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'Free men we stand under the flag of our land': A transitivity analysis of African anthems as discourses of resistance against colonialism

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Abstract

Recent studies on colonial discourse have demonstrated that the speeches of freedom activists in colonial Africa served as sites of resistance. One key text-type that has, however, been neglected in the literature on the discourse of emancipation is the national anthem of colonised states. The present study redresses this gap by examining the discursive enactment of resistance in the anthems of former British colonies in Africa, focusing on lexical choices and transitivity. The analysis discusses the collective memory of the cultural trauma of the colonial experience as a resistance strategy. It further identifies two motifs of resistance in the anthems, namely the motifs of freedom and legitimation of land ownership. Together, these procedures articulate an anti-imperialist and anti-establishment stance intended to provide hope, strength, and encouragement to an oppressed group. This paper extends the scholarship on the discursive enactment of resistance by focusing attention on a context underexplored in the literature. It also illustrates the need for the (re)construction of relevant ideologies in national anthems to stimulate desirable, progressive attitudes among citizenry in African states. Thus, the paper holds implications for decolonial research and highlights the role of language in political decolonization processes.

Keywords: African studies, critical discourse analysis, national anthems, resistance discourse, systemic functional linguistics

1 Introduction

While there is much research in applied linguistics on the discursive enactment of power and domination (Negm, 2015; Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019), relatively little research has focused on the enactment of resistance and emancipation. A few studies have nonetheless revealed that dominated groups adopt a range of discursive strategies to resist hegemony (e.g., Chiluwa, 2015; Colima & Cabezas, 2017). Resistance has been defined as 'an act, or a set of acts, that is designed to rid a people of its oppressors, and it so thoroughly infuses the experience of living under oppression that it becomes an almost autonomous [discursive] principle' (Slemon, 2002:

107). Research on resistance discourse can be divided into studies on micro-discursive resistance and macro-discursive resistance. Studies on micro-discursive resistance examine the interplay between power and resistance as 'an interactive dyadic two-way concept' among interactants in discourse (Negm, 2015: 285). These studies consider power as something that constantly shifts from one interactant to another in talk-in-interaction, as it is resisted, contested, and challenged (Bavelas et al., 1992; 22; Harris, 1994; Negm, 2015). Research on macro-discursive resistance examines discourses that are part of an organised struggle for liberation from institutionalised domination. Such studies have been concerned with resistance against national power (Yankah, 2000; Chiluwa, 2012; Colima & Cabezas, 2017), or power vested in institutions (Afful & Mwinlaaru, 2012). Notably, studies on macro-discursive enactment of resistance have examined the use of social media to organise the Biafra secession protests (Chiluwa, 2012) and the Arab uprising (Wolfsfeld, Segev & Sheafer, 2013). Recent research has also examined the anti-Beijing protests in Hong Kong (Tay, 2021).

Few studies have examined the macro-discursive enactment of resistance against global forms of domination such as colonialism, imperialism, and slavery despite the longstanding tradition of these forms of domination across place and time (Saboro, 2013, 2017). Recent studies have examined the ideological enactment of resistance to colonialism, focusing on the speeches of Kwame Nkrumah (Nartey, 2019, 2020) and Sukano (Nartey & Ernanda, 2020). The present paper contributes to this latter group of studies, focusing on a key yet neglected text type, national anthems. Specifically, we analyse anthems of former British colonies in Africa, focusing on lexical choices and the resources of transitivity provided by systemic functional linguistics (Thompson, 2008; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). These national anthems are symptomatic of the collective memory and consciousness of a people with a long traumatic history and their investigation will contribute towards a fuller understanding of the colonial experience from the point of view of the colonised and increase our knowledge of the discursive strategies dominated groups employ to reconstruct cultural trauma and enact resistance (Eyerman, 2001; Saboro, 2016).

The anthems are examined as forms of 'writing back' to the colonial power and opposing the ideological discourses that supported colonialism (Ashcroft, et al., 2002). As Burney (2012: 106) notes, 'the strategy of "writing back" … is a form of resistance, of reclaiming one's ownership of oneself by resisting the hegemony … overturning the narratives of the empire and thereby disjuncturing colonial discourse'. Our analysis and interpretation of the discursive

resources of the anthems is situated within the context of the power structures and the taken-for-granted assumptions that defined the colonial enterprise as well the culture and the lived experiences of the African people. We also consider the anthems as forms of 'politics of disguise and anonymity' (Scott, 1990: 19). Scott (1990) identifies two kinds of discourses that are produced by and characterise domination: the 'public transcript' and 'hidden transcript'. The public transcript is the socially sanctioned discourses that characterize the verbal interaction between superiors and subordinates. The hidden transcript is the discourse that goes on behind the corridors of power, a set of communicative phenomena that people in subordinate positions develop to talk about their superiors in their absence and which the dominant group develops to admit their limitations. Between the public and the hidden transcripts is a third type of subordinate group politics, namely 'a politics of disguise and anonymity that takes place in public view but is designed to have a double meaning' (Scott, 1990: 19). The colonial experience was an 'institutionalized means of extracting labour, goods, and services from a subject population' (Scott, 1990: 21). Against this background, although the anthems of the colonised African countries were performed at the dawn of independence as emblems of nationhood, they bear the 'past within them – as scars of humiliating wounds, as instigation for different practices, as potentially revised visions of the past tending toward a postcolonial future … in which the formerly silent native speaks and acts on territory reclaimed as part of a general movement of resistance' (Said, 1993: 212).

Although there are a few studies on national anthems, these studies are concerned with their content, rhetorical structure, and lexicogrammatical choices (Cusack, 2005; de Souza, 2008; Wang & Ma, 2018). The present study goes beyond these studies to examine the anthems of the colonised as 'critical' discourses of resistance and emancipation. We focus specifically on two objectives: (1) how the anthems discursively construct the collective memory of the cultural trauma evoked by colonialism and (2) the motifs of resistance and emancipation, i.e., how the native discursively redefine their identity and reclaim their territory.

2 Data and method

The data for the study consist of 21 national anthems of Anglophone Africa, comprising a total of 301 clauses and 1, 976 running words. These anthems were purposively sampled from the official government websites of former British colonies in Africa and from secondary sources such as previous research on anthems (de Souza, 2008). The criteria for inclusion were that the anthems must be written in English and should be composed during the transition from colonial

rule to independence. In countries such as Seychelles, South Africa, and Ghana, where an English anthem co-exists with anthems in national languages, only the English version was included (see Appendix 1 for the list of countries). Although the current anthem of Somalia has been written in English, it was excluded because it was recently composed. Their former anthem was adopted from a song composed before their independence and was originally not intended as a national anthem.

The data analysis combines lexical and grammatical analysis, using a multi-stage analysis procedure. First, the AntConc corpus toolkit was used to identify the top 20 content words – excluding names of countries (see Table 1). Second, the anthems were chunked into clauses and the clauses were analyzed for their process types and transitivity structure with the assistance of Excel spreadsheet, drawing on systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Transitivity is a grammatical system that represents different domains of experience in language. The system consists of six process types, each representing a domain of experience. Material processes represent the domain of physical experience and are processes of doing and happening (or actions and events). Mental processes represent the domain of inner consciousness and are processes of thinking, feeling, wanting, and perceiving. Relational processes construe the domain of being, comprising attribution and identification. Behavioural processes represent the domain of physiological experience, verbal processes are processes of saying, and existential processes indicate the existence of a participant. Each process type has its unique participant roles and other lexicogrammatical characteristics. For instance, material processes are associated with the roles of Actor, the doer of the action; Goal, the affected participant in a transitive clause; Scope, a participant in an intransitive clause over whom the action ranges; Recipient, the beneficiary of transfer of possession; and Client, the beneficiary of a service. In addition to participant roles, processes may have circumstances (realised by adverbial groups or prepositional phrases) indicating time, place, manner, purpose, etc. attendant to them.

Following the transitivity analysis, we isolated clauses containing the top 20 frequent words (Table 1) using the Microsoft search tool in Excel and examined the transitivity concordance of these clauses to identify the distribution of participant roles (e.g., Actor, Goal, Senser, and Sayer) across different entities (e.g., God, Nation, Citizens, and Concepts) mentioned in the anthems. Transitivity concordance is the grouping together of ‘all the clauses in which each entity or group of entities in the text is represented in a particular participant role’ (Thompson,

2008: 18). The focus on clauses with the top 20 frequent words ensures that the analysis is based on discursive resources and meanings that are largely common among the anthems. In isolating the clauses, we realise that these frequent words cluster around a few common themes (i.e. freedom, legitimising ownership of land, invoking divine blessing). For example, a search for *land, bless, protect*, and *God* largely retrieved the same or overlapping clauses and *free, stand, awake, peace,* and *strong* also retrieved clauses that were largely overlapping, with the lexeme *free* tending to be the common word among them. The clauses were therefore grouped around these common themes for discussion. Also, we repeatedly read through the 21 anthems to confirm that the motifs identified were pervasive across the anthems and not skewed to a few anthems.

Table 1. Frequency distribution of top 20 content words in the corpus of anthems

Word	**Freq**	**Rank**
Land	38	7
Bless	24	13
God	24	14
Peace	17	19
Free	16	21
Freedom	16	22
Africa	13	27
Nation	13	28
Love	11	30
Stand	11	31
Praise	10	35
Unity	10	38
Liberty	9	42
Strong	9	44
Protect	8	49
Country	7	54
Great	7	56
hearts	7	57
Men	7	60
awake	6	64

Table 2 presents the distribution of process types across all clauses in the 21 anthems. The most frequent process types are material and relational processes. This shows that the anthems deal more with doing-&-happening and being, especially attribution, than with other domains of experience. Interestingly, there are only few mental processes, contrary to the observation that across registers in English, mental processes rank second highest after material processes (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). This indicates that the anthems have less to do with a direct representation of the people's inner consciousness such as emotions and desire than with actions (material clauses), attributes and identity (relational clauses), behaviour (behavioural clauses) and sayings (verbal clauses). No existential clauses were recorded. Instead, there are considerable instances of minor clauses (and also elliptical clauses). These minor clauses include exclamations, address forms, and epithets.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of process types

Process type	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Material	134	44.5
Relational	73	24.3
Behavioural	26	8.6
Verbal	18	6.0
Mental	3	1.0
Minor Clause	47	15.6
Total	**301**	**100**

For a comprehensive analysis of the data, the findings presented below are based on a combination of lexical analysis and transitivity analysis of the anthems.

3 Collective memory and (re)construction of the colonial experience

We use the term 'trauma' to refer to a memory accepted publicly by a group of people of an event 'which is (a) laden with negative affect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions … or group's identity' (Eyerman, 2001: 3). We consider the representation of three dimensions in the colonial experience, namely the colonial power, the colonized, and the colonial process itself. The anthems generally represent the colonial rulers negatively as an

outsider-oppressor. Referring expressions used to identify them include *the foe*, *oppressors,* and *the enemy* as illustrated in the following extracts:

(1) Liberia: With God above our rights to prove / We will over all prevail / With hearts and hands, our country's cause defending / ***We'll meet the foe with valor unpretending***

(2) Ghana: And [God] make our nation great and strong, / Bold to defend forever / The cause of Freedom and of Right. / Fill our hearts with true humility / Make us cherish fearless honesty, / ***And help us to resist oppressors' rule*** /With all our will and might evermore.

(3) Eritrea: ***The barbarian enemy humiliatingly defeated*** / And martyrdom has paid for freedom

The negative evaluation of the coloniser via the use of referring expressions such as *the foe, oppressors*, and *the barbarian enemy* suggests that the colonial people view the coloniser as an entity that has caused them pain and suffering. The allusion to the *barbarian enemy* in (3) carries a strong negative ideological loading against the foreign invader. The coloniser is compared to the ancient Greek image of the barbarian as the savagely violent outsider with incomprehensible speech. The transitivity patterns reveal how the anthems discursively construct the engagement of the colonised with the colonial power. The clauses highlighted in these extracts are material (or doing) clauses. The Actors are the colonised people, and they are represented by the pronouns *we* and *us.* The Scope (*the foe, oppressors' rule*) and Goal (*The barbarian enemy*) participants represent the colonial powers and their rule. It is striking that although the anthems are composed by and for different countries, they (re)construct the coloniser in semantically and structurally parallel clauses. The transitivity template created by these linguistically similar clauses is: 'Actor: the colonised + Process: material + Goal/Scope: coloniser' (see Thompson, 2008, on transitivity template). The vision created for colonialism in the anthems is thus a longstanding struggle by the colonised against an oppressive invader who must be eliminated. It is the colonised who are assigned agency and are thus the effectual participants acting against an unwanted intruder.

The lexicogrammatical choices in the extracts have the semantic feature [+force]. The use of modal *will* to show volition and the circumstantial element *with valor unpretending* in (1) as well as the verbs *resist* (2) and *defeated* in (3) reconstructs the colonised as effectual and a determining force against the colonial power. Also, the anthems depict the resistance against

colonialism as both a past and future objective. The choice of the future tense in (1), *'ll meet*, and the non-finite verb in (2), *to resist*, show that resistance to colonialism is not a one-shot-time event that ended with independence but a continuous struggle against imperialism and neocolonialism. Example (3), which has been formulated in past tense, celebrates the successful struggle of the people of Eritrea that culminated in independence. The modifiers *unpretending* (1) and *humiliatingly* (2) also evoke the off-stage hidden transcript of the coloniser. The colonised is confronting the colonial power with naked force and the colonial authority is dismantled and their limitations exposed. The previously silent native speaks and acts potently on reclaimed territory. Generally, assigning agency to the colonial people in the anthems points to a reconstruction of the traumatic experience of the colonised as a determined resistance towards a positive postcolonial future. In other words, the colonised comes out as a victor and not a victim.

War-time rhetoric plays an important role in the construction of resistance discourse (Nartey, 2019; Nartey & Ernanda, 2020). Hence, it is instructive that expressions such as *foe*, *oppressors*, and *enemy* are used in the anthems. Such lexicalisation creates an immediate 'us' vs. 'them' tension or in-group vs. out-group dichotomy that intensifies the threat posed by the colonialists and hence the need for them to be opposed. The articulation of 'enemy' is not only pivotal to establishing and maintaining a moral order (Lazar & Lazar, 2004), but also creates a sense of solidarity and definiteness in objectives by determining a target for missiles to aim at (Bhatia, 2008). This means that 'enemification' strengthens the discourse of resistance constructed in the anthems and it imposes a moral imperative on the people of Africa to resist colonialism.

Unsurprisingly, the colonised are positively evaluated in the anthems as *heroes*, *victors*, *fathers*, and *martyrs* as the following extracts show:

(4) Nigeria: ***The labor of our heroes past*** / Shall never be in vain

(5) Stand and sing for Zambia, proud and free, / Land of work and joy in unity, / ***Victors in the struggle for the right***, / We have won freedom's fight.

(6) O Cameroon, Thou Cradle of ***our Fathers***, / **Holy Shrine** where in our midst they now repose, / ***Their tears*** and ***blood*** and ***sweat*** thy soil did water, / On thy hills and valleys once ***their tillage*** rose.

(7) Zimbabwe: **We praise *our heros' sacrifice***, / And vow to keep our land from foes;

(8) Namibia / **land *of the brave*** / Freedom fight / we have won / Glory to ***their bravery Whose blood* waters / our freedom**

(9) South Sudan: Let us stand up in silence and respect / Saluting ***our Martyrs whose blood / Cemented our National foundation***

The clauses in which the positively evaluated referring expressions occur comprise attributive relational processes (e.g., *The labor of our heroes past / Shall never be in vain; [We are] Victors in the struggle for the right; Thou [art] Cradle of our Fathers*), material processes (e.g. *Whose blood waters / our freedom; Their tears and blood and sweat thy soil did water*), and verbal processes (e.g. *We praise our heros' sacrifice*). The Carriers of the Attributes are the citizens and their ancestors (e.g., [***We** are*] *Victors in the struggle for the right*) or the nation (e.g., ***Thou** [art] Cradle of our Fathers*). The ancestors are also the Actors (*Whose blood, Their tears and blood and sweat, our Martyrs whose blood*) in material clauses. Relational clauses are used to ascribe positive attributes to the citizens, their ancestors or the nation. They provide the transitivity template: Carrier: *citizens/ancestors/nation* + Process: relational + Attribute: *positive qualities*.

Material processes are used to show the desirable contributions of the ancestors to the nation, and they provide the following transitivity template: Actor: *ancestors* + Process: material + Goal: *nation/concept*. Verbal processes are used to praise the ancestors and they provide the following transitivity template: Sayer: *citizens* + Process: verbal + Target: *ancestors*. The lexical and phraseological choices *labor, struggle for the right, tears, blood, sweat, tillage, sacrifice*, etc. form a semantic prosody of 'suffering/affliction'. When the positive representation of the colonised is compared with the negative representation of the colonial powers, it can be asserted that the anthems present colonialism as a fight between good and evil. Consequently, the colonised emerges as *heroes, brave, victors, fathers,* and *martyrs*. This binary opposition of forces of good vs. forces of evil invokes intense emotions of morality (i.e., right, and wrong) that serve to legitimize the resistance discourse constructed and yet again foist a moral obligation on the African people to resist the evil of colonialism. The collective memory of the colonial experience observed in the anthems is a fight for what is right, and the African people are united as the winners, heroes, and the martyrs in this fight. As Eyerman (2001:4) notes, cultural trauma is 'a process that aims to reconstitute or reconfigure a collective identity through collective representation, as a way of repairing the tear in the social fabric'.

This desirable reconstruction process is deducible from the lexical and transitivity patterns in the anthems.

Furthermore, the discursive representation of the colonial process itself heightens the negative representation of colonialism and the positive reconstitution of the collective self of the colonized people.

(10) Sierra Leone: We'll shout the freedom of ***a race benighted*** / A home of glorious liberty by God's command

(11) Eritrea: The barbarian enemy humiliatingly defeated / And ***martyrdom has paid for freedom*** Decades of ***devotion*** for purpose / Your name became ***challenger***, **miraculous** / Ertra, comfort for the ***oppressed*** /Proved that truth can win after all / Ertra, Ertra /A sovereign state on earth after all / ***Dedication*** that led to liberation

(12) Seychelles: With ***courage*** and ***discipline*** we have broken ***all barriers***. / […] / Never, never shall we cease ***struggling***. / Death rather than ***to live in slavery***! / Never, never shall we cease ***struggling***. / Equality for all of us! Freedom for ever!

The following lexicogrammatical choices specify the colonial process: *a race benighted, the oppressed, all barriers, to live in slavery, martyrdom*. These expressions highlight the humiliation, oppression, suffering, trauma, and frustration that characterized colonialism. On the other hand, lexical choices such as *devotion, challenger, dedication, courage, discipline,* and *struggling* foreground the determination and perseverance of the colonised people to resist colonialism and reclaim their dignity and liberation.

It can be deduced from the analysis above that the anthems of colonial Africa are sites of resistance. In these anthems, one can observe a process of discursive decolonisation aimed at dismantling Western discourses that justify colonialism such as the colonisers' representation of colonialism as 'a civilizing mission' (Sharpe, 1999). The anthems present a 'recovered reality', of counter-discursive strategies to the dominant Western discourse (Tiffin, 1995).

4 Motifs of resistance and emancipation in the anthems

This section examines the discursive representation of two motifs that enact resistance and emancipation in the anthems, namely the motif of freedom and the motif of legitimising ownership of land (including invoking divine blessing).

4.1 The motif of freedom

The motif of freedom is prevalent in the anthems as the lexemes *free* (free, freedom) and *liberty* together occur 41 times (14% of the total number of 301 words) in the data, making them the most frequent lexemes in the top 20 words in the dataset (see Table 1). The two lexemes have been analysed together since they are synonymous.

Table 3. Transitivity concordance of clauses associated with the motif of freedom

Participant Role	**Entities**					
	God	**Nation**	**Citizens**	**Ancestors**	**Concepts**	**Objects**
Attributor	1					
Actor	6	1	8	1	3	
Behaver			4			
Carrier		3	6			1
Sayer	1					
Target		1				
Attribute					7	2
Behaviour					3	
Goal		1	1		7	
Scope					2	
Total	8	6	19	1	22	3

The process types associated with *freedom/liberty* are mostly material, relational, and behavioural clauses. Table 3 presents a summary of the transitivity concordance of entities identified in these clauses. The most frequent entities represented by the participant roles are Concepts such as 'freedom' and 'liberty,' followed by Citizens, God, and Nation. The most effectual or active entities in the anthems are God and the Citizens. God is Attributor and Actor while the citizens are more dynamic, serving frequently as Actor, Behaver, and Carrier. The actions that God and the citizens engage in normally produce the concepts of freedom/liberty/peace/unity. These concepts also serve as Attribute in relational process where citizens are often the Carrier. The extracts below illustrate the motif of freedom/liberty.

(13) Stand and sing for Zambia, proud and **free**, / Land of work and joy in unity, / Victors in the struggle for the right, / We have won **freedom's** fight. / All one, strong and **free**.

(14) Namibia / land of the brave / **Freedom** fight we have won / Glory to their bravery / Whose blood waters our **freedom**

(15) South Sudan: We rise raising flag with the guiding star / And sing songs of **freedom** with joy, / For Justice, **Liberty** and Prosperity / Shall forevermore reign.

The extracts contain material clauses (e.g., *We have won freedom fight; whose blood waters our freedom*), behavioural clauses (e.g. *stand and sing for Zambia*), and elliptical attributive clauses (e.g. [*we are*] *proud and free,* [*we are*] *All one, strong and free*). In the material and behavioural clauses, the Actors and Behavers, realised by implied *you* in the imperative clauses in extract (13) and the pronoun *we* and the nominal group *whose blood* in (13) and (14) respectively, refer to the citizens or their ancestors. In the attributive clauses, the citizens ([***we*** *are*] *proud and free,* [***we*** *are*] *All one, strong and free*) and the nation (e.g., *Namibia,* [***you*** *are*] *land of the brave*) are also the Carriers of the Attributes. The following are the typical transitivity templates illustrated by the extracts:

- Actor: *God/citizens/ancestors* + Process: material + Goal/Scope: *freedom* (e.g., *We have won freedom's fight*.)
- Behaver: *citizens* + Process: behavioural + Behaviour: *freedom* (e.g., *And [we] sing songs of freedom with joy*)
- Carrier: *citizens* + Process: relational + Attribute: *freedom (*e.g. *[we are] All one, strong and free*).

These lexicogrammatical patterns foreground freedom in several domains of the experiences of the colonised. Their actions revolve around freedom, their verbal and bodily behaviour are characterized by freedom, and freedom is now part of their being.

Behavioural (15) and material processes (16-18) cast in the imperative mood are used to ascribe positive behaviours to the African people in order to recruit their support or boost their morale to champion the cause of freedom (cf. de Souza, 2008).

(15) **Freedom** ever, let us all unite / To build up Malawi.

(16) Rise, **free** men! / Proud Seychellois, our doors are open. / Our path is traced, / Our sun has risen, / We will not turn back.

(17) Raise high the flag of Ghana, / Black star of hope and honor / To all who thirst for ***liberty***;

(18) Namibia: Beloved land of savannahs / Hold high the banner of **liberty**

Freedom is also frequent as circumstances are usually associated with behavioural processes (20 – 25), especially circumstance of Place (20 -22). The typical transitivity template is: Behaver: *citizens* + Process: behavioural + Place: *freedom/liberty/unity/peace* (20-25). Other circumstantial elements are Manner (19), Purpose (23 and 24), and Guise (25).

(19) Where the banner of Ghana ***free*** flies, / May the way to ***freedom freely*** lie (circumstance of Manner: free, freely circumstance of Place: *to freedom*)

(20) For The Gambia, our homeland / We strive and work and pray, / That all may live in unity, / ***Freedom*** and peace each day. (circumstance of Place: *in unity, Freedom and peace*)

(21) Kenya: Justice be our shield and defender, / May we dwell in unity, / Peace and ***liberty***. (circumstance of Place: *in unity, Peace and liberty*)

(22) Mauritius: Around thee we gather/ As one people, /As one nation, /In peace, justice and ***liberty***. (circumstance of Place: *In peace, justice and liberty*)

(23) Let us live and strive for ***freedom***, / In South Africa our land. (circumstance of Purpose: *for freedom*)

(24) Uganda: United, ***free***, / For ***liberty*** / Together we'll always stand. (circumstance of Guise: *United free; and Purpose: for liberty*)

(25) Zambia: ***Free*** men we stand / Under the flag of our land. (circumstance of Guise: *Free men*)

By underscoring Africans' inalienable right to freedom, the anthems present colonialism as unlawful and unjust, making its resistance necessary. We thus argue that the anthems function as an emancipatory discourse that sculpts the African people in the mould of freedom fighters fighting for the noble and just cause of African liberation. As Nartey (2019) notes, the discourse of resistance is strengthened when it is depicted as a pursuit of liberty, freedom, and justice. That is, it provides a legitimate reason for a people to defend themselves from what they consider to be an attack on their freedom. Consequently, the motif of freedom in the anthems can be analysed as an inspiring discursive practice aimed at promoting the grievances of a marginalized, disenfranchised group and advancing their collective objectives. Such discourse can be empowering as it offers a message of hope, strength, and encouragement while playing

the role of a unifier (Hughes, 2018). That is, it can enable social groups and individuals to emancipate themselves from various forms of domination.

4.2 Legitimation of land ownership

Another predominant motif of resistance in the anthems is the legitimation of land ownership. The lexeme *land* occurs in nearly all the 21 anthems (the exceptions are Tanzania and Eritrea). It occurs in material, relational, verbal, behavioural, and minor clauses. The transitivity templates identified have been presented below and the transitivity concordance of clauses associated with land has been presented in Table 4.

- Actor: *God/citizens* + Process: material + Goal/Scope: *nation/land* (e.g., *God bless our homeland Ghana*; *And our Homeland of Kenya … / Firm may we stand to defend*).
- Sayer: *citizens* + Process: verbal + Receiver: *God* + Verbiage: *nation/land* (e.g., *O God, we beseech Thee to bless our native land*)
- Token: *nation/land* + Process: relational + Value: *kinship relation* (e.g., *Africa is our own motherland*).
- Token: *land/nation* + Process: relational + Value: *citizens* (e.g., *This glorious land of liberty shall long be ours*).
- Behaver: *citizens* + Process: behavioural + Phenomenon: *nation/land* (e.g. [*we*] *singing thy praise, O native land*)
- Behaver: citizens + Process: behavioural + Place: nation/land (*Free men we stand / Under the flag of our land*).

These transitivity patterns present a dynamic view of land in the discursive construction of resistance. God and the citizens act in material clauses to promote and protect the land. Relational and behavioural processes show the people's intimacy and kinship ties to the land as well as praise the good qualities of the land. The distribution of participant roles (Table 4) show that God and the citizens have agency and their actions and behaviours are directed towards the land or the nation.

Table 4. Transitivity concordance associated with clauses legitimizing land ownership

Participant Role	**Realisation**			
	God	**Nation/Land**	**Citizens**	**Concept**
Actor	9		9	
Behaver			4	
Carrier		3	2	
Sayer			4	
Token		1		1
Attribute		5		2
Phenomenon		1		
Goal		8		1
Scope		4		1
Value		2		
Client		2		
Receiver	1			
Verbiage		2		
Total	10	27	19	6

The strong theme of praising the landscape in Anglophone anthems has been noted by de Souza (2008). The present study further demonstrates that the predominant reference to land in these anthems is a motif of resistance. To appreciate the reference to land in the anthems as a motif of resistance, it is necessary to highlight the significance of land in African philosophy as well as the disagreement over land control in the colonial history of Africa. Land in indigenous African culture is sacred and revered and it serves as a cultural and religious resource. Land connects the living to their ancestors as part of the heritage bequeathed them by these revered forebears (Nti, 2012). The ancestors acquired their land by various means, including first settlement and war. Hence, any form of alienation from the land/environment disconnects the people from their ancestors and for that matter their very essence (Nti, 2012). In indigenous practice, therefore, land is inalienable.

Unsurprisingly, efforts by colonial administrators to take over land control from indigenous custodians in the colonies, however good their intensions were, gave rise to vehement resistance from the colonized people. In the Gold Coast (now Ghana), for instance, the

introduction of the Crown Lands Bill in 1894 and 1897 giving powers over the so-called 'waste lands' or 'public lands' to the British Crown for the effective management of foreign investment was confronted with strong opposition through protests, newspaper articles, and petitions to the colonial government. These activities led to the formation of the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society, which laid down the foundation for organized opposition to colonial rule. As Nti (2012: 3) notes, 'while the colonial government saw [land] as part of the economic and political trappings of power, the people … saw land as a cultural and religious resource that gave them the needed connection with the ancestors in their everyday life'. In other African countries such as Zimbabwe, the struggle over land between the African indigens and white settlers has continued to be a source of conflict long after independence.

The anthems re-enact the struggles over land rights, thereby serving as a means of 'writing' back to the colonialists to reclaim the land of the African people and emphasise their cultural and religious significance. The following extracts further support this observation:

(26) Botswana: Blessèd be this noble **land**, / Gift to us from God's strong hand, / **Heritage our fathers left to us**.

(27) Zambia: Africa is **our own motherland**, / Fashion'd with and blessed by God's good hand

(28) Mauritius: Glory to thee, **Motherland** / O **Motherland of mine.**

(29) Seychelles: With dignity we must cultivate **our land**, / With determination we must exploit our seas.

(30) Oh Ugandah! The **land that feeds us** / By sun and fertile soil grown. / For **our own dear land**, / We'll always stand,

(31) Lesotho: Oh, **land of mine**, / **Land of our Fathers**, / May you have peace.

(32) Cameroon: Dear **Fatherland**, thy worth no tongue can tell!

(33) And **our Homeland** of Kenya, / **Heritage** of splendour, / Firm may we stand to defend.

(34) Zimbabwe: O God, we beseech Thee to bless ***our native land***; / The ***land of our fathers*** bestowed upon us all

In the extracts above, the possessive determiner *our* (and the pronoun *mine*) is predominantly used to characterise land (*our land; land of mine*). Kinship terms are also associated with land: *fatherland, motherland, homeland, native land, land of our fathers*. These expressions emphasize the ancestral/cultural and religious essence of lands. Land ownership in Africa is

either by family ties, clan ties, community, or village ties (see Nti, 2012, on Akan). The choice between *motherland* and *fatherland* is associated with the inheritance system of the dominant and influential ethnic groups in the countries. Hence, while *motherland* is typically used in Ghana due to the dominance of the Akan culture which has a matrilineal system of inheritance, Nigeria and Cameroon use *fatherland* as their major ethnic groups (Hausa, Igbo, Fulani, Yoruba, for Nigeria; and Bamileke for Cameroon) are patrilineal. Neutral expressions include *native land* and *homeland*, which nonetheless encode the intimacy between the indigene and the land. Importantly, such phraseology conceptualizes the African people as a homogeneous group that is opposed to an undesirable system (i.e., colonialism) that seeks to exploit them and their resources. The motif of land ownership can thus be interpreted as a discursive strategy that reiterates the need to protect the African 'homeland', defend the continent's interest from external forces, and restore power back to Africans. Like the use of *enemy*, *foe* and *oppressors* analysed earlier, expressions such as *fatherland, motherland, homeland,* and *native land* create a strict 'us' vs. 'them' distinction that amplifies the resistance discourse constructed by positioning the African people against colonialism and by extension all forms of foreign domination.

In addition, the anthems frequently invoke divine blessing over the land (and the nation). Nearly all the 21 anthems make divine appeal, the exceptions being Cameroon, Namibia, Seychelles, and Eritrea. Table 5 presents the transitivity concordance of clauses invoking God. God is Attributor, Actor, and Receiver (of supplications) in saying clauses. The nation is typically the Goal or Scope of God's protection or blessing and the Verbiage assigned to God in supplications. The citizens are less frequently Actors, Carrier and Sayer. Attributes are concepts such as 'blessed, blessing, truth, and strength'.

Table 5. Transitivity concordance associated with clauses invoking divine blessing

Participant Role	**Entities**			
	God	**Nation**	**Citizens**	**Concept**
Attributor	1			
Actor	13		2	
Carrier		3	2	
Sayer			3	

Receiver	3			
Goal		6	1	1
Scope		5	1	
Attribute				5
Verbiage		3		
Total	17	17	9	6

The transitivity configuration establishes the following world order in the anthems: (1) God acts on citizens and citizens act on the nation or react in terms of their desirable emotions or behaviours (God > Citizens > Nation/Emotions/Behaviours) or (2) God acts on nation (God > Nation). The following extracts illustrate instances where God is invoked:

(35) **God bless** our homeland Ghana, / And make our nation great and strong, / Bold to defend forever / The cause of Freedom and of Right. / Fill our hearts with true humility / Make us cherish fearless honesty, / And help us to resist oppressors' rule / With all our will and might evermore.

(36) **God bless** Africa / May her glory be lifted high / Hear our petitions / **God bless** us, Your children. / **God** we ask You to protect our nation / Intervene and end all conflicts / Protect us, protect our nation, our nation, South Africa – South Africa

(37) **God bless** Tanzania / Grant eternal freedom and unity / To its women, men and children / **God bless** Tanzania and its people

(38) **O God bless** our land of Malawi, / Keep it a land of peace. / Put down each and every enemy … / Join together all our hearts as one, / That we be free from fear. /

De Souza (2008) describes these instances as Benediction in his analysis of the generic structure of Anglophone anthems. Cusack (2005) attributes the reference to God in the anthems to influence from the British anthem 'God Save the Queen/King'. We, however, attribute the reference to God to the extreme religiosity of the African. As Mbiti (1969) submits, the African is very religious and infuses spirituality into their everyday life or ordinary experiences. The anthems thus draw on the religious practices of the people to invoke God to support them in their good fight against the evil of colonialism. This appeal to an external legitimate source of authority reinforces the invocation of intense emotions of morality to strengthen the resistance discourse formulated and mobilise the masses for socio-political action. Since religion is 'the ultimate moral force within the societal order of discourse of the day' (Graham et al., 2004: 204), any endeavour that has God's blessings should be a worthy one. We therefore contend

that the invocation of a supernatural power in the anthems elevates the fight against colonialism from a secular socio-political idea to a sacrosanct, divine injunction that it is worthy of all forms of sacrifice, including death.

5 Conclusion

To illustrate the role of language in promoting emancipatory discourses, this paper has examined the construction of resistance in African anthems. It combined lexical analysis with transitivity analysis to investigate how the anthems galvanize the masses, bolster group cohesion, and build a communal identity necessary in the fight against colonialism. The paper has also demonstrated how the anthems developed (and continue to develop) a sense of direction and importance for the African people during a period of oppression. The net effect is a liberating and an empowering discourse that not only gives voice to the concerns of the African people, but also gives them a voice. The analysis revealed that the discursive construction of resistance and emancipation in the anthems draws on three main strategies. First, the anthems reconfigure and reconstitute the trauma of the colonial experience by assigning agency and a positive image to the African people. Second, they foreground the motif of freedom and, finally, they legitimize the African as the owner of the reclaimed territory. The semantic and structural similarities between the anthems are symptoms of a collective memory, a cultural trauma reconfigured and reconstituted to reclaim a positive identity and project a desirable postcolonial future.

Together, the anthems articulate an anti-imperialist and anti-establishment stance intended to provide hope, strength, and encouragement to an oppressed group. This means that in addition to serving as symbols of nationhood, the anthems encode memories of the colonial trauma and provide a space for 'writing back' to the colonial powers. We therefore argue that the anthems constitute a form of social justice in action, promoting a social justice agenda that advocates 'respect for the inherent dignity and rights of all human beings, [and] respect for others as equals irrespective of their specific cultural affiliations' (Barrett, 2016: i). This paper extends the scholarship on the discursive construction of resistance by focusing attention on a context underexplored in the literature, thereby diversifying this field of inquiry. It also illustrates the need for the (re)construction of relevant ideologies in national anthems to stimulate desirable, progressive attitudes among citizenry in African states. Finally, the paper contributes to decolonial research and highlights the role of language in political decolonization processes.

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Appendix 1: List of anthems

No.	Country	First verse of anthem
1	Botswana	Blessed Be This Noble Land
2	Cameroon	O Cameroon, Thou Cradle of our Fathers
3	Eritrea	Ertra, Ertra, Ertra
4	Gambia	For The Gambia, our Homeland
5	Ghana	God Bless our Homeland Ghana
6	Kenya	O God of all Creation
7	Lesotho	Lesotho, Land of our Fathers
8	Liberia	All Hail, Liberia Hail
9	Malawi	O God Bless our Land of Malawi
10	Mauritius	Glory to thee, Motherland
11	Namibia	Namibia Land of the Brave
12	Nigeria	Arise, O Compatriots, Nigeria's Call Obey
13	Seychelles	With Courage and Discipline we have Broken all Barriers
14	Sierra Leone	High we Exalt thee, Realm of the Free
15	South Africa	God Bless Africa
16	South Sudan	Oh God!
17	Swaziland	Oh God, Bestower of the Blessings of the Swazi
18	Tanzania	God Bless Africa
19	Uganda	Oh Uganda! may God Uphold thee
20	Zambia	Stand and Sing for Zambia, Proud and Free

21	Zimbabwe	O Lift High the Banner, the Flag of Zimbabwe