

Understanding Social Environment through African Literature: A Philosophical Re- imaging of Shanty Town

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Abstract

Overwhelming empirical experiences point to social environment as, perhaps, the most important factor that determines the extent a person can go in life. In situations where the social environment is conducive and geared towards the upliftment of peoples' lives, individuals can maximise their physical and mental development. On the other hand, a poor social environment dwarfs peoples' development and frustrates their ability to acquire skills, develop their talents and maximise their potentials. As such, living condition leaves a significant imprint in the making of an individual. Living in a society where an individual's physical and mental development are given all the necessary incentives to survive and flourish have become cardinal to how social environment is conceptualised and understood. Yet, understanding the social environment demands a nuanced and complicated approach that can only be handled by disciplines that can articulate and interrogate every factor that controls and shapes peoples' lives. Literature (here understood as imaginative literature) has its being, meaning and existence in the forces that operate and shape peoples' lives – how human society is organised, the quality of life, the physical and mental development. That is, literature is both a reflection and a reflector of the social environment. However, in view of literature's fictional character, there is need for a more serious supervision of its ideas. Philosophy, as a *conscious* critical reflection on issues can validate literary ideas by exposing them to philosophical evaluation – critical analysis, exposition and reconstruction. The study's preoccupation is to show how exploring social environment through African literature on the one hand, and the introduction of philosophy to that exploration on the other, can be of immense benefit. The paper's main interest is on a poem, "Shanty Town", by an anonymous South African poet. In all, by utilising the advantage of the united effort of literature and philosophy, the study will contribute to a better understanding of social environment in Africa: the problems it creates, the best solutions to the problems and the agenda for future action.

Key words: Social Environment, Development, African Literature, Philosophy, Shanty Town

Setting the Context: Philosophy's interest in Literature

Philosophy's interest in literature can be viewed from multiple perspectives. I choose five views to highlight the point:

First, philosophy deepens our understanding of the nature of literature: its concerns, the issues it raises and how these forms the fabric through which our metaphysical leaning, epistemological understanding and ethical disposition among others are interrogated, expanded, and evaluated for the best interest of humanity. In Shanty Town, for instance, the poet describes the hard living condition of the inhabitants of Jabavu: chained to land 'dry as the sand, rough as a rasp', living in match-box houses where 'frost-rimmed night invades the shacks' and 'far from streets and lights and cars', they are completely removed from development. It is the duty of philosophy to probe and raise issues such as: Why are the Jabavu people singled out for this *special treatment*? What is the place of government in their life? What is the value of human life? Is such a value dependent on race or is there something intrinsic in human worth that transcends race? What is the place of justice and security in an environment of social exclusion?

Second, philosophy helps to point and sustain attention to problems raised in literature as well as give the problems a comprehensive exposure. The anonymous writer of Shanty Town depicts the ills of apartheid in South Africa. By raising questions relating to the best standards for society and government and their justification, philosophy not only directs and sustains attention on apartheid, but also tries to find out the best form of political arrangement for human existence. What is the identity of the writer of Shanty Town? Why did the writer prefer to remain anonymous? Does a writer pose a threat in such environment? Is using race as a determining factor of all facets of everyday life make for the best suited political arrangement for collective existence? What are the basic tenets that should govern a well-ordered collective existence for the purpose of achieving the best life?

Third, through sustained reflection philosophy can provoke interest in some obscure aspects of a literary work which may lead to its better understanding and relevance. By placing Okonkwo beside Unoka in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe portrays the extent a person can go through determination and hard work in a society where merit is allowed to prevail. Here freewill and determination are the hallmarks of excellence. Yet, although Unoka is portrayed as a failure, the book also notes that he 'was very good on his flute' (4), a great musician and 'had a sense of the dramatic' (6). Is it possible for a person to be born into a society that is not yet ready for his/her talent? In such a case, what is the place of determination and hard work? What does freewill achieve? Through such probing, philosophy beams a searchlight on some neglected aspects of a literary work, thereby increasing its significance and continuous interest on it.

Fourth, philosophy helps to lift literary ideas into recognisable concepts that can be applied in different issues of life. Eugene's *total* holiness in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* can be related to an ethical theory such as Kant's categorical imperative. According to Kant, there is 'only one categorical imperative and it is this: Act only according to that

maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law' (30). Under such evaluation, Eugene's *holy conducts* not only lose their *immaculateness* but begin to look very messy and *terribly* sinful.

Finally, philosophy makes it possible to go beyond a literary text in order to construct its full meaning – the social environment that gave birth to it, its writer's ideology and prejudices, its profound significance, the import of its language, the limits or depth of the writer's knowledge and the work's ability to act as an agent of denigration or transformation. For instance, Soyinka's *A Play of Giants* can be read as political philosophy. 'Political philosophy' in MSC Okolo's view 'is the application of philosophy to questions relating to the ideal standards for society and government and their justification' (*Philosophy* 121). David Miller asserts that political philosophy 'involves analyzing and interpreting ideas like freedom, justice, authority and democracy and then applying them in a critical way to the social and political institutions that currently exist' (500). *A Play of Giants* parades four power-drunk African heads of state. Through their activities, the problem of power and leadership crises in Africa can be constructed. Such issues as the incursion of the military into politics in Africa, whether military rule is better than democracy, what standard should be used to evaluate its goals, achievements and legacies, among others, can be raised, discussed and evaluated. This way, philosophy can take us beyond the author's intention and the artistic content of the literary work.

Shanty Town: Synopsis

Located within the social framework of racial conflict, Shanty Town portrays how colour differences provide the basis for every experience. Epistemologically, the poem is anchored on the external, concrete, objective and knowable world of apartheid South Africa. Its' characters are concretely related to experiential things as prejudice, class, racism, values, ideology, social and political institutions, and economic inequality.

Here the inhabitants of Jabavu, a typical shanty town, are subjected to all manner of injustices – economic, social, political and educational. Apart from the mercy of God that allows the stars to shine on the people, every other thing for the *unwanted* slum dwellers is 'bare' – trees, grass and even 'streets and lights and cars' are far removed to ensure that the people are submerged in darkness. Jabavu, of course, depicts a *real-life* setting of blacks in apartheid South Africa. In Peter Abrahams' *Tell Freedom* blacks are consigned in areas where the surroundings 'seemed to fit into the bleak austerity of the land about it'. A land without 'a tree' and just 'harshness' to the point that '[e]ven the sky seemed cold and remote and very far away' (19). A land where dark people live in room filled with smoke, bed covered with pieces of rags (92), areas that reek of piddle (94). The contrast between Fordsburg (where the whites live) and Vrededorp (where the blacks struggle for existence) is 'so great', it is like stepping 'into another world, on another planet' (103). The living condition of most blacks turn them into 'dried-up creatures' and put a question mark on their 'humanity' like the people Abrahams encountered in the Cape Flats (287).

Consigning black people to places like Jabavu ensures that they occupy the bottom in terms of class rankings in the society which significantly cuts them off from the privileges, rights, duties and obligations reserved for those on a higher class level. The line of difference is so clear under apartheid that blacks are not free to compete with whites for higher status. Their positions are fixed, immutable; their lives are cheap and expendable. For the inhabitants of Jabavu, there is no central direction in the establishment and achievement of an effective economic system.

The poem both anticipates and captures post-apartheid South Africa. Today South Africa's apartheid system belongs to the past; and the past is past of course. Yet a cruel past has a way of interfering with the present and frustrating the future. Examples abound both in fiction and in reality. When Okonkwo in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* defied a friendly advice and his inner conscience and conviction and took part in the murder of Ikemefuna, he set the stage for his downfall and his family's future disintegration. The murder of the white supremacist, Eugene Terreblanche in 2010 showed the superficial gloss covering the *concentrated* bitterness and hatred still felt by many South Africans – black and white. Donald Woods fears that the killing of Steve Biko by the apartheid regime will make it 'almost impossible to ensure that when apartheid goes it will be removed in an atmosphere of political and social stability in which all citizens could look to the future with confidence' (393). Even the series of xenophobic attacks that keep erupting in South Africa is linked to the fall-out of apartheid, the lingering insecurity that black South Africans still feel, especially their unpreparedness to effectively compete in a knowledge driven economy (Douglas Anele, Derenle Animasaun, Charles Kumolu, Obi Nwakanma). Kumolu reports that South Africa black-on-black violence has claimed over 300 lives since the 1990's. The fact is that the end of apartheid is not an automatic wand that can wipe off the massive and cumulative effect of inequalities as black South Africans had expected. To address institutionalised inequality require time, serious social engineering, persistence, perseverance, dogged determination and stern commitment.

Shanty Town is clearly a portrayal of apartheid life in South Africa. Yet its vision goes beyond the immediate situation to embrace universal references such as: the place of justice in the makeup of social environment devoid of social inclusion; the relationship between repression and resistance; the need for government to be both legal and legitimate; and the need for laws and policy initiatives that will address equitable and consistent treatment of all people.

Events in South Africa since apartheid days continue to demand a sustained critical attention to social environment particularly in its relation to literature. Through mirroring reality, literature provokes a critical view of our social environment and/or motivates us to find alternative arrangements. By applying philosophical reflection we are better positioned to understand where injustice is, its foundation, composition and how best to tackle it. Philosophy, then, points to the social problems that are there, the best solutions to the problems and the agenda for future action.

Analysis: The Social Environment

Shanty Town points to social injustice as a major gauge of evaluating the social environment. Social injustice here refers to the situations and conditions that result when society is organised in a way so as to make it impossible for some members to get their due. In such situations, the law is skewed to favour some thus rendering equity useless. Here social injustice is at the core of the social problems undermining the social environment. Issues of racism, discrimination, intolerance and disempowerment form the root expressions of social injustice in Shanty Town.

In the poem, the inhabitants of Jabavu, the black face of South Africa, are treated as less than humans. They live in shredded hamlets, stripped of their dignity and their family life is reduced to tatters. On the other side, the white city of Johannesburg has every conceivable good thing that life can offer reserved for them *alone*. They live in comfortable homes, go to good schools, and have the best jobs and the protection of the law. The stratification is such that no black man has his *home* in the white city of Johannesburg (Nadine Gordimer 107). What black people *can do* is not important; what is, is what apartheid regime decides they *should do*. Writing on apartheid in South Africa, Gordimer informs that '[b]lack men do all the physical labour in our country, because no white wants to dig a road or load a truck. But for every kind of work a white man *wants* to do, there are sanctions and job reservations to shut the black man out' (107).

It is clear that the 'Shanty' people are not part of the social consideration of the country. Such social environment ends up blighting the potentials and talents of its victims. Aime Cesaire denounced the coloniser for wiping out the extraordinary 'possibilities' of Africans (178). The abject poverty which the people are subjected to is more than enough to wipe out extraordinary possibilities. The point, as Okolo observes, is that 'poverty *holes* up its victims. The world of the poor is a universe of liabilities and limitations...' (A Philosophical 66). (Un)fortunately, a government that excludes some of its people, bars them from exploring their innate abilities and acquiring needed skills in order to contribute meaningfully to the development of the society ultimately plants the seed of its destruction. Indeed, apartheid collapsed through its own internal contradictions. Okolo insists that 'society loses capable human capital, productive benefits, and critical transformative agents' when potentials are locked up due to repression by the state (The Repressive 443). To appreciate the truth of this statement one only needs to reflect on what South Africa would have been without Mandela. John Stuart Mill sums up: 'The worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of individuals composing it....a State which dwarfs its men in order that they may be more docile in its hands, even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small men no great thing can be accomplished' (20).

Another important point raised by the poem is economic injustice. Economic injustice occurs where matters relating to trade, industry and all avenues of money making and decisions

on money management are arranged in such a way that some members of the society are placed at optimal advantage and others at an abysmal disadvantage. Cast off and abandoned on an arid land, the inhabitants of Jabavu are not part of the economic planning of the country. They are made powerless to embark on any economic venture to support themselves or contribute meaningfully to the economic development of the country. Moreover, this economic vulnerability renders them susceptible to all manner of illness and disease. The only sound in the shanty is the cough of children whose only article of protection against the 'hard night cold'/'dusty ground'/'rocky ground'/'freezing ground' are 'cotton blankets, rags and sacks'.

Marx is of the view that man's economic wellbeing supersedes all other issues of life. A sustained reflection on the crippling effect of hunger will help demonstrate the cogency of this conception. The most effective weapon employed by the Nigerian government against Biafra during the Nigeria-Biafra civil war (July 1967-January 1970) was starvation. Both Achebe (*There was*) and Dan Jacobs accused the Nigerian Federal government of deliberately killing more than two million Biafrans through starvation. In the forward he wrote both in Tony Byrne's and Michael Gould's books, Frederick Forsyth laments that the total blockade by land, sea and air set up by Nigerian government led to mass-starvation of men, women and children. He blamed the many lives lost in Biafra to 'hunger'. Starvation was employed as part of the 'final solution' to the Jewish problem. William Schabas reports that Rudolf Hoess, the commandant of Nazi concentration camps from May 1940 until December 1943, testified that 500,000 Jews died from disease and starvation (47). Manfred Lachs points to the Nazi authorities reduction of the amount of food in occupied countries to 400 and even 250 calories a day as 'negative violence' (21). 'Starvation' according to Goldstein in Damola Awoyokun 'was the most agonizing death that can befall any living creature' (23). At the beginning of her mission, mother Teresa was advised to make sure she eats sensibly, with plenty of protein and not miss meals for her to be able to do a good day's work. Charlotte Gray reports that mother Teresa took this advice seriously such that when 'later young girls began to join her in her work, she made sure that they ate a proper breakfast of *chapattis* before they set off in the mornings' (18). The point is that starvation *literally* brings a person to his knees and then to his grave. Esau's response to Jacob's demand for an exchange of his birth right for a plate of stew sums up: 'Here I am, at death's door; what use is a birthright to me?' (*The New Jerusalem Bible*, Genesis 25:29-34).

Political injustice is also a major factor in measuring social environment. Political injustice represents a situation where some members of a society through marginalisation are stripped of powers that will enable them have control and/or play active role in government. In Shanty Town, the inhabitants are subjected to a condition where all their attention and energy are directed towards battling the harsh weather and a 'dusty' and 'rocky' earth for survival. They do not have even the benefit of modern machinery provided by science to emancipate themselves from poverty.

Peter Anthony Kopoka links poverty to the inability to attain a minimum standard of living, 'a lack of decision-making' and 'acute exploitation and powerlessness of the individual, of groups within a country and of nations' (151). Poverty makes it *extremely* difficult, *almost* impossible to effectively participate in government – whether in the capacity of a leader or a follower. To be a leader, a person should, at least, possess a certain educational qualification. Plato is of the opinion that a philosopher-king will make the best leader by virtue of his intellectual wisdom which is a product of elaborate intensive programme of education. Equally, to be a follower entails the ability to understand governments' policies and programmes and to be in a position to accept, criticise and push for their reform.

It is difficult to see how people holed-up in match box shacks, waging fierce battle against 'frost-rimmed' nights and trying to eke out a living from a 'rocky ground' can run for a political office (with all it entails) or even muster political confidence and consciousness to challenge the government (as a well-positioned follower should). 'Poverty', Okolo avers 'is, above all, disenfranchisement from power games' (A Philosophical 66). Dominic Nutt submits that to hold a government to account 'you need to be able to read, to understand and to challenge your representatives'. Obviously, it is tough for people submerged in poverty to become 'an organized citizenry ready to monitor the political process and the conduct of public officials' (Diamond 100).

Closely related to political injustice, Shanty Town underscores educational injustice as another important index for assessing social environment. Educational injustice occurs where a certain group of society through *deliberate* laws and policies are prevented from having access to quality education. The aim is to make it impossible for such group to attain to certain positions in the society.

The apartheid government introduced the Bantu Education Act of 1953 to restrict the curriculum for Africans. Under the act, Africans were not taught mathematics as such would be *useless* to them. They were only entitled to *controlled* education that would enable them fulfil their purpose in life: to be *effective* servants of their white masters. Pusch Commey notes that the Bantu Education Act 'created an inferior and badly resourced education system with a curriculum that taught blacks to be servants destined to minister to the needs of the white master' (14). In *Mandela: The Authorised Portrait* the Bantu Education Act is described as 'an attempt to imprison their [black peoples'] minds' (67). Even this minimal education is grossly underfunded. Abrahams informs that of 'a total population of roughly eight million non-Europeans, about 500,000 were at school, about 6.5 per cent. Of these only 2.4 per cent received post-primary education of any kind'. In addition, '[o]n the children of the two million Europeans the state spent something like ten million pounds: on those of the eight million non-Europeans about one million' (237).

In Shanty Town the children do not go to school. They are kept at home to languish in their 'shacks'. Given such situation, the Jabavu inhabitants cannot achieve upward mobility. According to *The American Peoples Encyclopedia* '[d]uring the nineteenth century and after,

the significance of educational achievement as a class determinant greatly increased, and in many parts of the world education became the most effective basis of upward mobility' (509). For the Jabavu people, there is no room for them to acquire skills and/or utilise their talents to climb out of their holes. The sociologist Talcott Parsons is of the view that one of the distinctive features of modern societies is that modern social status is *achieved not ascribed*. The implication of this for Gernot Böhme is that social position and social power within a contemporary knowledge society depend largely on educational attainment (48). Indeed, Mandela's ability to provide effective, articulated challenge to apartheid is due to the fact that he was educated. Defying all odds, he graduated as a lawyer. Even at that 'Mandela was ever aware of being a black man in a white man's court....In one instance, a magistrate evicted him for not producing his legal qualification, a demand that was never made of white attorneys' (Mandela *Mandela* 54). Gordimer narrates that '[w]hen the first African advocate was called to the Johannesburg Bar, ..., government officials raised objections to his robing and disrobing in the same chamber as the white advocates' (109). This is not surprising. Education alone cannot take care of all the ills in a *disarranged* social environment. Zoltan Hajnal tells us that '[h]olding the levers of power and having a voice in the deliberations that determine policy are critical. If a group is shut out of the governing process, it is likely to be at a severe disadvantage' (18-19). The Nigerian situation is a good example. Speaking during the Northern Youth Summit organised by Northern Hibiscus Initiative in Kaduna, Nasir El-Rufai, the Kaduna state governor, described Nigeria as consisting of two countries: 'there is a backward, less educated and unhealthy Northern Nigeria and a developing, largely educated and healthy Southern Nigeria'. Yet Ajibola Amzat, the feature editor of *The Guardian*, reports that the northern Nigeria has been getting more funding. For instance in 2016, the total net statutory amount allocated by the Federal Government (FG) to Imo state, which records the highest literacy level, was ₦29.85 billion; Yobe state with the lowest literacy level received ₦30.95 billion. In 2014 population census Imo's population estimated at 4.7 million was almost twice that of Yobe estimated at 2.8 million people. This kind of skewed arrangement is perpetuated because the North controls the levers of power in Nigeria. For the educational and intellectual advantage of the people of Southern Nigeria to be of help in bringing about and sustaining a conducive social environment, they must secure a firm hold on power. Without that, their voices will lack weight and they cannot determine the policy direction of the nation. This is, perhaps, the major reason their clamour for the restructuring of Nigeria has been ignored by the northern controlled FG.

The threat a writer faces and the threat a writer presents are good pointers to what is going on in a social environment. This is an important subtheme in *Shanty Town*. The author of the poem did not reveal his/her identity. Given the subject matter of the poem and the poet's audacity in engaging in an issue that should not be *looked at too closely* the poet knows the kind of fate that awaits him/her if his/her identity is known.

In *Tell Freedom* Peter Abrahams recounts how his writing instead of bringing joy to his family and friends became a source of worry because a non-European is not expected to think, to reflect on 'things that should not be mentioned' (232). He could not get a job because the state is not ready for a black writer who can 'look at too many sides of a question' (308). In Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* 'Chapter Fourteen section six of the Newspaper Amendment Decree gives the Honourable Commissioner (for Information) general and specific powers over what is printed in the *Gazette* (the National newspaper)' (26). Ikem Osodi, the irrepressible editor of the *National Gazette*, reveals that the anxiety of government is based on the fact that 'storytellers are a threat. They threaten all champions of control, they frighten usurpers of the right-to-freedom of the human spirit - in state, in church or mosque, in party congress, in the university or wherever' (153). Fiction aside, Achebe narrates how soldiers were sent after him after the January 15, 1966, coup in Nigeria because his book *A Man of the People* published at that time 'forecast a military coup that overthrows a corrupt civilian government' (*There was* 67).

Indeed, to ensure that writers are reduced to the barest minimum, African governments try to stifle the humanities and the social sciences. C.B.N. Ogbogbo traces a major reason for the poor enrolment of Nigerian students to study history at the university to 'government policies that tend to scrap the teaching of history at the junior secondary school level' (49-50). In March 2018 the federal government ordered the reintroduction of history as an independent subject into primary and secondary school curriculum. Even at that, the implementation is yet to take off in most schools due to lack of commitment on the part of government to enforce its reinstatement with the same efficiency it effected its removal. Soyinka warns that 'when you abolish History in institutions, you open the gates wide for rampaging revisionism...' (Between 'Dividers'). Ngugi observes that there have been attempts to 'arrest' history in Kenya because it is considered 'subversive' precisely because it 'is the result of struggle and tells of change that it is perceived as a threat by all the ruling strata in all the oppressive exploitative systems' (*Moving* 96). In Claude Ake's opinion there is a deliberate attempt by government to suppress social science in Nigeria because it is believed to be breeding radicalism. To be sure, the Federal universities built in the 1980's were devoted to Agriculture and Technology without any faculty of social science and/or humanities. The editors of *Legacies of Power*, Melber Henning and Roger Southall, inform that a professor of political science at the University of Botswana, Ken Good, was served with a deportation order by the president because he contributed a chapter on Botswana (xxiv). The president considered his writing a threat to the country's national security. Ngugi was imprisoned by the Kenyan government in 1977 and again in 1982 and later banned from teaching at the University of Nairobi which led to his exile because the government considered his plays a threat (*Decolonising* 58-62).

Be that as it may, a writer and, indeed, a scholar owe it to the society to unearth and expose its arrangement: the type of government in place and its relationship with the citizens, the makeup of the law and the extent to which it is equitable and just in dealing with every

member of the society, the nature of the interaction between the have and the have-nots. Achebe sums up: 'if a society is ill the writer has a responsibility to point it out' because to be a writer is to be a committed writer – to speak for one's history, one's beliefs, and one's people, especially when others cannot (*There was* 57).

Finally, Shanty Town suggests that a social environment which harbours extreme repression attracts revolution to itself. The poem ended with hope. But it is not an empty hope. It is hope infused with the spirit of rebellion in the face of unjust situations, a need to be outspoken and a firm refusal to be cowed by inhuman authority. The final stanza of the poem proclaims that 'One day Jabavu will awake/ To greet a new and shining day;/ The sound of coughing will become/ The children's laughter as they play/ In parks with flowers where no dust swirls/ In strong-walled homes with warmth and light.'

There are many ways this will come to pass. It can be achieved through Karl Marx's historical necessity. For Marx all history was a record of class struggles brought about by the economic arrangement within the capitalist system that deprives the working class of the value of its labour, thus justifying the workers to organise to overthrow the system. For James Marsh 'if we are treating others so badly...in a way that violates minimum standard of justice and decency, then, we can expect violent response from those exploited, marginalized others' (72). In Locke's opinion government exists by the free consent of the governed. The implication is that people whose privileges, rights, duties, and obligations are not equitably represented in government affairs have the right to revolt.

Indeed, the African National Congress (ANC) formed as black peoples' political response to apartheid which started as a non-violent organisation had to change its tactics for a more violent approach. According to Mandela 'the grave plight of the people compels them to resist to death the stinking policies of the gangsters that rule our country' (*No Easy* 27). It must, however, be noted that the price of revolt is not cheap. Mandela was incarcerated for twenty-seven years for his political struggle. Yet that price made it possible for the blacks in South Africa to claim the victory anticipated by the poem. Mandela became the first elected black South African president in 1994 and set in motion measures to address the injustice inherent in apartheid system of government. Beyond that, he turned out to be 'Africa's greatest leader so far' (Sobowale 17); 'the beacon of justice and hope on the continent, indeed for the world' and the person who 'present and future African leaders must all go to for sustenance and inspiration' (Achebe *There was* 258).

Conclusion

A philosophical re-imagining of Shanty Town has helped to point out factors that make for a poor social environment. Wherever social, economic, political and educational injustice exist; and the writer, the humanities and the social sciences are repressed it will be difficult for both individuals and society to operate at maximum capacity in terms of physical and mental development. In such situation, it is the duty of the scholar to mobilise and enlighten the people on the issues at stake and the best means (campaigns, sit-at-home, peaceful protest, occupy,

revolution among others) of bringing about the most desirable social environment in which people can express both their ordinary and extraordinary possibilities and the society will benefit from its best critical transformative agents.

In all, philosophy and literature place mankind within the ambit of the universe, as beings in constant relationship with the social environment, influenced by it, shaped by it, expanded or limited by it and yet have the power to transcend their historical origins and become a universal expression binding people from different climes and ages. Literature offers a comprehensive social vision based on the writer's close ties to peoples' lives, their ability to explore our collective existence and hold up a mirror showing our choices, consequences and alternatives. This way literature becomes a witness to the inner makeup of our social environment with all its attendant tensions, conflicts, and injustices and how this help to shape our collective consciousness and responses. By calling attention to injustice, the theme of Shanty Town is animated and infused with such diverse philosophies as those of Socrates, Plato, Kant and Marx. The study acts as a vindication that literature can function as an adequate vehicle of philosophical reflection by acting as a reliable compass to current issues, perspectives of experience and how they are intellectually apprehended. Understanding the social environment through the application of philosophy to literature, then, helps in the proper profiling of the problems, with added advantage of proffering the best solutions to the problems and the agenda for future action. This will definitely deepen the way issues surrounding the social environment are constructed and handled.

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