

Article

Decolonising neo-colonial hegemonies in Africa: A comparative case for socialist realism in the drama and law of Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa

Stanley Timeyin Ohenhen^{*}, Princewill Chukwuma Abakporo, Oluwatobiloba Ifedolapo Ajayi, Oorefe-kristi Faniyi, Olatunde Wright, Grace Adigun, Fidelis Egbe, Olusegun Olaniyi, Kolawole Olawale, Olayiwola Oladele

Bowen University, Iwo 232101, Nigeria

^{*} **Corresponding author:** Stanley Timeyin Ohenhen, stanley.ohenhen@bowen.edu.ng

CITATION

Ohenhen ST, Abakporo PC, Ajayi OI, et al. (2024). Decolonising neo-colonial hegemonies in Africa: A comparative case for socialist realism in the drama and law of Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*. 8(5): 3420. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i5.3420>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 23 November 2023

Accepted: 26 December 2023

Available online: 15 April 2024

COPYRIGHT



Copyright © 2024 by author(s).

Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development is published by EnPress Publisher, LLC. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Abstract: Through a comparative investigation of the function of socialist realism in the drama and law of Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, this research investigates the decolonization of neo-colonial hegemonies in Africa. Using the drama and legal systems of Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa as comparative case studies, the research explores how African societies can challenge and demolish oppressive systems of domination sustained by colonial legacies and contemporary neo-colonial forces. Relying on the Socialist Realism and Critical Postcolonial theoretical frameworks which both support literary and artistic genre that encourages social and political transformation, the research deploys the case study analysis, comparative literature analysis and focused group discussion methods. Data obtained are subjected to content and thematic analysis. The study emphasizes how important the relationship between the legal and artistic worlds is to the fight against neo-colonialism. It further reveals the transformational potential of socialist realism as a catalyst for social change by looking at themes of resistance, social justice, and the amplifying of disadvantaged voices in drama and legal discourse. The research contributes to ongoing discussions about de-neo-colonization through this comparative case study, and emphasizes the role socialist realism plays in overthrowing neo-colonial hegemonies. The study sheds light on the distinct difficulties and opportunities these nations—and indeed, all of Africa—face in their pursuit of decolonial justice by examining the experiences of Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa.

Keywords: decolonization; neo-colonialism; hegemony; Africa; drama; law; Socialist Realism; social justice

1. Introduction

Background on decolonization and neo-colonialism in Africa

Africa's process of gaining independence from European colonial powers is known as decolonization. After World War II, as the European empires began to experience economic decline and growing pressure from nationalist groups, this movement gathered steam. The struggle for independence from colonial control and self-determination came to characterize post-war Africa. Decolonization and neo-colonialism have been intensively studied by scholars and activists in Africa, offering crucial insights into the complexity of power, resistance, and change. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, (1963), which investigates the psychological and social impacts of colonization, and Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, (1972) which examines the economic exploitation perpetuated by neo-colonial forces, are important books in this category.

According to Nkrumah (1963), the social, political, and economic landscapes of Africa have been significantly affected by colonialism and neo-colonialism. Indeed, African countries launched a number of battles and movements to end colonial control and declare their independence in the middle of the 20th century. These researchers would be in this work, arguing that liberation of numerous African nations from European colonial rule signaled a fundamental shift in the balance of power and the struggle for self-determination. Decolonization attempted to topple repressive systems and create independent states. After the formal decolonization procedure, however, the problems caused by neo-colonialism loomed large. Despite the seeming independence of African governments, neo-colonialism is the continuation of indirect forms of dominance and exploitation by former colonial powers and other foreign forces. Again, in agreeing with Nkrumah (1965), the hopes of full freedom and self-determination were undermined by this phenomenon, which continued unjust economic ties, political meddling, and cultural dominance. Neo-colonialism's effects have been pervasive and crippling. Neocolonialism continued the unequal distribution of wealth, the exploitation of natural resources, and the passing on of negative trade deals economically. The economic links that African countries frequently had to former colonial powers prevented them from building sustainable economies and addressing social injustices.

Neo-colonialism took political form when outside powers manipulated African states. Former colonial powers and international organisations exerted influence over African states through economic aid, military involvement, and diplomatic pressure. This intervention harmed democratic government and hampered the attainment of self-determination and national prosperity. Neo-colonialism replaced indigenous ideologies and ideals with Western ones, eroding indigenous cultures and values. The cultural identity and pride of the African population was damaged by the spread of Western norms through education, the media, and popular culture. This cultural control also perpetuated the psychological and social repercussions of colonialism.

Understanding the legacy of colonialism and the persistent influences of neo-colonialism is crucial to comprehending the challenges faced by African nations in their struggle for development and self-determination (Nkrumah, 1963). This development has given rise to initiatives to reclaim agency, promote Pan-African solidarity, and advance cultural and economic sovereignty. In the African context, the struggle for decolonization and the ongoing battle against neo-colonialism continue to shape political movements, artistic expressions, and intellectual debates. It is within this context that the role of socialist realism in drama and law becomes significant, as it offers a means to challenge, critique, and re-imagine the structures that perpetuate neo-colonial hegemonies in Africa.

2. Literature review

2.1. Decolonisation and neo-colonial hegemonies

The process by which a nation regains its independence after being colonized by another is known as decolonization. It entails resolving the past and present effects of colonialism in addition to regaining sovereignty and self-determination. Conversely, the term "neo-colonial hegemonies" describes the ongoing authority and influence that

once dominating nations or colonial powers have over weaker or former colonised nations. This can take on various forms in the political, cultural, and economic spheres, frequently sustaining uneven power relations and exploitation.

The process of decolonisation is intricate and multidimensional, entailing the breakdown of colonial systems and the reclaiming of sovereignty by nations that were formerly colonised. It includes a country's political independence as well as the affirmation of its indigenous cultures and the correction of past wrongs committed by colonial forces. Fanon (1963) asserts that decolonisation is a comprehensive and extensive process of cultural and psychological freedom for colonised peoples, rather than only a political event. Neo-colonial hegemonies, on the other hand, describe the modern forms of dominance and control that previously colonial powers or other dominant states exercised over formerly colonised or weaker countries. According to Nkrumah (1967), neo-colonialism's systems of political and economic control upend newly independent countries' right to self-determination and continue the Global South's economic exploitation.

Since continued forms of external subjection and interference frequently impede the efforts for full independence and autonomy, the concepts of decolonisation and neo-colonial hegemonies are closely related. According to Mignolo (2011), decolonisation requires not just political independence but also the challenge of Eurocentric epistemologies that sustain unequal power dynamics in the postcolonial world and the decolonisation of knowledge. Escobar (1995) emphasized in his critique of development as a neo-colonial enterprise that mechanisms including economic reliance, uneven trade ties, and military interventions are commonly used in modern contexts to maintain neo-colonial hegemonies. The global power disparities that were created during the period of overt colonialism are preserved by these continuing systems of dominance.

In summary, decolonisation represents the struggle for self-determination and the dismantling of colonial legacies, while neo-colonial hegemonies encompass the continued forms of domination and exploitation that hinder the true independence and agency of formerly colonised nations. These concepts are deeply interrelated and continue to shape global power dynamics in the contemporary era.

2.2. The legal systems and neo-colonial influences

It is crucial to take colonialism's effects on the formation and operation of legal systems in post-colonial cultures into account when talking about legal systems and neo-colonial impacts. The establishment of colonial legal systems frequently resulted in the marginalisation of native legal customs and the integration of neo-colonial elements into the legal structure. For instance, scholars contend that the introduction of European legal systems during the colonial era weakened native legal customs and upheld neo-colonial hierarchies of power (Mamdani, 1996). Local legal standards were eroded as a result, and foreign legal systems that benefited colonial powers were imposed.

Furthermore, post-colonial states' legal systems are still shaped by neo-colonial tendencies thanks to instruments like financial aid schemes, investment treaties, and free trade agreements. These processes perpetuate unequal power dynamics inside

legal frameworks by frequently prioritizing the interests of transnational businesses and former colonial countries (Gathii, 2011). It is a complicated and multidimensional topic how colonialism affected the formation and operation of legal systems in postcolonial states. Colonial powers frequently imposed their own legal systems on the lands they colonised, which had a long-lasting effect on the legal systems that these cultures eventually developed. Indigenous legal traditions were marginalised as a major effect of colonialism.

The aim of European colonial powers was frequently to supplant pre-existing legal systems with their own, resulting in the deterioration of indigenous legal customs and the enforcement of foreign legal structures. Several postcolonial societies—India, Nigeria, and Kenya, among others—have documented this trend (Mamdani, 2002). Moreover, the establishment of colonial legal frameworks sustained neo-colonial power dynamics in postcolonial states. The interests and political and economic domination of the colonising powers were frequently upheld by these legal systems. For instance, many postcolonial states' legal systems in the Global South, especially amongst African countries, are still influenced by international trade agreements and investment treaties, which maintain power imbalances and give preference to the interests of multinational businesses and former colonial powers (Gathii, 2011).

Scholarly discussion and research on the long-lasting effects of colonialism on postcolonial legal systems have been considerable. Colonialism's legacy continues to influence postcolonial states' legal systems' growth and operation, underscoring the continuous impact of past events on modern legal frameworks. One important topic of research is how neo-colonial influences affect postcolonial states' legal systems. Neo-colonialism is the term used to describe the ongoing effect that other dominant nations or institutions, as well as former colonial powers, have over formerly colonized countries in terms of politics, economy, and culture. The judicial systems of postcolonial states have seen the palpable repercussions of this influence.

Scholars like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Fanon have illuminated how neo-colonialism maintains power disparities and modifies legal frameworks in postcolonial settings. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), and Ngũgĩ's *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), offer significant perspectives on the long-lasting impact of colonialism on the legal and political frameworks of postcolonial societies. Legal scholars have also examined the ways in which neo-colonial interests and uneven power dynamics have been maintained through the use of investment treaties and international trade agreements. For example, John T. Gathii's work in *War, commerce, and international law* (Gathii, 2011), looks at how global economic agreements have shaped postcolonial states' legal systems, frequently to the benefit of former colonial powers and multinational corporations.

Furthermore, there has been attention in the effects of neo-colonialism on indigenous legal systems. The persistence of neo-colonial power dynamics inside postcolonial nations has been emphasized by postcolonial legal scholars as a result of the imposition of foreign legal frameworks and the marginalisation of native legal standards (Mamdani, 1996). In conclusion, postcolonial states' legal systems are still shaped by neo-colonialism, which sustains disparities in power.

2.3. Socialist realism in drama

The Soviet Union supported socialist realism as a literary, artistic, and dramatic movement in the early 20th century. Socialism and communism greatly influenced the legal discourse and culture of the socialist and communist countries. Socialist realism, as a literary and artistic genre, played a significant role in shaping cultural and sociopolitical landscapes in many contexts, including Africa. Its significance lies in its ability to act as a powerful tool for social critique, mobilisation, and transformation. In drama, socialist realism emerged as a dominant aesthetic in many postcolonial African nations as they grappled with the challenges of nation-building, identity formation, and social change. It emphasized the representation of working-class struggles, collective transformation, and the promotion of social justice. These researchers argue that by foregrounding the experiences of ordinary people and addressing systemic issues of exploitation and oppression, socialist realist plays sought to inspire and mobilise audiences towards political and social change.

The 1977 play *I Will Marry When I Want* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o is a notable example of socialist realism in African drama. According to Thiong'o (1977), it shows the struggles of rural Kenyan peasants who oppose the exploitation and marginalisation that are fostered by capitalist and neo-colonial forces. The drama exposes the flaws in postcolonial society and urges for group action and social change through potent storytelling and symbolism. Thiong'o's *I Will Marry When I Want*, emphasizes the significance of cooperation and unity in opposing repressive systems.

Socialist realism offers a critical lens for analysing and transforming legal frameworks and justice systems in the context of law. It calls for a reevaluation of the underlying presumptions and beliefs that frequently support inequality and injustice and questions the prevalent legal narratives. A more inclusive, human-centered, and socially transformational legal system is promoted by socialist realism legal theories. Indeed, the idea of Socialist Realism encompasses drama and theatre, especially in the socialist nations of the 20th century. Dramatic socialist realism, which aimed to highlight and promote working-class values and struggles while denouncing the inequities of capitalist society, was therefore strongly associated with the political and ideological objectives of socialism. The emphasis on producing plays that emphasized the bravery and sacrifices of the proletariat—often illustrating the class struggle and the ultimate triumph of socialist ideals—was one of the fundamental features of Socialist Realism in drama. Theatrical works and plays were supposed to critique individualism and bourgeois ideals and to embody the concepts of development, unification, and collectivism.

The dramatization of Socialist Realism in the works of Bertolt Brecht, whose “epic theatre” approach sought to elicit critical thought and social reform, is a notable example. Brecht used Socialist Realism in his plays, including *The Threepenny Opera* (1987) and *Mother Courage and Her Children* (2006), by tackling political and social subjects and realistically and sympathetically illustrating the sufferings of the working class. Furthermore, playwrights and theatre professionals were required to follow strict criteria based on Socialist Realist concepts in the Soviet Union and other socialist nations. It was anticipated that the plays would highlight the socialism's accomplishments, encourage patriotism, and highlight the unity of the community.

2.4. Social realism in legal theory

Socialist realism in legal theory, is an approach that aims to harmonize legal norms and procedures with socialist ideologies and values. This point of view supports legal frameworks that advance justice, equality, and the benefit of society as a whole and sees the law as an instrument for transforming society. Legal scholars have investigated the ways in which socialist ideals might influence and mold legal theory and practice within the framework of socialist realism. Gurvitch (1946), for instance, promoted a judicial system that embodies the socialist ideas of social justice and collective ownership. Gurvitch emphasized the significance of incorporating socialist principles into legislative frameworks and procedures in order to tackle socioeconomic disparities and establish a fairer community.

In addition, Shklar (1988) talked about how socialist realism affects how laws are interpreted and decided. Legal decision-making must take social and economic aspects into account, according to Shklar, who also argued in favor of a legal system that actively seeks to end oppression and promote the welfare of society. Cohen (2008) also looked at the idea of socialist legal theory and how it would be able to deal with structural injustices in the legal system. Cohen suggested that redistributive justice and the use of the legal system to empower oppressed populations should be the main focuses of socialist legal theory. To sum up, socialist realism in legal theory places emphasis on incorporating socialist ideas into the legal system, emphasizing the advancement of social justice, equality, and communal well-being.

A viewpoint known as “social realism” in the legal system acknowledges the impact of social and economic variables on the creation and administration of legislation. According to social realists, the law reflects and upholds current power structures and disparities rather than being neutral or independent of society factors. The environment of affirmative action programs is one instance of social realism in the legal system. Lugogo, et al. (2019) assess the efficacy of affirmative action in promoting employment fairness within the context of South Africa. They contend that the employment of the law as a vehicle for social transformation to address historical and systemic injustices is the reason behind affirmative action legislation.

The criminal justice system is another area where social realism in the legal system is evident. Researchers have shown how social and economic variables, such as race, poverty, and resource availability, can affect the decisions made by judges. For example, Smith (2017) talks about how social and economic differences can lead to different treatment in the courts, which in turn keeps social injustice alive. In conclusion, social realism in the legal system highlights how crucial it is to acknowledge and take into account the social and economic forces that influence the formation of the law and how it is applied. This viewpoint emphasizes the necessity of having legal frameworks that take socioeconomic gaps and inequality into consideration and aim to reduce them.

The incorporation of indigenous legal systems is one instance of how socialist realism is used in law. A more culturally aware and equitable legal system can be built by acknowledging and adopting indigenous legal traditions, which are frequently anchored on group decision-making, restorative justice, and community involvement. This strategy encourages a sense of ownership and self-determination while

acknowledging the unique historical and cultural characteristics of African societies. During the 20th century, the idea of socialist realism in law first appeared in the Soviet Union and other socialist legal systems. It had a strong connection to the larger creative and cultural movement of Socialist Realism, which sought to present socialist ideals and the working people in a favourable light.

Socialist Realism in the context of law meant that legal standards, organisations, and practices were supposed to support the socialist ideology and the establishment of a socialist society. This meant that, in actuality, laws and legal institutions were frequently employed to promote socialism, social and economic objectives, control the production and distribution of goods, and quell any dissent or opposition to the socialist government. Rokossovsky addresses the application of socialist realism in law and its tenets in *The Theory of Socialist Law and the Problems of General Theory of Law* (1975). Rokossovsky sheds light on the theoretical underpinnings of socialist realism in law and how it affects legal procedures in communist nations. The emphasis on using the law as a tool to advance social justice and the interests of the working class was one of the main features of socialist realism in the legal system. The common good, equality, and collective ownership were among the socialist ideals that legal standards were supposed to uphold and embody.

The support of cultural rights and community-based justice systems is another part of socialist realism in law. These strategies reject the imposition of Western legal principles and place a strong emphasis on civic participation, cultural diversity, and the preservation of customary ways of doing things. Socialist realism in law lays the way for more inclusive and transformative justice by bringing legal institutions into line with the values and aspirations of local communities. Its capacity to oppose oppressive systems, amplify underrepresented voices, and imagine alternative futures makes socialist realism important in drama and law. As postcolonial African countries work to decolonise their society and topple neo-colonial hegemonies, their emphasis on social justice, equality, and group action is in line with their ambitions.

There is actually a blend in the link between Socialist Realism and Drama, as it is with Law. Socialist realism frequently depicted legal subjects in a way that mirrored the principles and beliefs of the governing party. It sought to illustrate the working class's hardships, the benefits of collectivism, and socialism's victory over capitalism. The legal system was frequently portrayed in legal dramas and literature as a tool for obtaining justice for the downtrodden and working classes, which served to further the notion that the state was there to defend the rights of the populace. Maxim Gorky's play *The Lower Depths* (1902), is a noteworthy example of how socialist realism influenced law. In this play, Gorky depicts the fight for justice and dignity in the face of social injustice and financial hardship by highlighting the predicament of the poor and their interactions with the court system. Legal texts and court rulings in socialist nations, for instance, frequently highlighted the collective character of legal rights and obligations, supporting the notion that the legal system should be used to further the interests of the working class.

2.5. Social realism and de-neocolonisation

In critical theory and modern literature, socialist realism and decolonization are

significant topics. As a literary trend, socialist realism aims to portray the common lives of people in a genuine and realistic way, frequently emphasizing social and political themes. De-neocolonisation, on the other hand, is the process of reversing the political and cultural legacies of colonialism. These topics are prevalent in literature and can be found in books like Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986). Through his writing, Thiong'o examines the significance of decolonising literature and language as a way to reclaim cultural identity and fight against neocolonial influences. Fanon's seminal work, on the other hand, delves into the psychological and sociopolitical effects of colonialism on the colonised and the struggle for true liberation.

Furthermore, the 2009 book—*War, Commerce, and International Law* by legal expert James Thuo Gathii explores the connections between commerce, international law, and the lingering effects of colonialism in Africa. Meanwhile, a critical study of the intricate and frequently acrimonious processes of state-building and administration in postcolonial Africa may be found in Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (1996). In addition to contributing to current conversations on identity, power, and resistance in the postcolonial world, these works offer insightful analyses of the opportunities and difficulties associated with social realism and de-neocolonisation in literature and larger socio-political contexts.

The concepts of social realism and de-neocolonisation have played a crucial role in influencing conversations about identity, power relations, and representation in modern literature and critical theory. The romanticism and idealism of past literary traditions gave rise to the literary trend known as social realism. It frequently delved into the economic and social injustices that shaped the lives of common people in an effort to present an unbiased portrait of their experiences. Social realist writers, including Charles Dickens and Emile Zola, were instrumental in popularising the genre by bringing attention to the harsh reality that underprivileged populations had to deal with.

Within the framework of Fanon's phrase "de-neocolonisation," it is acknowledged that achieving political independence from colonial powers alone is not enough. In order to release formerly colonised cultures from the ongoing influence of their colonisers, de-neocolonisation advocates for a thorough demolition of the cultural and psychological legacies of colonialism. Cultural legacy must be reclaimed, indigenous languages must be revived, and historical narratives must be reevaluated in order to challenge dominant colonial viewpoints. The intricacies of postcolonial cultures are frequently explored in contemporary works that explore these subjects, questioning power dynamics, identity creation, and the legacy of colonial exploitation. The breadth of the conversation around socialist realism and de-neocolonisation is reflected in these literary investigations, which go beyond standard fiction and poetry to include critical essays, memoirs, and theoretical works.

3. Theoretical frameworks

The theoretical frameworks of Social Realism and Critical Postcolonialism are

fundamental to understanding and contextualizing the ideological and cultural dimensions of the research.

Social Realism Framework: The idea of Social Realism in literature and art dates back to the 1800s, when writers like Émile Zola (Nelson, 2007) and artists like Gustave Courbet as reported by Weisberg (1980), wrote their works. Nonetheless, the Soviet literary critic and philosopher Georg Lukács had a big impact on its use in socialist and postcolonial settings. The progressive ideas of the working class and the larger social struggle are reflected in and promoted by literature and the arts, according to Lukács (1971). The goal of the study is to investigate how socialist realist ideas are expressed in the legal and literary spheres, which is consistent with the Social Realism paradigm. Using this approach, the research aims to provide light on the influence of socialist realist ideas on political discourse, legal reform, and social consciousness by analyzing how they have shaped legal strategies and cultural creations in socialist and postcolonial contexts.

Critical Postcolonial Framework: Scholars like Spivak (1985), Said (1978), and Fanon (1963) have left their mark on the Critical Postcolonial paradigm. Its foundations are found in the analysis of postcolonial ideologies and cultural representations, the critique of colonial power dynamics, and the decolonization movement. The study examines how socialist realist ideas interact with postcolonial legal and literary environments, which is in line with the Critical Postcolonial paradigm. The research can critically interact with the colonial legacies and the ongoing fight for social and cultural sovereignty in postcolonial literature and legal systems thanks to this framework. Using this framework, the study attempts to uncover the nuances of literary and legal representations in postcolonial settings, taking into account the impact of socialist realism principles and their consequences for agency, resistance, and power relations.

Through the integration of Critical Postcolonial and Social Realism frameworks, the research aims to investigate the complex relationships between postcolonial ideology and socialist realist principles, as well as the resulting effects on drama and legal expressions in the situations under investigation. These frameworks offer a theoretical perspective that broadens the field of analysis and improves comprehension of the intricate interactions between ideology and the neo-colonial legacies.

3.1. Comparative case study of Socialist Realism in the drama and legal systems of Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa

3.1.1. Drama of Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa with de-neocolonisation and socialist realism themes

I Will Marry When I Want by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii: Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's sociopolitical play *I Will Marry When I Want* (1977) explores the injustices and challenges the Kikuyu community in Kenya experienced during the post-colonial era. It examines issues of class inequality, land ownership, exploitation, and the oppressive behaviours of the governing elite. The drama begins with the underprivileged peasants celebrating a bountiful harvest, which provides the wealthy with an opportunity to further take advantage of the underprivileged neighbourhood. The main character, Koi, stands in for the hopes of the working class

and their desire to better their life by acquiring land. He is coerced into a dishonest land sale by the ruling class, though.

To showcase the community's cultural heritage and identity, the playwrights make extensive use of symbolic language and customary Kikuyu practices. The rites place a strong emphasis on the value of solidarity, group identification, and resistance against persecution. The play also examines how women struggle in patriarchal societies, stressing their autonomy in the face of adversity while defying established gender stereotypes. In *I Will Marry When I Want*, the socioeconomic disparities and unethical behaviour that developed in the post-colonial environment are criticized. The drama illustrates the exploitation of the working class and the demise of traditional values in the face of capitalist greed and modernisation through the character of Koi. To regain control and agency, it urges cooperation and resistance.

I Will Marry When I Want also addresses broader themes of imperialism, neo-colonialism, and the impact of global capitalism on local communities. It resonates not only with the Kenyan context but also with the struggles faced by oppressed communities worldwide. The play serves as a powerful and provocative critique of the post-colonial and neo-colonial society, shedding light on the social, economic, and political challenges faced by the Kikuyu community. It emphasizes the importance of cultural identity, resistance against oppression, and the need for collective action in the pursuit of social justice and liberation.

The Play of Giants by Wole Soyinka: Wole Soyinka's *The Play of Giants* (1984) is renowned for its intricate and multi-layered examination of power relationships, corruption, and the fight for emancipation in a post-colonial African society. *The Play of Giants* has features that are consistent with socialist realism's key ideas. The play's indictment of sociopolitical inequality and the abuse of power is one example of socialist realism in action. In his analysis of post-colonial African countries, Soyinka focuses on the oppressive nature of governance and the pervasiveness of corruption. The play exposes the exploitative activities of people in power and emphasizes the impact of these actions on the lives of regular individuals through realistic depictions of political leaders and their manipulation of the masses.

Moreover, *The Play of Giants* displays a collective consciousness and highlights the importance of unity and resistance against oppressive regimes. The play focuses on a group of individuals who attempt to overthrow a despotic ruler and restore democracy to their nation. This emphasis on collective action reflects the principles of socialist realism, which advocates for the empowerment of the working class and marginalised communities, urging them to stand together to challenge oppressive systems.

The drama also explores issues of social justice and the circumstances that give rise to injustice. Soyinka examines the effects of colonialism and how it contributes to societal power disparities. He offers a harsh critique of neocolonialism, emphasizing how it affects sociopolitical control and economic exploitation. Soyinka encourages audiences to consider the structures that support inequality and imagine solutions based on social justice in doing so. *The Play of Giants* also has satirical, humorous, and symbolic aspects by Soyinka. These literary methods challenge established narratives, highlight inconsistencies, and encourage audience members to think critically. By using satire to showcase the absurdity of oppressive systems and the

hypocrisy of those in power, the play aligns with the tradition of socialist realism, which seeks to critique and dismantle oppressive structures through artistic expression.

While *The Play of Giants* may not strictly adhere to all the principles of socialist realism, it contains elements that align with its core ideals. The play critiques socio-political inequality, explores collective action against oppressive regimes, advocates for social justice, and employs literary devices to challenge dominant narratives. Through these means, *The Play of Giants* contributes to a broader tradition of socially conscious art that seeks to expose and resist systems of oppression.

The South African play *Woza Albert!* by Mtwana et al. (2018), adheres to the principles of socialist realism. It was initially performed in 1981, and since then, it has established itself as a classic of South African theatre. *Woza Albert!* depicts a dystopian future in which Jesus Christ returns to contemporary South Africa in order to satirize and mock the repressive apartheid system in that country. The play's themes, vocabulary, and structure are all based on socialist realist ideals as it attempts to highlight the injustices and socioeconomic disparities that the apartheid state was responsible for.

The play promotes social consciousness by highlighting the struggles of common people against repressive systems and depicting the real-life experiences of marginalised and oppressed communities. It uses humour as a potent technique to emotionally connect the audience through satire and irony, forcing them to consider their own complicity and challenge the status quo. Additionally, the play emphasizes solidarity and collective consciousness as major themes. It promotes a shared comprehension of the current social challenges by allowing the audience to relate to the characters' struggles. *Woza Albert!* emphasizes the value of teamwork and cooperation in enacting social change by encouraging empathy and developing a feeling of community.

The drama also uses allegory and symbolism to strengthen its indictment of the apartheid regime. Jesus' persona, which stands for the ideal of mercy, equity, and justice, contrasts sharply with the repressive system. The drama highlights the need for societal transformation and raises issues of authority through this jarring contrast. The use of satire and humour in *Woza Albert!* also exemplifies a crucial aspect of socialist realism, which is to challenge established narratives and show contradictions in an approachable and entertaining way. The play enables a critical analysis of the social and political mechanisms that support inequality by upending expectations and utilizing humour to combat injustice.

Overall, *Woza Albert!* exemplifies socialist realism's tenets through its examination of social and political issues, engagement with the viewpoints of marginalised communities, promotion of collective awareness, use of satire and humour to highlight inconsistencies, and upsetting of conventional wisdom. It stands as a potent example of South African drama that personifies the values of liberation, social justice, and resistance.

3.1.2. Africa's legal systems and socialist realism: Comparing the cases of Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa

The legal systems of Africa use a variety of theories that have been impacted by political, cultural, and historical circumstances. Commonly, the systems combine parts

of common law, civil law, religious law, and customary law. Despite the fact that socialist realism is not commonly used in African legal systems, certain nations have done so in order to alleviate social and economic injustice. For instance, in the past, nations like Tanzania and Mozambique have advocated socialist-inspired policies to support socioeconomic development and equitable resource allocation:

Kenya: The constitutional framework that Kenya's legal system functions under aspires to advance equality, justice, and fairness. Kenya has adopted concepts and measures to correct historical injustices and achieve social and economic equality, even though it does not formally follow socialist realism. The main legal framework for Kenya was approved in 2010 and is known as the Constitution. It includes tenets like social justice, equality, and the defense of marginalised communities (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Kenya has pursued land reforms aimed at allocating land to historically oppressed people in order to redress historical land injustices. The Land Act of 2012 and the Community Land Act of 2016 protect communities legally and work to provide equitable access to resources and land. (Republic of Kenya, 2012; Republic of Kenya, 2016).

Policies including affirmative action have been put in place to advance equity and representation. For instance, the Constitution forbids more than two-thirds of elected or appointed public entities from being of the same gender, ensuring that women are adequately represented (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). In addition, initiatives like the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) set aside a portion of public contracts for minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities (Republic of Kenya, 2013). Kenya has launched a number of social intervention programmes, such as free primary education, universal healthcare, and social safety net efforts, even though it does not exactly adhere to socialist realism (Republic of Kenya, 2013). These initiatives seek to enhance access to fundamental services while reducing inequality.

The poor recognition and preservation of the land rights of the Nubian population in Kenya has long been a problem. The Nubian community in Nairobi's Kibera filed a lawsuit against the Kenya Railways Corporation in *Nubian Rights Forum v. Kenya Railways Corporation* to protest their eviction and demand the legal acknowledgement of their land rights. This lawsuit brought to light the systemic marginalisation and prejudice the Nubian population has experienced as a result of colonial and post-colonial land policy.

Using a socialist realist perspective, the case study shows how larger issues of structural inequality and social injustice are represented in the lives of the Nubian people. By promoting an analysis that concentrates on the economic and social circumstances of marginalised people, socialist realism develops empathy and cooperation between various groups. It provides a competing narrative to the prevailing discourse and gives suggestions for creating a society that is more equitable and egalitarian.

The Nigerian Legal System: Nigeria's judicial system does not blatantly adhere to socialist realism. It does, however, include legal guidelines and continuous conflicts aimed at advancing justice, equity, fairness, and egalitarianism. The Federal Republic of Nigeria's Constitution, which was enacted in 1999 and revised in later years, provides the fundamental legal framework for the nation (Constitution of Nigeria, 1999). It protects essential human rights, such as the rights to equality, dignity, and

nondiscrimination. Nigeria has a common law legal system in place that it acquired from its time as a British colony and which aims to promote the values of equality and fairness in the administration of justice. In order to guarantee the preservation of rights and administer justice, the judiciary is essential.

Nigeria continues to deal with issues including electoral fairness, police brutality, and the pursuit of justice and human rights. Legal battles are frequently fought by civil society organisations, human rights activists, and concerned people to demand justice and hold public officials accountable. Despite not adhering to socialist realism, Nigeria has adopted a number of economic initiatives meant to advance social justice and fight poverty. The National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), which includes initiatives like the N-Power youth empowerment programme, cash transfer schemes, and school food programmes, is one example of a social intervention programme that falls under this category (National Social Investment Office, n.d.).

The campaign against political impunity and corruption has been ongoing in Nigeria. Legal action has been led by the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP), which uses lawsuits to combat corruption and promote openness and accountability. SERAP has attempted to establish an environment of accountability by pursuing legal remedies for corruption victims through smart litigation and public advocacy.

A critical framework for analyzing the processes and power structures that support and sustain corruption is provided by socialist realism. Socialist Realism can raise public awareness and inspire group action by portraying the experiences and effects of corruption. It encourages a focus on the social and economic impact of corrupt practices and portrays the struggles of the marginalised, fostering a collective sense of responsibility to combat corruption and promote social justice.

South Africa: The South African legal system is governed by the 1996-adopted Republic of South Africa Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). It respects the values of justice, equality, fairness, and access to rights and opportunities for all people. The Constitution has broad clauses that support social justice and aim to right the past wrongs of apartheid (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). It protects a wide range of rights, including civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

South Africa has put policies into place for land redistribution and reform to rectify previous land injustices. Restitution, redistribution, and tenure reform are a few of the measures the Constitution (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996) permits for land reform. Laws like the Land Reform (Labour Tenants) Act of 1996 and the Restitution of Land Rights Act of 1994 offer legal frameworks for correcting land inequities and fostering equitable access to land. The country of South Africa also adheres to the B-BBEE (Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment) policy framework. By enabling greater involvement, ownership, and administration of the economy by formerly disadvantaged people, this strategy seeks to advance economic transformation and alleviate historical injustices (Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act, 2003).

Through institutions like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the legal system in South Africa has also been crucial in correcting historical injustices. The TRC aimed to create a restorative justice system that would enable victims of

human rights abuses committed during the apartheid era to share their stories and the perpetrators to ask for pardon (Act of 1995 for the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation). Even while South Africa uses legislative frameworks to advance social justice and equality, there are still difficulties in putting such principles into practice and correcting historical injustices. The attainment of complete justice, equity, fairness, and egalitarianism is hampered by problems like corruption, persisting inequality, and the slow development of land reform.

Following the end of apartheid, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has played a significant role in the nation's quest for reconciliation and justice. The TRC focused on establishing reconciliation while addressing the human rights abuses committed during the apartheid era. By providing a space for victims to share their stories and experiences, the TRC sought to create a collective understanding of the past and envision a future of equality and justice. It is clear how the testimony and narratives provided during the commission contested the predominate apartheid narrative when the TRC is examined through the lens of socialist realism. Examining apartheid's structural brutality and institutional oppression is made easier by socialist realism, which also fosters a sense of shared responsibility for society change. It underlines how crucial it is to recognize oppressed communities' efforts and experiences during the decolonisation process.

By employing Socialist Realism in legal case studies, it becomes possible to reveal deeper insights into the power dynamics, social conditions, and struggles experienced by marginalised communities. It encourages a critical examination of the structures that perpetuate inequality and enables the exploration of alternative paths towards social justice and decolonisation.

4. Key findings and discussion

The key findings revolve around the ways in which social realism in drama and the legal frameworks of these three African countries can serve as vehicles for decolonisation and resistance against neo-colonial hegemonies.

Documentation of Historical Narratives: The study emphasizes how important it is for literary and legal materials to both chronicle and refute the historical narratives that colonial forces produced. It clarifies how these narratives have supported neo-colonial hegemonies and the related power disparities by comparing and contrasting dramatic works and judicial precedents. The study highlights how crucial literary and legal materials are for recording and refuting historical narratives that were formed by colonial forces. The research sheds light on the ways in which these narratives have supported neo-colonial hegemonies and the corresponding power disparities by drawing comparisons between dramatic works and legal regimes. The research emphasizes how important it is for literature and the law to reinterpret the past and advance a more complex understanding of colonial legacies.

Cultural Representation and Legal Justice: The study emphasizes how important social realism is to drama as a means of resistance and cultural representation. It highlights the challenges and possible prejudices in the legal systems of Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa by contrasting how societal injustices are portrayed in dramatic works with the judicial remedies to related concerns. This emphasizes how

crucial a comprehensive strategy is for combating structural injustice and advancing justice. The study emphasizes how important social realism is as a tool for resistance and cultural expression in theatre.

Resistance and Decolonisation: The research reveals how a platform for resistance and decolonisation is provided by the intersection of critical legal analysis and social realism in drama. It highlights the ways in which artistic and legal representations can contest the legacies of colonialism and aid in the reclaiming of indigenous voices and the overthrow of neo-colonial hegemonies. Critical legal analysis and social realism in theatre combine to provide a forum for decolonisation and resistance. It can also help indigenous voices be reclaimed. This research emphasizes how legal and artistic interventions can address historical colonial-era social injustices and have a transformative effect.

The Role of Cultural Production: The study emphasizes the importance of cultural production as a tool for confronting and contesting the lingering effects of colonial legacies, especially in the field of theatre. This acts as a spark for the redesigning of legislative frameworks and the promotion of social change that takes into account the goals and realities of the target communities. The study emphasizes how legal frameworks can be re-imagined and societal transformation can be fostered through artistic representations that represent the goals and realities of African populations. This research highlights how narratives of decolonisation and the reconfiguration of power dynamics in postcolonial African countries are fostered by the interconnectivity of artistic and legal repertoires.

In summary, the research reveals the interdependence of artistic and legal repertoires and their capacity to influence decolonisation narratives and alter power dynamics in postcolonial African cultures by combining the insights from the literary and legal domains. It argues that in order to support decolonisation efforts and challenge neo-colonial hegemonies, a complete strategy incorporating both artistic expression and legal discourse is necessary. This comparative study highlights the transforming power of social realism and makes a substantial contribution to the multidisciplinary conversation on decolonisation. Overall, these results show how drama, legal systems, and de-neocolonisation initiatives are intricately related to one another, underscoring the potential of interdisciplinary approaches to rectify historical injustices and promote social reform in African contexts.

5. Implications and significance of social realism in the decolonisation of neo-colonial hegemonies in Africa

Giving voice to the downtrodden and underprivileged strives to challenge the mainstream Western narratives and power structures. It aimed to undermine the hegemonic control exercised by colonial and neo-colonial powers by emphasizing the experiences and viewpoints of colonized peoples. In order to decolonize cultural identities and assert national autonomy, socialist realism was crucial. It helped to recover and celebrate indigenous cultural heritage by highlighting the value of local cultures, languages, and traditions in the face of colonial and neo-colonial influences.

The movement promoted anti-imperialist ideas, opposing Western nations' hegemony and their neocolonial aspirations. Alternative narratives were offered by

socialist realism, which emphasized colonized peoples' struggles and encouraged a sense of cohesion and solidarity against imperialism. Socialist Realism sought to strengthen the masses in their struggles against colonial and neo-colonial hegemonies by creating collective consciousness and unity. In order to encourage individuals to oppose and reject oppressive regimes, it attempted to mobilize and galvanize them.

Socialist Realism played a role in the development of international solidarity groups that linked opposition to neo-colonial hegemonies in various areas and countries. It gave rise to and influenced anti-imperialist groups all across the world by providing a forum for international cooperation. These ramifications emphasize the role that socialist realism plays in opposing and overturning neo-colonial hegemonies. It is crucial to understand that Socialist Realism can be interpreted and used in a variety of ways, depending on the particular situation.

6. Potentials and limitations of socialist realism in drama and law

6.1. Potentials

By giving marginalized people in Africa a voice and representation in cultural production, realism has the ability to amplify their power. They can be empowered to defend their rights and interests by having their hardships, aspirations, and experiences highlighted and brought to light. By highlighting indigenous cultures, languages, and customs, socialist realism may significantly contribute to the promotion and preservation of African cultural identity. In order to combat the marginalization and destruction of indigenous cultures brought on by colonial and neo-colonial influences, it can help reclaim and strengthen African cultural heritage. Socialist Realism has the potential to foster Pan-Africanism, promoting unity and solidarity among African nations against neo-colonialism. By emphasizing common struggles and shared aspirations, it can facilitate the formation of transnational alliances and collaborations.

6.2. Limitations and challenges

Regardless of the stated potentials of socialist realism in having the panacea for surpressing or completely obliterating the neo-colonial hegemonies of modern African states, it however has humongous challenges:

State Control and Propaganda: The possibility of state control and manipulation, which can result in the spread of propaganda, is one of the drawbacks of socialist realism in Africa. The ability of the movement to genuinely challenge neo-colonial institutions and power dynamics may be compromised if governments exploit literature and art that was influenced by socialist realism as a vehicle to further their political goals

Cultural Diversity and Contextual Differences: Africa is home to a variety of cultures and circumstances, which could make it difficult to apply one particular literary or creative style, such socialist realism. The movement may not adequately address the diversity and complexity of African cultures and societies because to its focus on particular topics and aesthetics

Limited Accessibility: Socialist Realism as an ideology movement may not have been as well-supported or given as much attention across all of Africa. To effectively

confront neo-colonial hegemonies, it may not have the same potential influence in all regions, nations, and cultural contexts of the continent.

7. Conclusion

Socialist Realism's role in drama and the law in decolonising neo-colonial hegemonies is crucial for tearing down oppressive systems and liberating oppressed groups. Socialist Realism can assist in reclaiming cultural identity, advancing social justice, and fostering a sense of communal awareness by opposing dominant narratives and emphasizing the experiences of the colonised. As an alternative to the dominant narratives of colonial and neo-colonial powers, socialist realism in theatre can be a potent tool for highlighting the struggles and aspirations of underprivileged populations. By giving audiences a forum to discuss social and political issues, it can promote empathy and understanding (Fanon, 1963, p. 115). Through the portrayal of the lived experiences of the colonised, Socialist Realism in drama can foster a sense of agency and resistance against neo-colonial hegemonies.

Legal theory and practice can be affected by Socialist Realism's critique of the current legal systems that uphold neo-colonial hegemonies. In addition to pushing for decolonisation and social transformation in legal systems, it can serve as a lens for studying the interconnections of imperialism, power, and the law (Makau, 2016, p. 45). The development of critical legal concepts that oppose Eurocentric norms and promote a more equal and inclusive legal system can be aided by socialist realism. By examining Socialist Realism's possibilities in drama and law, it becomes clear that it provides a way to oppose structures that uphold neo-colonial hegemonies and advance decolonisation. But it is important to recognize that there are obstacles to Socialist Realism's implementation, including state officials' co-optation and oversimplification. A comprehensive and intersectional strategy that acknowledges the various experiences and views within oppressed populations is required to solve these difficulties.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, STO; methodology, PCA, OIA and KO; validation, PCA, OIA and KO; formal analysis, OF and OW; investigation, OF and OW; resources, FE; data curation, FE; writing—original draft preparation, STO; writing—review and editing, PCA, GA and OO (Olusegun Olaniyi); supervision, OO (Olayiwola Oladele); project administration, OO (Olayiwola Oladele); funding acquisition, PCA. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Acknowledgments: Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria is acknowledged and appreciated as a major funder.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

- Alexander, J. (2015). Gorky's Socialist Realism: The creation and production of *The Lower Depths*. *Studies in Russian and Soviet Cinema*, 9(1), 25–42.
- Brecht, B., Weill, K. (1987). *The Threepenny Opera*. Translated by Robert MacDonald, Methuen Drama.
- Brecht, B. (2006). *Mother Courage and Her Children*. Translated by Tony Kushner, Methuen Drama.

- Cohen, G.A. (2008). *Socialist Justice and Legal Theory*. *Columbia Law Review*, 59(4), 420–432.
- Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press.
- Fanon, F. (1952). *Black Skin, White Masks*. Editions du Seuil.
- Fanon, F. (1963). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.
- Gathii, J. T. (2011). *War, Commerce, and international law*. Oxford University Press.
- Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (1999). *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Available online: <http://www.nigeria-law.org/> (accessed on 20 December 2023).
- Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2022). *National Social Investment Programme*. Available online: <https://opentreasury.gov.ng/index.php/component/content/article/121-2022/social-sector-2022-monthly/7666-national-social-investment-office?Itemid=101> (accessed on 20 December 2023).
- Government of the Republic of Kenya. (2010). *The Constitution of the Republic of Kenya*. Available online: <https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/> (accessed on 20 December 2023).
- Government of the Republic of South Africa. (1997). *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Available online: <https://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/constitution-republic-south-africa-04-feb-1997> (accessed on 20 December 2023).
- Government of the Republic of South Africa. (1997). *Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment Act 53*. Available online: <https://www.gov.za/> (accessed on 20 December 2023).
- Gurvitch, G. (1946). *The Social Structure of the Soviet State: Law and Administration*. *Columbia Law Review*, 46(3), 537–554.
- Lugogo, P. U., Dsane-Selby, L., & Chanza, N. (2019). *Affirmative Action in Employment Equity in South Africa: An evaluation of the effectiveness of the policy*. *Journal of African Legal Studies*, 12(3), 345–367
- Lukacs, G. (1971). *History & Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Merlin Press.
- Makau, J. M. (2016). *The Interaction between Trancendental Marxan Critique, Socialist Realism, and the Law of Capitalist Transformation*. *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 48(1), 43–52.
- Mamdani, M. (1996). *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press.
- Mamdani, M. (2002). *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. Princeton University Press.
- Mignolo, W. (2011). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Duke University Press.
- Mtwa, P., Ngema, M., Simon, B. (2018). *Woza Albert*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o. (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. James Currey.
- Ngugi Wa Thiong’o and Ngugi wa Mirii (1977). *I Will Marry When I want: Nairobi*. Kamiriithu Educational and Cultural Centre.
- Nkrumah, K. (1963). *Africa Must Unite*. Panaf Books.
- Nkrumah, K. (1965). *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*. International Publishers Company, Incorporated.
- Nkrumah, K. (1967). *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization*. Monthly Review Press.
- Rokossovsky, Lev A. (1975). *The Theory of Socialist Law and the Problems of General Theory of Law*. *Journal of Socialist Legal Studies*, 5(2): 87–104.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*, by Edward Said, published by Pantheon Books.
- Shklar, J.N. (1988). *Legal Theory and Socialist Realism*. *Yale Law Journal*, 97(6), 1457–1477.
- Smith, T. (2017). *Social Realism and the Criminal Justice System*. *Journal of Legal Studies*, 25(2), 189–210.
- Soyinka, W. (1984). *A Play of Giant*. Spectrum
- Spivak, G.C. (1985–1986). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* *Journal Wedge*, 7(8).
- Weisberg, G.P. (1980). *The Realist Tradition: French Painting and Drawing, 1830–1900*, Cleveland Museum of Art.