbol Theory. London: Sage Publications Ltd., 1991

- Elias, Norbert. The Civilizing Process. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1997
- Giddens, Anthony. Sociology. Cambridge: Polity, 2001
- Goffman, Erwin. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1959
- Jahn, Jahnheinz. Muntu: African Culture and the Western World. New York: Faber and Faber, 1990
- Kwakye, Benjamin. The Clothes of Nakedness. London: Heinemann, 1998 Kwakye, Benjamin. The Sun by Night. Asmara: Africa World Press, Inc., 2006 Lukacs, Georg. The Historical Novel. London: Merlin Press, 1962
- Lukacs, Georg. The Theory of the Novel. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971
- Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. The River Between. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers Ltd., 1965
- Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. Weep Not, Child. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers Ltd., 1987
- Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. Matigari. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1990
- Ninsin, Kwame. "Introduction: Thirty-Seven Years of Development Experience." Emmanuel Hansen & Kwame Ninsin (eds.) The State, Development and Politics in Ghana. London: Codesria Book Series, 1989: 1-12
- Nugent, Paul. Big Men, Small Boys and Politics in Ghana. Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1995
- Ogburn, William. On Culture and Social Change. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1950
- Okyerefo, Michael Perry Kweku. The Cultural Crisis of Sub-Saharan Africa as Depicted in the African Writers' Series - A Sociological Perspective. Frankfurt a/m: Peter Lang Verlag, 2001
- Yitah, Helen A. Philosophies of Existence in Contemporary Ghanaian Fiction: A Critical Study of The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Search Sweet Country And The Clothes of Nakedness. MPhil Thesis, Department of English, University of Ghana, 2001