

## The Contexts and Typologies of Literary Source Materials in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass*: Focus on the Actual and Typical Realities

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### Abstract

This paper examines the typologies as well as the contexts of literary source materials in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Burning Grass*. Particularly, this paper's focus will be on how various kinds of realities, otherwise the source materials, represented in *Burning Grass*, (like the aspects of nomadic Fulani culture, identity, and environment), can be classified either as 'actual' or 'typical' realities, specifically from the reader's point of view. Therefore, this paper aims to elucidate on what informs this study's categorization of literary source materials either as 'actual' or 'typical' realities. In a bid to attain a plausible explanation, this paper contextually analyzes material in the focused study *Burning Grass*, and applies the researcher's field experience as a means of evaluation the primary data essentially from culture-specific perspectives.

**Key words:** Actual, Nomadic Fulani, Realities, Source Materials, Typical, Typologies

### 1. Introduction: Contexts and Typologies of Literary Source Materials

This paper is prompted by a commentary by Michael M. Horowitz in a review published in *American Anthropologist* about a documentary film captioned *Soro*, produced by Edward Hopen and H. K. Davis. In the suggested remark, Horowitz a social anthropologist and cultural ecologist, who had carried out robust field studies in parts of Sahel region of Africa, points out the significance of *Burning Grass*, a Nigerian novel written by Cyprian Ekwensi<sup>36</sup>, as a reliable reference to some cultural and social realities of Nigerian nomadic Fulani particularly during the colonial period and some years after independence. In the film review Horowitz (1970: 971) recommends that those instructors who use the documentary film '*Soro*' should suggest to their students to 'read *Burning Grass*, Cyprian Ekwensi's 1962 novel, in which there is a sensitive and detailed picture' of culture representation. In line with this paper's perspectives, 'a society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe, in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members' (Goodenough 1957: 167). This definition is both useful and illuminating, because it lays emphasis on certain ingredients of society and socialization such as shared value systems, communal beliefs, customs and norms which are attributes that define the communal as well as an individual's perspectives on realities. Hence, this study views Horowitz's recommendation as an indication that novels variously represent typical and/or actual realities of specific individuals or/and community, and not just mere figments of an author's imaginations.

A narrative such as *Burning Grass* falls within the categorisation of a novel and according to Dennis Walder, an Emeritus Professor of Literature, whose research interests range from 19<sup>th</sup> century fiction to 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, 'novels are fictions, or may be called fictitious, because they depict imaginary characters and actions' (1995: 10). However all novels are neither entirely nor equally imaginary in their depiction hence some 'seem to be more or less fictitious than others' (Walder 1995: 10). This is because 'we know that parts of Dickens's *Great Expectations* were drawn from the author's own life', and that other novels, such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* 'were suggested by and even based on real events' while Shelley's *Frankenstein* was 'derived from a dream or nightmare, and could hardly have happened to somebody in real life' (Walder 1995: 10). Similarly, Ekwensi's 'earliest stories were about his father and they eulogised his father's unequalled bravery as an adventurous (elephant) hunter and his dexterity as a carpenter' (Emenyonu 1988: 22). Buttressing, Walder goes on to observe that 'the standard current definition of a novel centrally includes the idea of representing the real world' (1995: 18). If a novel's literary source material represents 'the real world' which denotes two major typologies of realities, namely; actual realities and typical realities, the question then is; what and what constitutes actual realities or typical realities. Therefore, the notion of a novel as a fictitious story evidently can be argued to imply that such narrative simply does not claim to document or

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<sup>36</sup> Cyprian Ekwensi was born in 1921 at Minna, the capital of Niger State, located in north-central region of Nigeria, which also is widely referred to as Middle-belt. He was educated at Government College Ibadan, Achimota College Ghana, and at Chelsea School of Pharmacy in England. At some stage or the other in his life, Ekwensi was a teacher, forester, pharmacist, film-maker, and a broadcaster. Nonetheless he remains most popular and widely remembered as a pioneer in pamphlet and prose literature in West Africa. Ekwensi is remembered not just as a novelist but as an author of many novels such that in his life time, he published more than forty literary works as well as scripts for television and radio productions.

reproduce a specific past event as it had happened, in other words it does not replicate occurrences exactly, even though some authors build their stories around actual realities.

From the above exposé, it is plausible to argue that Horowitz's comment necessitates the need to analytically look deeper at the contexts of literary realities or source materials upon which the novel *Burning Grass* is built, which will help in providing sufficient illumination and understanding on his recommendation. Therefore, this paper contextualizes Horowitz's concept of sensitive and detailed picture of cultural realities by classifying them as either actual realities or typical realities, which will provide basis for similar studies.

In a bid to provide deeper background to this paper's analysis of literary source materials as realities as examined from the reader's point of view we shall look at the contributions of William James. In his thesis on the contexts and typologies of realities, William James, a foremost American philosopher and psychologist of his generation, in his famous chapter 'the realms of reality' collected in his work *Principles of Psychology* volume two posits that reality manifests numerous and differently, however that their appreciation depends on individual and specific community's circumstances and prevailing social constructs. He notes that these numerous and differently occurring realities can be analyzed within sub-universes of realities. He outlined seven realms of realities as the basis of his discuss. They are the realm that serves as the hallmark of realities, which is the sub-universe of sense or the realm of physical things; the realm of science, in which things are understood in terms of physical forces and laws of nature, and this realm he notes is available mostly to the enlightened or those he classified as the educated; the trajectories of philosophy and mathematics which expose us to a world of abstract truth and ideal relations; he also notes that as humans, we are all subject to the distortions of commonplace illusion and prejudices, hence the realm of idols of the tribe; he also suggests the trajectory of our cultures as another realm of reality which expose us to the spheres of mythology and the surreal; he also believes that each of us has his or her own subjective opinions, which may or may not be expressed to others, hence sub-universe of individual opinion and imaginations; and another realm of reality he describes as the sphere of madness and vagaries, which has the propensity to disconnect us from what is viewed widely by others as the clear and evident plausibility in which those others can readily believe. In his tilt on pragmatism and subjectivity, he contends that what we assume as real must connect with us personally due to their relevance and inter-connection with other aspects of our circumstances. Clearly James' work presents us with evidential basis of discussing the differentials in human realities.

In line with James' position on realities as notions and definitions which are ultimately produced within the influences of different social constructs, Stephen Hester and David Francis on their view on 'reality construction' versus 'reality analysis', notes that 'on the one hand, 'realism' emphasizes the real and objective character of social phenomena', while on the other hand, a cluster of views on specific dimensions encompassed by the terms constructionism or social constructionism, in one way or the other 'emphasizes how the apparent objectivity of social phenomena is explicable in terms of social practices of reality construction' (1997: 96). They also contend that 'the social constructionist asserts that whereas members typically view social life as comprising an objective realm of factual things, it can be demonstrated that such 'facts' are socially constructed artefacts' (1997: 96).

The idea generated from Hester and Francis is that all forms of realities are necessarily the products of different social constructs; hence the concept of social constructionism is about the idea that realities are what people make of nature, objects and subjects therein and the activities taking place in and around them. Another point of view derived from the contribution of Hester and Francis is the concept of plurality of realities, which is also in concordance with the position of James. To relate the relevance of the concepts and theories in Hester and Francis' work to the current study, we begin by noting that narratives are mediums of relating individual perspectives on the past, about the present and suppositions on the future of life, living life and nature, which are forms of realities. And as regards to the contexts of realities, they argue that 'the correct sociological ontology is that there are many realities, each relative to a certain social collectivity or environment' (Hester & Francis 1997: 96). They maintain that while it appears to a given community's 'members that (their) reality has such features as fixity, objectivity and transcendence, the sociologist can show that these features are nothing more than the product of activities by which points of view are achieved and upheld' (1997: 96). This view supports this papers classification of some forms of represented realities in novels as typical or actual.

Having established that realities exists variously and differently, that realities can be location specific, culture specific, evolutionary, and has different manifestations, the primary interest here is to view realities represented in our focused study from the readers' points of view. We know that narratives captures realities in form of stories, and these captured realities are from a specific source material. By source materials we mean the basis of a given story as well as that of the objects and subjects represented in the story. The idea here is that a given story must have existed

somehow either as wholly or partly as a past occurrence or combinations of past occurrences, or present happenings, or ideas in the consciousness before it is narrated by the narrator. Likewise, the objects and subjects represented in a story should be that which must be unambiguously recognizable and linkable to memories of specific individual or individuals or community or particular location or particular season or particular age. Hence the readers' quest to link such to those memories already stored in the brain to create recognition. Therefore a reader relies on his level of knowledge or accumulated memories, to recognize and localize a given story, as well as the various objects and subjects therein as specifics which wholly or partly presents actual realities or typical realities of specific individual, individuals and/or society.

## 2. Synopsis of the Focused Study

In the focused study *Burning Grass*, Ekwensi's story illuminates on some social realities of a nuclear nomadic Fulani family, depicted in a rapidly changing northern Nigerian region during the colonial era. In this story, Ekwensi follows the trials of the central character named Mai Sunsaye, whom he describes as an elderly Fulani herdsman, a studious fellow, a medicine man and a leader of his people in the village of Dokan Torro. Contextually, *Burning Grass* also revolves around the ensuing domino effects of Mai Sunsaye's tribulations on his family and their collective as well as individual attempts to get their lives back to normal. Also from *Burning Grass* we learn that the incident that triggered the tribulations of Mai Sunsaye and his family began one day whilst he was grazing his cattle in company of his sons, Hodio and Rikku (the elder and the younger respectively). The summary of the incident was that a Kanuri girl named Fatimeh, a slave of one Shehu (described as an unruly ex-soldier), was attempting an escape from Shehu's captivity. As she was being pursued by one of Shehu's men, by chance she sighted an elderly man (Mai Sunsaye) sitting under a tree. Instinctively she ran straight to him for protection.

In response, compassionate Mai Sunsaye promptly decided to give her refuge. Subsequently, Mai Sunsaye in liaison with his sons unilaterally decided and offered Fatimeh's pursuer five herds of cattle as the price for her freedom and ordered him to leave without her. The pursuer apparently bullied by Mai Sunsaye's autocratic disposition, complied only after making a fervent lack-lustre disapproval, in which he suggests an unequivocal allusion to an impending retribution from his master Shehu. While Hodio did not clearly show any flicker of enthusiasm as regards to his father's moves to takeover Fatimeh, noticeably, right from the very first glance, Rikku became infatuated with Fatimeh. On her part, starting from the very first day and afterwards, Fatimeh reciprocated by showing veiled tell-tale signs of affection towards Rikku. Eventually, it was Hodio, who eloped with Fatimeh. Hodio's action depressed Rikku so much that he began to emaciate as a result. Consequently, Mai Sunsaye promised Rikku he will find and bring back Fatimeh, because as at the time, it appeared to him as the only viable option to make Rikku happy again. However, as a leader of his people in Dokan Toro, Mai Sunsaye was facing a hostile opposition from Ardo, his long-standing foe, who refuses to acknowledge his legitimacy. One afternoon, Ardo in company of his men released a bird with a magic talisman, the kind that afflict people with *sokugo*, described by the novelist as 'a magic that turned studious men into wanderers, that led husbands to desert their wives, Chiefs their people and sane men their reason' (1962: 10). Later on that same day, whilst Mai Sunsaye sat outside his hut reading under a *dorowa* tree, he was drawn to a black bird with a magic talisman. Compulsively, he stood up and began to pursue the bird. It lured him away from his home and family. It led him on a journey that would take him to distant places. Places where he made new acquaintances and learned firsthand about the rapid changing ways of life of those people residing in other parts of northern Nigeria as a result of colonialism.

His wandering led him to a chance meet with his eldest son Jalla whom he had not seen for a reasonable while at a ceremonial flogging contest known as *soro*<sup>37</sup>. While he was engaged in this way-ferrying, his family was stormed by arsonists, led by Ardo; as a result his entire family's huts were razed and reduced to rubble. Fortunately Rikku, Leibe and Shaitu (Mai Sunsaye's youngest son, only daughter and wife respectively) managed to escape with their lives and eventually got re-united at Jalla's home in another village. In the meantime, Fatimeh after eloping with Hodio, she did not stay long with him because she was later forcefully retaken by Shehu. Nonetheless, after awhile with Shehu, Fatimeh escaped. This time while on the run, she met an old herdsman, whom she stayed with and learnt from him about the intricate skills of cattle rearing, and the knowledge of the efficacy and application of several kinds of roots and herbs. He later settled her with two cows and a bull which were all spotless white. Wearing only white

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<sup>37</sup> *Soro* is a male youth ceremonial flogging-meet practiced by some nomadic Fulani clans in northern Nigeria, which, according to the occasion, is practiced either as a rite-of-passage or as a sport. It is also a cultural entertainment which offers the opportunity for a public exhibition of courage and the ability to withstand pain by the male youths of their community demonstrated through the receiving of whiplashes on the bare-chest/back in a public site of performance.

apparels and journeying only in evenings, Fatimeh roamed the wild with her cattle and a Lion which she reared as a cub.

In the end, Mai Sunsaye in the course of his wandering met Fatimeh, who healed him of his *sokugo*; met Ligu, his long-term friend, who helped him to conquer Shehu and his men in a bid to rescue Rikku, which led to his family's reunion. Also Mai Sunsaye finally vanquished Ardo, who as a result took flight from the village, thus paving the way for him to ultimately assume leadership of his people for years without rivalry. Ekwensi ended his narration with Mai Sunsaye's peaceful passage after a brief illness.

### **3. *Burning Grass* a Representation of Specific Culture and Realities**

*Burning Grass* is similar to a significant number of earliest post-colonial novels from Nigeria, because they were perceptibly creative writings designed to express the peculiarity, uniqueness, validity, and the prevailing realities of African people and culture. In other words, earliest novelists of Nigerian extraction such as Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Onuora Nzekwu and Cyprian Ekwensi, 'derived their inspiration from traditional lore, indigenous customs, and the oral tradition, in a bid to demonstrate to their readers, Africa and non-African alike, that Africa has a culture she could be proud of' (Palmer 1972: ix). Similarly, Emmanuel Obiechina observes that 'the impulse towards the novels at this time' (the post-colonial years) of which Ekwensi has become a notable part of, 'bears testimony to the recovery of a creative confidence all but lost during the period of colonialism' (1975: 14). Obiechina goes on to observe that 'the treatment of nature, music and art' which form part of a people's cultural, environmental and social realities as Ekwensi presents in *Burning Grass* 'brings out in broadest outline the points so far made about traditional and modern approaches to the representation of reality in the West African novel' (1975: 42).

In line with this study's position, those three trajectories of realities are central to this study because it is through them that Ekwensi has been able to project the nomadic Fulani's communal individualities and interrelatedness. The import of these assertions is that in an African novel, like *Burning Grass*, an author in an attempt at representing and affirming the existence of the valid culture of a people invariably presents their 'actual', as well as their 'typical' realities. The perspective here is that, in the nomadic Fulani culture, there are things describable as either 'actual' or 'typical' realities and in essence this paper examines the contexts and typology of these realities as represented in *Burning Grass*, from the reader's point of view.

The term 'reality' includes all forms of experiences, occurrences, existences, manifestations and phenomena that are directly or indirectly part of life and living life. Hence, reality represents 'anything' which forms part of memories. By experiences this study refers to what is seen, heard, felt (either physically or subconsciously), whereas occurrences denotes all forms of happening. Existences include all forms of naturally occurring and man-made things, living and non-living things, while phenomena include the paranormal, supernatural, mystical and mythical. Though the description of reality can be viewed from diverse perspectives, in this study the researcher notes that in textual evaluation of creative literature, reality can be analysed from such point of views as characterisation, geography, topography, language, and the story-line. A story like *Burning Grass* is a typical story of the nomadic Fulani. This is because it represents in many ways their peculiarities embedded in their worldview, culture, environment and history. A typical story presents details that are akin, archetypal, and representative of the story subject in real life, whereas actual reality story represents or re-enacts a pass occurrence/event. In line with the perspective of this study, the term typical reality, examining within a cultural perspective represent such things that can be in the first instance culture specific such as – dances, songs, food, etiquette, mannerisms, ways of dressing, ways of holding ceremonies, festivals, sports, occupations, physical appearance, and other attributes which typify or are typical to a 'fictive subject'. And the 'fictive subject' could be an individual, a community, a society, a nation depending on the scope of the narrative. Hence, those relevant information/identifiers that are widely acknowledged and are ascribable to a given 'fictive subject' are the typical realities. Therefore typical realities has to be subject-specific as well as typical to a given 'fictive subject', which in the context of *Burning Grass* the 'fictive subject' are the nomadic Fulani resident in northern Nigeria. The typical realities are describable as 'fictive subject' specific as well as locale-specific but cannot be said to represent a specific incidence or history, because they are not widely acknowledged as such. Again the story of Ekwensi in *Burning Grass* falls within this study's categorization 'typical reality' because the story does not readily yield it historical identifier to majority of those who have read it. In essence those readers interviewed for this study, who are sufficiently informed about the novel's setting and sociology, claim that it contains realities that may have happened one way or the other. On the other hand, the term 'actual realities' represents those realities Ekwensi has represented in *Burning Grass* such as localized specific authentic incident(s), history, culture, setting, environment, geography, topography, naturally occurring things, and landmarks that has sufficient details, which unambiguously leads informed readers towards recognition of aspects of pass occurrences or

specific existence or thing. The simplistic notion is that authors generate their characters by bestowing them with such persona they deem fit such as names, physical attributes, well-being, status, abilities, career and then take them through life (albeit fictional).

Leaning on this premise, it is logical to say that a fiction such as *Burning Grass* is an authored creative story which is not deemed to have exactly recounted a past occurrence although its story can be deduced as either entirely or to some extent actual or typical contextually. Consequently, some readers of a story like *Burning Grass*, most likely can through informed analysis interpret its content as one which talks generally or specifically about certain individual(s) or community, however indirectly. Therefore, re-presenting culture in a fictional work which is about using a people's typical realities and actual realities is a delicate. The delicate nature is that it can be very political because some misrepresentation can be viewed as a calculated attempt to tarnish such people's image or to insult their sensibilities. Interestingly it can be an opprobrium to some writers and their fans if one suggests that their fictional work is a 'mere fabrication', hence writers of fictional work would rather want to be taken serious than dismissive. Most fictional writers will rather want the reading public to view their work as a reflection of some people's or a given society's realities.

Looking at the focused study, this study's position is that *Burning Grass*, as a narrative is not indicative of an identifiable popular historical occurrence hence it is not readily verifiable to most readers as a representation of an actual specific true-life story. However, based on this study's findings, individuals who have read *Burning Grass* feel that its story-line is typical; hence it may have similarly occurred in the life some nomadic Fulani family of the era, the story represents. Consequently, *Burning Grass* can be referred to as a tale which contains actual, typical, as well as typical-mystical realities, which suggests that the author created the story; hence it is a product of his imagination. The logic here is that if a narrative such as *Burning Grass* is a creative product, one can infer that it is deliberate and inspired. Thus a deliberate attempt to recreate means that the author is a re-creator, and he/she recreates aspects of his/her experience and knowledge. An author is inspired by ideas, experience or encounter and all these are different forms of realities. Most often than not, with little or no contention, writers suggest that their writings are mirrors through which the society can appreciate itself. If we agree that the society, the entirety of things therein, and the activities, and manifestations that occur in a society are forms realities, then we can say as well that creative writings are re-creating realities in one form or the other. From whichever dimension one try to debate this, one ends up concluding that writers re-create realities, mostly or partially, either clearly or abstrusely in their own choice of plot and according to their overall resource. Consequently, if creative writings are deliberate, it literally means that they are consciously done, which indicates that they are a conscientious deed from the author. What this paper appreciates by the idea of fiction as a story which is of a made-up kind is that it does not overtly claim to represent a particular occurrence in the past exactly neither does it suggest it is reporting the present precisely, whilst it does not claim that it is a prediction of future accurately either scientifically or otherwise.

Even though a fictional work is not a 'true' documentation of a known past occurrence as it happened, research carried for this study indicates that some fictional writings are generated from one or a combination of source materials which indicate, reflect or revolves around known past occurrences (actual realities). Among these are the fall of the Benin Kingdom as re-enacted variously in *Ovonrawnem Nogbaisi* written by Ola Rotimi and *The Trials of Oba Ovanremwen* by Ahmed Yerima, the Kenyan Mau Mau struggles as re-enacted in *The Trials of Dedan Kimathi* co-authored by Ngugi wa Thiongo and Micere Mugo; the Tanzanian 'Maji Maji' colonial struggles as re-presented in *Kinjeketile* by Ebrahim Hussein, the Aba Women's Riot of 1929 in Nigeria as re-created in *The Dragon's Funeral* written by Emeka Nwabueze and South Africa's Apartheid experience as re-enacted in *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* by Athol Fugard. Novels also reflect the present such as in Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* which reflects the prevailing political malaise and the endemic corruption in governance in Nigeria. Also in some cases creative writings project into the future such as in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Iska*, acclaimed by Emenyonu as 'one of the first novels to forecast civil war in Nigeria' (1988: 26). For that reason it is plausible to say that some fictional writings do tell stories either majorly or peripherally about actual realities, albeit not as exactly as they were known to have happened. Therefore, even though an author in an attempt to produce a fiction by deciding to apply names which are not actual names of individuals who are known to have engaged in some particular activities in the past, the portrayal of such activities through pin-point geographical location of action referring to exactly the place it had happened through apt description, indication of landmark, language of the people in question, culture and identity, defines the typology of the source material as 'actual reality'.

#### **4. Instances of Typical Realities and Actual Realities in *Burning Grass***

From a reader's point of view, this study's finding is that in a prose, a narrative is an interlocking chain of actions, whereby each unit of action or the entire sequence of actions can be classified either as a typical or an actual reality. Ekwensi's story in *Burning Grass* as it is woven around a fictional nomadic Fulani family experiences, does not represent a widely acknowledged historical event nor a known past occurrence. Hence the story narrated in *Burning Grass* in line with this study's analogy is in many ways a representation of a typical reality of some nomadic Fulani in northern Nigeria. In the course of this study, the interviewees note that some aspects (such as characterization, setting, topography, etiquette, worldview and occupation) of the story do correspond in many ways with what they know, with what they have read, seen as well as heard about some nomadic Fulani of northern Nigeria. Ekwensi in his very opening sentence in chapter one of *Burning Grass*, states: 'when they begin to burn the grass in Northern Nigeria, it is time for the herdsmen to be moving the cattle southwards to the banks of the great river,' (1962: 1). This opening statement, to an informed reader who is well acquainted with the topography and geography of northern Nigeria, and the predominant occupations of the inhabitants, would likely recognize the combination of typical details which would lead him to recognise specifically the people the author is referring to as 'the herdsmen'. The name northern Nigeria is an actual reality because it is a name of a given place, which denotes a specific identity and location, so also the name River Niger. The descriptions of the nomads' transhumance culture are factual and ascribable to certain group of people in northern Nigeria however it does not denote a specific transhumance which is widely acknowledged in history hence it is a typical reality.

The burden of applying this literary method is that in the process of describing the topography, culture, physical appearance, social and religious perspectives, and history concerning a factual location such as northern Nigeria and the actual inhabitants, such as the nomadic Fulani, Ekwensi is expected to be neither blatantly fictitious nor pejorative. In a bid to complement the application of actual reality in locale, Ekwensi paints a picture of the novel's locale (northern Nigeria). Through the description of the topography of the locale (a type of grassland) which can be contextually either actual or typical, the climatic/weather related seasonal habit of the residents – the dry season hunting (a form of typical reality) – he likewise introduces the Fulbe nomads whose nomadic culture is largely influenced by these climatic conditions – hence the necessity to move their cattle southwards to banks of the great river. Ekwensi depicts one of the cyclical tell-tale that indicates the beginning of the Fulbe ladde herdsmen annual transhumance, that is the movement of their herd through known routes from the arid northern parts of Nigeria towards the more wet Middle-belt geo-political zone and beyond, towards the rain-forest belt in eastern and western Nigeria (which are both in the southern geo-political zone of Nigeria). Ekwensi story period falls within 1960 to 1962. Ekwensi also refers to the season in the year when the transhumance usually commences and the characteristics of this period in the year in following expression:

It is time too for the harmattan to blow dust into eyes and teeth, to wrinkle the skin: the harmattan that leaves in its wake from Libya to Lagos a shroud of fog that veils the walls and trees like muslin on a sheikh. (1962: 1)

As a matter of practice, at the outset of harmattan (a season of dusty chilly dry atmosphere) in parts of northern Nigeria, professional as well as amateur hunters usually set out to the wild in groups of around fifteen to as many as forty men/boys, to hunt wild animals. In a bid to drive the animals from their hiding, they usually set the already dry and brittle grasses alight. So while the hunters burn the dry grasses to hunt, the Fulani herdsmen gradually move southwards towards 'banks of the great river', by which he either mean the River Niger or the River Benue which are arguably the two most important rivers in Nigeria, as well as the places of green grasses and water. This paper's view is that the transhumance which Ekwensi did not suggest went beyond the bank of the great river but towards it, simply mean that the Fulani herdsmen in his narrative did not go beyond the northern geo-political zone of Nigeria rather they migrated from the 'Sahel savannah' region to the 'Guinea savannah' which is presently classified as middle-belt or north central geo-political region of Nigeria.

The descriptive details of the nomadic Fulani flogging contest *soro*, is a typical reality of the nomadic Fulani manhood test. And it is in reference to the detail presented by Ekwensi, about the *soro* practice that Horowitz made his recommendation. Also the names of characters applied by Ekwensi are typical realities because these names can be recognized by the reader as names of certain group of people. However the names of places and locations such as Libya, Lagos, northern Nigeria, and Fulani are examples of actual realities. While the names of the characters did not lead the reader to specific persons in history, the names Lagos, Libya, Northern Nigeria, River Niger and Fulani leads the reader to specific entities. The reference to the efficacy of the charm *sokugo* is a typical reality. The notion that the *sokugo* can give a man the ability to win a flogging contest is a typical-mystical reality held by some Fulani and non-Fulani alike.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion this paper notes that through informed idea, a reader can recognize whose realities a story is representing, the nature of reality the story is recreating; whether it belongs to the category we called typical realities or the other which is the actual realities. This paper also suggests that the description of what are termed typical realities of a people in a story is evolutionary in nature, while source materials that are actual realities are perpetual. That typical reality stories are not about specific historical individuals while actual reality are. For instance, while the story captured in *Burning Grass* represents majorly the typical realities of the nomadic Fulani of the colonial period in northern Nigeria, it cannot be said to be the typical realities of the nomadic Fulani of the northern Nigeria from 2000 to 2012. This is because the circumstances and situations in life generally are in constant continual evolution, hence the nomadic Fulani in Ekwensi's *Burning Grass* had to manipulate the colonial officers who come to count their cattle for taxation purposes, but presently the nomadic Fulani are not contending with the colonial officers, rather they are dealing with fellow Nigerians, whom some are even Fulani. This means difference realities to the colonial era nomadic Fulani and the present day nomadic Fulani.

Also this study suggests that those realities that are actual realities tend to remain consistent from age to age, generation to generation, despite social and political evolution that changes typical realities. For instance, the actual reality in Ekwensi's story which is the period the colonial British administered Nigeria, will not be affected by socio-politico-economic evolutionary changes, because it is history. The period of colonial administration is not Ekwensi's imagination; it is a past occurrence that is widely acknowledged and remembered.

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