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Narrating Insecurity and Resilience: Discourses of Violence and Socioeconomic Transformation in *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile*

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Field Code Changed

Abstract

As the African continent grapples with insecurity, violence, displacement and socio-economic change, contemporary African writing has increasingly become a critical platform for such engagements. In Africa, literary and narrative texts are becoming significant repositories of lived experience that are frequently neglected by official political and media narratives as societies continue to struggle with issues of political instability, social fragmentation, and environmental crisis, as well as the threat of terrorism. This paper looks at insecurity and resilience as depicted in *The Chibok Girls* written by Helon Habila and *Song of the Crocodile* written by Nnedi Okorafor. It examines the meanings of violence, trauma, displacement and survival as discourses in the contemporary African context of insecurity and socio-economic problems, as constructed in both texts. The paper is based on trauma theory, postcolonial criticism, and discourse analysis, and suggests that these selected texts go beyond being simply representations of violence to highlight the human impacts of insecurity on the individual, family, and community. *The Chibok Girls* tells the story of the devastating impact of terrorism and the kidnapping of school girls in Northern Nigeria while *Song of the Crocodile* addresses the degradation of the environment, social marginalisation and communal conflicts in fragile spaces in Africa. Both texts, using narrative styles that render victims human and focus on local experiences, offer a critique of reductive representations of African crises and a focus on forms of resilience, resistance and social reconstruction. The paper argues that the contemporary African stories are an important way of questioning the dominant narratives of insecurity and at the same time envisioning possibilities for socio-economic change. The texts foreground the human agency in the face of hardships and provide a context for broader discussions of development, justice, and collective survival in modern-day Africa.

Keywords: Insecurity, Resilience, Socioeconomic Transformation, Trauma, Contemporary African Literature

1. Introduction

In recent years, African literature has evolved into an effective platform for writers to comment on the social, political and economic forces that impact African life. Inquiries into insecurity, terrorism, displacement, environmental crisis and socioeconomic instability have increasingly taken centre stage in Africa's literary production in recent decades. While many African societies still suffer the effects of violent conflict, insurgencies, environmental damage, and bad

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government, literary works have become significant modes of representation of these experiences and an interrogation of the systems that keep them alive. Literature can be not just a mirror of society, but also a critical discourse that challenges dominant discourse, foregrounds social experiences and imagines other social transformations. As insecurity has become more prominent in the field of literary studies, it also has been a phenomenon in Africa at large. Several African nations are still grappling with complex security problems that include armed conflicts, forced migration, humanitarian crisis, and terrorism, according to recent reports. The actions of Boko Haram and other armed groups in Nigeria have resulted in a high rate of displacement, disruption to the education system, and socio-economic instability, especially in the Northeast. Having been abducted in 2014, the Chibok girls' massacre of over 276 girls continues to be one of the most emblematic incidents of insecurity and gender-based violence in modern-day Africa. The psychological, social and economic impact of the abduction suffered by survivors, families and affected communities continues to be cited in recent evaluations. (The Guardian)

African writers have reacted to these realities by creating stories that reflect the devastating power of violence as well as the strength of people and communities in crisis. These texts disrupt the politics and media that minimize insecurity to just numbers, military action or state issues. Rather, they highlight the mundane realities of people living through war, displacement, loss, and uncertainty. Storytelling, literature, in turn, humanises victims, remembering them and providing areas for reflection on the larger issues of justice, identity and social reconstruction. The paper explores the notions of insecurity and of resilience in *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile*. The two texts, although different in nature and in style, address issues of violence, vulnerability, survival and transformation in the current context in Africa. *The Chibok Girls*, by Helon Habila, brings back in focus the events that led to the abductions of the Chibok school girls and puts them in the context of the wider issue of terrorism, governance failures and social neglect. The text has been studied as a record of violence, and also as a condemnation of the flaws in the system and the circumstances that allow inflictions of violence to take place. While *Song of the Crocodile* focuses on environmental and social insecurity among marginalised communities, the two themes are linked and the book examines how vulnerability to the environment, to economic hardship and to social displacement are all interconnected.

This paper proposes that *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile* represent insecurity as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses social, economic, environmental and psychological insecurity. The texts also emphasize the importance of resilience to confronting challenges and as a basis for envisioning socioeconomic change. The paper adds to the scholarly ongoing debate on literature, security, discourse and development in the current Africa. It also shows the continued relevance of narrative as a tool for comprehending the human aspects of insecurity and its social potential for renewal in societies facing great challenges.

2. Discourses of Violence and the Representation of Insecurity in *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile*

Today, violence plays a pivotal role in the narratives of Africa that aim to respond to the conditions of insecurity and social instability. Violence is not only described as a physical act or a single occurrence in *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile*, but it also becomes a constant presence, affecting the lives of individuals, communities, and societies. Both texts use different narrative techniques to show the long-term implications of insecurity and to uncover the mechanisms which perpetuate insecurity. Most importantly, they challenge the dominant politics and media discourses

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which frequently see the conflicts in Africa as limited "terrorism/criminality/ethnic tension" narratives. The Chibok Girls uses the reality of abductions by Boko Haram, the lives of the girls themselves, their families, and communities impacted by the insurgency to depict the violence. Habila doesn't only look at what the terrorist group does; he looks at what it takes from the human as well as the emotional impact of the terrorist's actions. The abduction is no longer a happening; it starts to signify the overall insecurity which has haunted parts of northern Nigeria for years. The text captures the fear, uncertainty, and grief of parents looking for answers long after their child is gone, through the use of interviews, testimonies, and personal narratives.

The importance of what Habila has to offer is that of rejecting abstraction. When it comes to media reporting on terrorism, figures are used, numbers are scrutinized and casualty figures are reported, often the human aspects of the tragedy are lost. Habila challenges this in her work, giving back to the victims their individuality and portraying them as daughters, students, friends and community members. In today's time, African stories of conflict often aim to bring back the human element to people who have been detached from dominant political narratives in their suffering. (Nwankwo 2023) The Chibok Girls is thus a counter-discourse in this context because it counters the depersonalisation sometimes portrayed in representations of terrorism. The text also uncovers the ways in which insecurity is a barrier to education and socio-economic development. Chibok was a kidnapping of young girls who represented hopes for personal enrichment and social mobility. Their absence is thus a loss, not only for those who have lost their loved ones, but also for opportunities to develop in marginalised communities. The importance of educational disruption and its links to long-term socioeconomic vulnerability in conflict-affected areas of Africa has been highlighted in recent scholarship (UNESCO, 2024). Through the plight of the education denied, Habila illustrates how terror isn't limited to terroristic violence but extends to the denial of education, and thus of development.

Likewise, in *Song of the Crocodile*, insecurity is seen as a more complex phenomenon which stems from environmental degradation, social marginalisation and economic vulnerability. While insecurity is associated with armed violence and terrorism in *The Chibok Girls*, Okorafor discusses insecurity brought about by ecological and social upheavals. The text depicts communities that exist in context of uncertainty, exploitation and exclusion. The narrative uses vivid imagery of place and landscape to demonstrate the intermingling of issues of identity, belonging and survival to environmental instability. One of the strengths of *Song of the Crocodile* is its challenge to the security paradigm of traditional security concepts. *Song of the Crocodile* is noteworthy for its extension of the notion of insecurity beyond the boundaries of traditional security. Increased attention has been given to the concept of threats to human wellbeing in the contemporary study of security that go beyond armed conflict and include environmental crises, poverty, displacement and social inequality (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2024). The narrative also supports this wider appreciation of how the environment can create conditions of fear, uncertainty and vulnerability similar to those created by political violence, as evidenced in the extent to which Okorafor uses the environment to create these conditions in her story. It thus invites readers to reflect on the traditional concept of security as well as the interdependencies of social, economic and environmental issues.

Both texts also reveal how structural neglect is responsible for creating and maintaining insecurity. *The Chibok Girls* is filled with repeated mentions of the weakness of the state, lack of security, and social marginalisation, all of which have been conducive to the spread of terrorism. Similarly, *Song of the Crocodile* reminds us of the effects of ignoring sensitive communities and ecosystems.

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In both, insecurity is not only an external danger, but a phenomenon that is related closely with systemic failures and uneven development. A psychological dimension of the violence of the texts selected is another important dimension. The trauma is a recurrent phenomenon that affects people and communities. According to trauma theory, the effects of violence may be long lasting, with the trauma being a psychological impact that lasts beyond the immediate crisis (Caruth, 1996). The trauma in *The Chibok Girls* is expressed in the loss, the uncertainty and the long wait. Families are left with unanswered questions about what happens to their daughters, and they find themselves in a situation of emotional suspension after the event. When it comes to the lack of closure, it becomes a violent continuing event, showing the impact of terrorism even after the actual violence has stopped.

Likewise, *Song of the Crocodile* tells the story of people whose collective memories are haunted by displacement, environmental loss and social exclusion. Insecurity seems to leave a scar on people, communities and cultural heritage. The representations highlight the ongoing effects of structural and environmental violence and raise awareness of the forms of suffering that are often not recognized in the traditional security discourses. Ultimately, the *Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile* share a message about the human aspects to insecurity, which is what makes them similar. The two texts question the prevailing narratives which focus on military solutions and political calculations, ignoring the experiences of ordinary people. They foreground individual narratives, emotional realities and social consequences thereby uncovering insecurity as a human problem with significant social and economic implications. Violence is therefore not only an interruption in peace, but a force that changes communities, shifts life trajectories and poses a danger to the frameworks of collective wellbeing.

By exploring the themes of terror, environmental crisis, trauma and structural neglect, the two texts show that insecurity in today's Africa is not simply a political and military problem. Instead, it should be considered as a multidimensional phenomenon, which relates to issues of education, development, identity and human dignity. Both stories provide a context for a third theme that is important, resilience. Violence and insecurity have a predominant role in much of the narrative space but are not the whole of the human experience. The texts also shine a light on the ability of people and communities to persevere, adapt and envision possibilities for renewal in the face of difficulty.

3. Resilience, Survival and Socio-economic Transformation: *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile*

The Chibok Girls and *Song of the Crocodile* are two powerful accounts of violence, trauma and insecurity, but neither is limited to that. Rather, both works emphasize the importance of resilience as a key reaction to a difficult situation. The texts reflect the ability of individuals and communities to survive, adapt and recover from great struggles and help expand ongoing discussions of socioeconomic change in modern-day Africa. By doing this, they defy the notion of passive victims of crisis in African societies, and place focus on agency, resistance, and the opportunity for renewal. *The Chibok Girls'* resilience is most clearly seen in their families' and communities' resolve to maintain their hope amid long periods of uncertainty. Habila depicts parents who keep trying to find their daughters years after they were abducted, who will not stand down. They persist, making personal grief collective action and advocacy. The BringBackOurGirls movement that arose as a result of the abduction is a good example of how local and global forms of resistance can question political apathy and attract international attention on issues of insecurity and gender based violence. The text shows that these representations are not only individual psychological

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reactions, but are also social practices for the purpose of challenging claims for justice and accountability.

In the context of being raised by the poor in a place with little institutional support, the resilience portrayed in *The Chibok Girls* is exceptionally important. Many families in the affected area face loss and poverty and social marginalisation as well. However, the story is always a reminder of the strength that comes from the unity of the community. Families help each other, they share experiences and they make networks of support to help them deal with the continuing uncertainty. Alhassan and Mohammed (2022) state that the most significant mode of coping for conflict-affected groups in northern Nigeria in the years following the insurgency has been community-based resilience. In this context, Habila's text teaches us what collective endurance can be – resistance against violence and against despair. The Chibok Girls education is also a strong symbol of resilience. The girls were kidnapped as they went to school, and their education is a symbol of a fight for social mobility and empowerment in general. Boko Haram's violence towards western education is a bid to limit opportunities and support exclusionary systems. The call to act for girls' education after the abductions, therefore, is a rejection of violence as a determinant of the future of targeted communities. Education continues to be an instrument of socioeconomic change, especially for young women who are often limited in their opportunities due to insecurity and structural inequalities.

In the same way, *Song of the Crocodile's* concept of resilience is a process of adaptation and survival in uncertain and marginalized environments. The communities shown in the text face problems such as environmental degradation, economic difficulties and social exclusion. However, Okorafor does not present these communities as helpless victims, but rather as ones that are able to work out the situation in a different way and create strategies for their survival. Cultural practices, a sense of community, and a sense of place are powerful ways of expressing resilience in the text. These elements help give cohesiveness and a sense of identity even in the face of external threats to social stability. Among the most striking features of *Song of the Crocodile* is its depiction of the intertwining of environmental sustainability and socio-economic resilience. The authors imply that environmental wellbeing is synonymous with human wellbeing, especially in communities where the livelihood is closely linked to natural resources. Environmental degradation is thus an ecosystem issue, but also a socioeconomic issue impacting food security, income generation and social cohesion. Studies on environmental security in Africa in recent years have also underscored the interconnection between the environmental and human security challenges, as sustainable development demands an integrated approach that mitigates both environmental and human vulnerabilities (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2023). Okorafor's story further supports this notion by highlighting the importance of balancing human communities and their environments for resilience.

Gender is also significant in the development of resilience in both texts. Women and girls are not only victims of insecurity but are also central agents of processes of survival and recovery in the narratives. The Chibok Girls shows the abductions of these girls as a symbol of courage and perseverance, and the role of the mothers and female activists as a voice in the struggle for justice. In *Song of the Crocodile* too, the female characters play a role in the maintenance of community values and social continuity. Representations like this question the notion of the passive victim of violence that is typically attributed to women within the male dominated society. Rather, texts focus on the agency of girls and women and the vital role that they play in the community's resilience and social change. Through the emphasis on resilience in both texts, the overall

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conversation is one of socioeconomic change. The transformation is not shown as an abrupt breakaway from the adversity but as an incremental process of reconnecting social relationships, regaining agency and establishing opportunities for the future generation. This view is consonant with current development scholarship, which increasingly sees resilience as being an essential element of sustainable development. Resilient societies are more at ease to withstand the shocks, recover from crises, and pursue long-term developmental goals as per the United Nations Development Programme (2024). The chosen texts reflect this by demonstrating how resilience can help people and communities to cope with insecurity and to envision different futures. Importantly, Habila and Okorafor do not glorify resilience. Their texts recognise the great suffering of violence, displacement and marginalisation. Resilience is not then shown as the easy overcoming of adversity, but a more complex and sometimes painful journey.

The characters remain stuck in their suffering, insecurity, and loss even as they try to recover. This subtle depiction maintains that resilience is not an idea alone, but is situated in the lived experience of daily life. *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile* foreground resilience as well as insecurity and disrupts the telling of Africa as a story of crisis and conflict. They illustrate that despite violence and instability in contexts, people and communities can adapt, resist and engage in meaningful change. The texts provide rich reflections on the potential of socioeconomic renewal in today's Africa via issues of education, community solidarity, environmental sustainability, and gendered agency. Finally, resilience is not just a reaction to insecurity but also a basis for envisioning a different future. The texts chosen indicate that sustainable socioeconomic change is not a matter of the lack of violence, but rather the presence of opportunities, justice, inclusion and hope. By emphasizing these aspects, Habila and Okorafor join the literary conversation that values the difficulties faced by the societies of Africa and the ability of humans to overcome them.

4. Literature as Counter-Discourse: Re-imagining Security and Development in the Contemporary African Context

One of the major strengths of contemporary African literature is its capacity to give alternative interpretations of social realities and to engage with dominant discourses. But literature in areas of conflict, displacement, poverty and political instability can be used as counter-discourses that call into question official narratives, bring to light silenced experiences, and highlight marginalised voices often missing from political and media discourses. *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile* are examples of this function as they challenge reductive depictions of insecurity, and rather, reconceptualise the nature of security and development in today's Africa. African emergencies are often discussed in terms of terrorism, conflict and state failure in dominant discourses of insecurity, which are mostly produced by political institutions and international media. These depictions often focus on military solutions and geopolitical issues and lack a significant degree of focus on what the people in the region actually experience. In many cases the communities involved in violence remain statistics and larger socio-economic and historical factors are not considered. International portrayals of African conflicts have been observed to gloss over more intricate realities while continuing and reinforcing narratives that portray Africa as a constant space of crisis and instability (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020; Mbembe, 2021).

The Chibok Girls directly challenges such representations by turning the spotlight from the perpetrators of violence to the victims and survivors. Habila does not view the Chibok abduction as a security incident, but as a sad and tragic story for the human person and its social, psychological, and economic ramifications. The story places the voice of the parent, the survivor, the activist, and the community in the foreground, rather than the political and media discussions.

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In this way, the text avoids the process of depersonalisation that is common in the discourse of terrorism and gives back the individual to victims of violence. The text also challenges narratives from the establishment which regard insecurity as simply being a result of extremist ideology. Habila repeatedly refers to structural problems like poverty, educational inequality, government neglect, and the lack of a proper security establishment, while taking the Boko Haram issue into account. In doing so, the story is able to move beyond the issue of violence in the short-term and helps the reader think about how socioeconomic factors play into insecurity. This view resonates with current academic research, which emphasizes the need to tackle the underlying drivers of conflict and not just the symptoms, for sustainable peace to be achieved (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2023).

Likewise, *Song of the Crocodile* acts as a counter discourse, broadening mainstream security discourses. The text highlights issues of insecurity that are not in the mainstream of political discourse, such as environmental vulnerability, social exclusion and economic marginalisation. The story of communities that are fighting against environmental degradation and social neglect draws attention to a more narrow state-centred vision of security and introduces the need for a human-centred approach. Security does not refer only to a lack of armed violence; it also relates to access to resources, environmental sustainability, social justice and to living conditions. This extended view of security is part of the developing debates of development and security studies. Security is defined in the Human Development Report as the people's freedom from fear, deprivation and uncertainty (UNDP, 2024). Okorafor's story is a good example of this, because it is an account of how the environment and the socio-economic situation can be as devastating to human wellness as war. The book thus adds to a large body of literature on Africa that aims to redefine security in a more holistic and inclusive way.

The other major feature of the texts chosen is the desire to maintain memory. Literature contains a wealth of collective experiences, which do not let any traumatic events get erased from memory or taken as a footnote to history. The process of narrating the girls' experience of abduction is an act of resistance against silence and erasure in *The Chibok Girls*. The text preserves a personal story and community memory, thus providing a lasting record of suffering, endurance and survival. In this regard, memory is a literary and political act, resisting the normalisation or forgetting of injustice. In *Song of the Crocodile*, the significance of memory is also a salient theme, one that is tied to loss of the environment and of culture. The story implies that communities are resilient in not only living through in material terms, but in keeping their stories, traditions, and identities alive. As a means of continuity in the face of disruption and as a way in which communities can envision futures other than the ones that are present. Memory is frequently used as a mechanism of resistance to the domination and reclaiming of agency in postcolonial narratives as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2019) note. In Okorafor's work, memory is connected to resistance and renewal, as this is the tradition.

Moreover, neither text suggests that African societies are only a crisis society. Violence, displacement and hardship are central themes in the narratives, but they are not the only aspects of the African experience. Throughout the texts, the human aspect of agency, creativity and resilience are emphasized. Communities are not only shown as victims waiting for help, but also as actors that are involved in building their own futures. This focus is important as it challenges the traditional African stereotype that is often framed in terms of dependence, powerlessness and failure. Through their exploration of insecurity and resilience, *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile* ultimately propose alternative visions of development. These visions are based on more

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than military power and economic data, but on human dignity, social justice, education, the environment and community empowerment. Development is seen as a process that must cover both material needs and human experiences. The texts highlight the voices of those most impacted by insecurity and champion inclusive, participatory and sustainable pathways towards change.

These stories are thus more than just about literature. They play a part in broader discussions on security, governance and development, bringing voices that are seldom heard in official policy dialogue. Through this, they show the power of literature as a tool of social criticism and an intellectual intervention. In both Habila and Okorafor, the reader is called to question the hegemonic narratives of insecurity, and to think about more compassionate and just ways of social change. In conclusion, *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile* prove the timeless significance of literature in modern-day Africa. The texts counter dominant discourses, remember and highlight resilience, showing that literature is not just a product of society but also a player in the process of constructing discussions on justice, development, and future. As they tell their stories, we are reminded that meaningfully changing societies in socio-economic ways starts not only with economic policies and political reform but with the stories we get ourselves to believe about our societies, their problems and their options for renewal.

5. Conclusion

In the present paper, we have focused on articulating insecurity and resilience in *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile*, specifically in relation to larger issues of violence, trauma, and socioeconomic change in contemporary Africa. Both works provide examples of insecurity not just in its physical aspect but in social, economic, environmental and psychological forms through various narrative approaches. The texts put the individual and community voices of those who live with these realities in the foreground and provide nuanced perspectives on the complex relationship between security and development in today's African societies. Analysis showed that the creation of insecurity in *The Chibok Girls* was through the prism of terrorism, abduction, displacement and institutional failure. The book charts the situation of the girls' abductions, the experiences of the families and communities, and thereby exposes stereotyped images of conflict, and rehumanises those who are frequently portrayed as numbers in political and media accounts. This shows that the impact of insecurity on development is not just physical, but also in areas of education, family structures, community cohesion, and long-term socio-economic wellbeing, as illustrated by Habila's work. The text is thus a witness to the suffering and an indictment of the structural conditions under which violence can thrive.

Also, *Song of the Crocodile* extends the definitions of insecurity beyond the usual focus on economic insecurity to include environmental degradation, social exclusion and economic marginalisation as equally important factors of insecurity threatening human wellbeing. The story of vulnerable groups in a world where the future is uncertain and the environment somewhat hostile, shows how environmental and socioeconomic issues combine to create a range of insecurities that is often ignored in mainstream political discourses. The text not only helps to foster a comprehensive perspective on security but also reminds readers of the interdependent nature of ecological sustainability, social justice, and economic development. One of the major findings in this study is that this is a text that does not allow for hopelessness or victimization. They do not ignore the terrible consequences of violence and instability but at the same time highlight resilience as a potential force of survival and change. The stories chosen to illustrate how resilience is seen in a sense of community, in learning goals, in cultural identity, in remembering, and in a spirit of justice amidst the challenges. To this end, resilience is not a mere response to

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crises but a process in which individuals and communities collectively confront challenging conditions and envision new possibilities.

Overall, the paper contends that contemporary African literature is an important way of rethinking the link between security and development. The texts chosen to highlight the human, social and economic aspects of insecurity, as well as recognising it as a political and military challenge. They also provide stories of strength to fight against hopelessness and hope for renewal. In exploring the themes of trauma, survival, memory, and transformation, the works of *The Chibok Girls* and *Song of the Crocodile* show how literature continues to be an essential vehicle for unpacking the complexities of Africa's present and imagining a more inclusive and viable future.

6. Recommendations

The results obtained from this study underscore the significance of embedding a literary approach in the larger discussions on security, development and socioeconomic change in Africa. Policymakers, development practitioners and scholars should note that the lived experiences of insecurity are not always represented in official reports, policy documents or in the media; these experiences may be better captured in literary texts. Literature can help advance more human-centred approaches to policy formulation and development planning by helping to foreground personal experience and community perspectives. There is also a need to increase scholarly work on the relationship between literature and security studies in the context of Africa. The emotional, psychological, and social impacts of insecurity and violence have been studied and commented on in political and military contexts but have yet to be made audible in literary works. Going forward, further studies are needed to explore the role of African stories in addressing the challenges of climate insecurities, migration, environmental displacement, digital surveillance, and economic inequality. Development efforts must not only mitigate or manage symptoms of insecurity but also tackle the underlying causes for sustainable socioeconomic change to be possible. Literary storytelling can contribute to the development of more nuanced and emotionally complex awareness of the problems plaguing a society and its potential for collective renewal through policy, development and social change discussions.

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