

**POST-INDEPENDENCE NIGERIAN LITERATURE AND THE QUEST FOR
TRUE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE NATION**

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Abstract

This paper critically examines post-independence Nigerian literary writers' engagement with the issue of misgovernance in their country. The essay contends that what is grounded in most post-independence Nigerian writings is a bewildering amalgam of socio-political contingences and economic realities which bedevil the country as a result of misgovernance. The constant trope in the writings is the quotidian complexion of affairs defined by monumental incoherence, paradoxes, elephantine socio-political paralysis, corruption, intolerance, ineptitude, political subterfuge, treachery by a decadent political elite, economic strangulation, crippling social morass and moral atrophy. It is also argued that new and old breed politicians, the military, the traditional rulers, the academia, male and female rulers have all failed in their individual stints in the governance of this country. None of them is able to offer the much needed leadership by the post-independence Nigeria. Therefore, the quest for a true political leader for the country, as depicted in post-independence Nigerian literature, has become a near obsession as it is orgiastic.

Introduction

The complex colonial and neocolonial experiences of African countries have thrown into sharp relief the saliency and vicissitudes of memory, particularly in societies that have been marked by failing democratic experiments, misgovernance and decadence. Unlike writers from the West, African writers are mostly committed artists. They have always focused attention on the nagging problem of elusive viable political leadership in their individual nations, a problem which has also been debated for some time in a range of academic disciplines. This paper seeks to examine the robust mediation of literature in

the destiny of an African nation, Nigeria, especially since independence. The methodology of the discourse inheres in a critical examination of political arts, using an informed eclectic combination of socio-cultural and political rubrics - neocolonialism, post-independence disillusionment and the like. It is assumed that literary texts are a valuable locus for studying the interplay of art and politics; literary works offer an interrogative epic of Nigeria's political history over the past 46 years. The overall thesis of the paper is that Nigerian writers have always found the informing vision of their creativity bound by the socio-political experiences of the nation, which their works both reflect and refract. It is argued that it is difficult for a Nigerian writer or any post-colonial writer to either take a definite Kantian art-for-art-sake position or an inviolable ideological bent in a society which is in permanent state of flux and ideological doldrums. The paper rethinks the interface of political art and 'artistic politics' in Nigeria by examining how Nigerian writers pronounce on political affairs in their nation and explain her disappointing post-independence trajectory. It is argued that Nigeria's failure to assert its political autonomy manifests itself mostly in literature. Satirical deployment of wit in the form of irony, innuendo or outright derision to expose political wickedness, ineptitude and folly populate most of post-independence Nigerian writings. Artful handling of (political) satire is seen in the works of writers as disparate in subject matter and style as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, Bandele-Thomas, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande and the like.

Narrating the Foibles of Nigerian Civilian and Military Rulers

The new wave of post-independence writings on politics is to some extent

influenced by ideas from outside the Western world. The most influential of these was Consciencism propounded by Kwame Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister and President of Ghana. This philosophical outlook reworks Marxist ideology from a specifically African historical, economic and social perspective. The pervading tone and mood of Nigerian literary texts which dwell on the problem of evasive political leadership are akin to those of the African-American writer, Lorraine Hansberry, in her *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959):

*Independence and then what?
What about all the crooks and
Thieves and just plain idiots
Who will come into power and
Steal and plunder the same as
Before - only now they will be black?*

Joe Ushie, in his collections of poems, titled *A Reign of Locusts*, also laments the problems of governance and failed state in Nigeria:

*Canaan,
For how long
will you remain
a tantalizing mirage in
a will-o-the wisp*

*For how long
Will you defy
Our home-hungry feet? ("Canaan").*

In "The African Bermuda", Ushie depicts military dictators, politicians and technocrats as political disappointments. The poem probes and investigates the chaos of the rites of passage in Nigeria's historical, socio-political and economic development. The poet is conscious of the fact that the growth and modernization in Nigeria are impeded and stamped by bad leadership. Hear Ushie:

*The Bermuda Triangle
Is where whatever crosses*

*Sinks without trace.
It sounded distant.*

*In time that triangle of
Soldier, politician and technocrat
Sank my lush land of birth
Here, a more mysterious Bermuda.*

Actually, Nigerian writers always dwell on the crisis of failed state; they do not keep mute. Some have even gone to the extent of actually taking up arms against the rulers, for instance, Christopher Okigbo. Adebayo Williams (1996) comments brilliantly on this: "while the dictator seeks a total domination of men and society, literature often seeks their total liberation. It is thus inevitable that the two must come into potentially fatal collision" (350). Political writers constantly engage in increasingly explosive confrontations with the rulers; some have in fact suffered great privation - torture, arbitrary arrests, detention, internal deportation, forced exiles, threats of physical liquidation, etc. In some of post-independence Nigerian works of art, what one observes are rather obvious attacks on politicians, ironic stories and whimsical cartoons of the contemporary social scenes, poking sophisticated fun at a variety of political foibles and dissecting the Nigerian socio-political society. The writers' attacks on the problem of misrule in the nation are brutal and direct, indeed verging on Naturalism.

Ademola's Dasylya's *Songs of Odamolugbe* is a scathing attack on the Nigerian leadership from the time of independence to date. To drive home his point, Dasylya draws attention to the fact that Satan (hitherto known as Lucifer) has been granted 'reprieve' to continue his jail term in Nigeria. Thus, on arrival in the country, Lucifer becomes a 'prince' attending to the needs of our 'politricksters'. In his 'Poetilogue', Dasylya writes:

That reminds me; because Nigeria recognizes his former position in heaven just before he fell, he was granted permission to change his name from Lucifer to Satan. And besides Kirikiri and Gashua, he has a cell in every state of the federation and Abuja. Like I said earlier, he was hardly in any of the executive cells; he is more visible busy at Aso Rock, Nigeria's seat of power. .. at the Senate and House of Reps. . . They find him very useful, he keeps their Ghana-must-gobags for them (18).

In Part One of the anthology sub-titled "Declaration", the first poem is "Ira" in which a literary missile is launched at compradors of multinationals, home-grown tyrants, political mercenaries, murderers of our motherland, etc. Thus, Dasyuva makes his task plain by revealing his intention through his anger at a system that ought to be working, but which is not due to the maladies and maladministration on the part of the leaders. Part Two of *Songs of Odamolugbe* is sub-titled "Songs of Obai". Here, Dasyuva comes out furious against the plunderers of the mother Africa, which he refers to as "Obai". This is a continent that is blessed by Oludumare and placed at the centre of the world. Like a true mother, Obai has fed all other parts of the world with her natural endowments as well as human resources. Obai soon becomes Nigeria, Dasyuva's country of origin, in "To me the Lord offered a scroll" (49). Here, he describes the beauty of this land:

*A map, a wonderful geography
Of my Obai, my country:*

*To the South
Silk-ocean so darkly, kisses the shores,
Roads, rails and rubies;
The electric and telephone lines,
Once potent, proud, sparkful, rich (49).*

However, the above beauty of the land has been bastardized by those at the helms of the affairs in the land. In the following stanzas, therefore, Dasyuva decries the state of

dilapidation brought upon Obai by the rulers:

*Now devastated, dormant!
Clucking gulls flew over the gullies...
Long, long ago before the agony of the Ogoni
Oil spillage by the bastards, or Ishekiri-
Ijaw fratricide they called ethnic cleansing!
But the soldier-ants and pepper-soup platoons
Termite at the root,
...feverish and famished! (49)*

Dasyuva defines the military who invaded the powerhouse and hijacked the leadership of the country as 'soldier-ants' and 'pepper-soup platoons termites'. In "In torrents the rain had poured", Dasyuva catalogues the periods of misrule in Nigeria. The first set he calls 'politrickers' followed by the 'militaria' epidemics. He salutes such leaders like Lumumba, Nkrurnma, Murtala, Sadat, Sankara, Rewane, Kudirat, Omotsola, Elegbede and Ige. Then he makes a clarion call:

*Arise O, compatriots!
Save mother Obai, for our sake:
Let Obai live that her children may not die (58).*

The political arrangement put in place after independence provides a fertile ground for the intrusion of armed forces originally saddled with the unique responsibility of rendering security services to the country against external aggression (Paul Zelesa, 1994). However, it is correct, to a considerable degree, that when a society is socially and politically in disarray, there is bound to be a disequilibrium engendering a cataclysm of either a people's revolution, or, where there is a political army, a military explosion. Therefore, due to their administrative foibles, the civilian leaders always tumble from the pinnacle of political power when the military dictators impeccably launch their political inauguration vowing to prove more efficient in the country's economic and socio political

husbandry. Most amazingly, however, the military rulers, either by design or default, become too insensitive and irresponsible to the genuine feelings, plights and yearnings of the masses. The country is thus often inevitably plunged into pandemonium as the military dictators excruciatingly inflict woes, pains and agonies on the country.

The failure of politicians in the aborted three attempts of democratic governance in the country and the betrayal of public trusts by their military counterparts constitute the thematic preoccupations of Biyi Bandele-Thomas's novels. Akin Adesokan (1994) comments on this:

There is an unwritten law where artists relocate: reinvent reality. It is what a great deal of writing is all about, but is it more desperate in Bandele Thomas's case? Each of his more formal works... engages the familiar post-independence Nigerian society, a place where rogues rule over rogues, where roguery is rule and the sensitive youth (mainly) are driven to violence (61).

Biyi Bandele-Thomas' *The Man who came in from the Back of Beyond* and *The Sympathetic Undertakers and Other Dreams* dwell on the shortcomings of military rules in Nigeria. The two texts are modern Nigerian fables with unreliable narrators; they explore a post-independence descent into madness. The military dictators are shown as corrupt and inhumane rulers who do not care what crimes the indigent masses resort to in order to pay their taxes and make a living. In fact, the texts are full of surreal horrors skeletons of the anonymous poor victims of road accidents, and quack abortionists litter the roads of the society depicted in the novels. It is a brutish nightmarish world where anything is possible, and nothing surprises. The whole of Nigeria's hideous, putrescent post-civil war history is imaginatively captured in the novels - a world wracked and marred by drug smuggling, government extortion, bar-beach show executions, and a host

of other problems. In ridiculing the military dictators, Bandele- Thomas also lampoons the naive political diatribes and utopianisms of the Nigerian Leftocracy, most especially, Bozo's guerrillas, the teenage high school intelligentsia, in *The Man Who Came in from the Back of Beyond*. Bandele- Thomas creates caricatures of Nigerian military rulers (for instance, the allegory of Babagee and Mamagee), exposing their slavish mentality, lack of organizing ability, business acumen and concern for the governed. In the words of Bayo Ogunjinmi (2000), Nigerian military rulers "tower and excel in autocratic and megalomaniac tendencies, turning into archetypes of *l' enfant terrible*" (90).

Achebe, in his *The Trouble with Nigeria*, reveals that the rulers in the country have always placed their own interests before those of the nation. To him, "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (1). Achebe can be understood to mean that Nigeria is naturally endowed with all it takes to be a great nation, but due to the ineptitude of its leaders, the country is grossly engulfed in backwardness, of which the masses bear the brunt. This provides a fertile ground for the realities in which most Nigerian writers are enmeshed. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, a novel that synthesizes brutal episodes exposing the effectiveness of military rule in transforming human society into a sheer hell hole (C.L Innes, 1991), the foibles of military rulers are foregrounded through a circle of three friends who are in different powerful positions in the country during a military era. In fact, they constitute "the cream of our society and the hope of the black race" (*Anthills*, p2). However, the hope is shattered as power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Sam, the military commander of the fictional country, Kangan (unmistakably Nigeria), who has assumed the presidency in a coup, brooks no opposition, and he is starving a dissident province

into submission to the central authority. Sam, the president for life, is suffering from bestiality and authoritarianism; he subjects people to cruel indignities. For instance, he closes the boreholes of a community in the midst of a major drought. The trouble with the country is summed up by Ikem, the editor of the national newspaper. To him, Nigeria's political woes are traceable to "the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being" (*Anthills*, p.141). The text depicts a deeply diseased country that urgently demands a deeper determination to cure the ailments.

The administrative ineptitude of the uniform men is predicated on their unpreparedness for political leadership. The military regime of His Excellency, Sam, is an accident. A narrator in the text pontificates that: "His Excellency came to power without any preparation for political leadership" (12). Sam begins to demonstrate his tyranny at a cabinet meeting when he obstinately refuses to visit the drought-stricken province of Abazon. This unveils the stark reality that military dictators habitually distance themselves from the people they rule. Umelo Ojinmah (1991) comments on this heinous act of the military dictator: "such concepts as moral principles, tolerance for opposition and in the use of power for the benefit of the people do not have much meaning to the leaders" (61). Actually, human rights' abuse constitutes another social malaise engulfing the fictional state of Kangan. Ojinmah asserts that in the novel

Achebe sees the soldiers as not being any better than the civilians they ousted. . . they have become worse, having perfected torture, intimidation and coldblooded killing as weapons to cow the opponents of their policies (86).

Elechi Amadi's *The Road to Ibadan* gives a strong reason why the armed forces, particularly the military, should not be involved in the governance of the nation. The Army Captain in the play unequivocally discloses: "the fact that we (soldiers) can think makes very little difference to our animal behaviour" (82). To him, soldiers do things exactly like animals, and so are irrational beings. It is apparent that the inglorious years of military dictatorship in Nigeria have left a nation lacking some requisite elements for socio-political and economic development.

Isidore Okpewho's *Tides* is a political thriller condemning the ineptitude and vices of the military as Nigerian rulers. In this text, Okpewho uses the epistolary technique to explore the disastrous effects, both human and environmental, of oil exploitation in the Niger Delta during the late 1970s. The Nigerian society that is depicted in the text is a totalitarian police-state, collaborated by the profiteering local chiefs and corrupt government bureaucrats. The central motif of the text is state's reckless disregard of public welfare. The novel offers a harrowing portrait of modern political terrorism in all its forms, governmental and insurrectionary. It is indeed a penetrating study of the complex psychology of complicity and betrayal.

Soyinka dwells on the vices of all the categories of Nigerian rulers in his texts and seems to have concluded that they are all bad. This is affirmed by Zia, one of his fictional creatures:

I am tired of having everything blamed on us military people. Between Sekou Toure and General Zia or Pinochet or Arap Moi and Houphouet Boigny and other one-party African and Asian dictators, tell me ,just what is the difference? (From Zia, with Love. 50).

Soyinka, in *Opera Wonyosi* and *A Play of Giants*, lambastes and lampoons military dictators and depraved soldiers in Africa. Also, in *Kongi's Harvest*, Soyinka establishes a hall of shame for proto-types of President Kamuzu Banda of Malawi, drawing a dreadful barbaric portrait of the best and brute force in African military leaders. The military rulers are depicted as masters of terror and censorship, draining the national wealth and impoverishing the masses. Actually, Nigerian rulers see the country as an object that could be possessed by them, even at the cost of its very survival (Ipshita Chanda, 2004).

Festus Iyayi also registers disenchantment with the military, and this he does by going back into history as reflected in *Heroes*. In this novel, Iyayi goes way back to the time of the Nigerian civil war to expose the vices of the military elite. He chose one of the worst periods of Nigeria's military regimes to highlight how the military elite contributed to the tragedy of governance in the country through their greed and indifference to the plight of the masses. One inference that can be drawn from *Heroes* about the pain of misgovernance in Nigeria is that the problem emanates from two sources: human failing and systemic failures. Nevertheless, he still maintains a note of optimism at the end of the novel and in the revolutionary ideas of the protagonist, Osime, the journalist.

Ernest Emenyonu's *Tales of Our Motherland* is a collection of stories which address the socio-political decadence in Nigeria. The author mostly employs the eye-of-a first witness method in narrating the pains of a nation. Emenyonu draws on the consequence of the military regime in chronicling the problems of misrule in the country. He demonstrates this vividly in the story titled "The People's Chief". The cosmos of this

story is an era of military dictatorship in the country. In actual fact, the state is nicknamed 'Pillar of Peace', a satire on the affairs in the country. The Head of State is paying a courtesy visit to the state. Therefore, the state needs a befitting face-lift. With all the pomp and pageantry, the author laments:

But things were not normal in our midst. All around, people were suffering untold hardships. Civil servants had not been paid for five months, teachers for much longer. Market women suffered the harshest effects. They sold on credit till there was nothing else to sell and no means of replenishment. Life was becoming drab and misery-personified (23).

Also, in "The Night before Election", while Obioma Ebe, Political Correspondent for *The National Spectator*, asks Alhaji Bako Idowu a question about the vision of his leadership, his answer provides a historical overview of the military intervention in Nigerian politics:

Six years after our independence, the military seized power from an inept civilian leadership and its irresponsible bureaucracy whose endemic corruption had destroyed our national economy and ruined the populace. The military came in to provide the much-needed antidote. But over time, the military had reconciled itself to malignant corruption and added on lawlessness and corrosive abuse of influence and power (145-146).

It is ironic that one of the major reasons adduced for the take-over of power from civilians by the military was usually the mismanagement of the economy. Yet, all economic and social indications show a dismal performance of the military establishment in power. Therefore, this has underscored the failure of the military to deliver its own promise. Military rule has thus impoverished the Nigerian people economically and has not performed better than its civilian counterparts.

Debo Kotun's *Abiku* chronicles the incongruities of the military political culture proportionally antithetical to the administrative protocols promised and anticipated each time soldiers commission their political inauguration. *Abiku* is, undoubtedly, an artistic rendition of "actual and quasi-historical materials from Nigerian life" (Titi Adepitan, 2002: 1). It illuminates the melancholy of the Nigeria's harrowing experience during the 'cursed' age of military supremacy in the country. Posturing as a sacred cow, the military head of state, General Bukha, perfectly eliminates the journalist, Lade Ogawa, who is uncompromisingly hell-bent on exposing the complicity of the head of state in "the disappearance of two-point-eight billion naira from the account of the National Oil Corporation" (*Abiku*, 16). This repressive agenda extends to the regime of Major General

Raheem Babasa, whose regime tags the journalists "the government's worst enemies" (17). The soldiers prove their expertise in bringing the country into the abyss of tribalism, a form of social unrest. This is tragically absurd of a leader claiming to have come to maintain political order. The text reveals that the long reign of the uniform men has made a mess running the country (Oluwole Coker, 2006). They are portrayed as "obsessed thieves in charge of the national treasure... a few that have the balls of the majority in their iron-fisted grip, and are always eager to squeeze" (*Abiku*, p.361). As a matter of fact, a leadership that fails to stem the tidal waves of political brinkmanship, tribalism, nepotism, corruption and iron-handedness cannot be painted with a Morse befitting an image other than 'aberration'.

Ben Okri's artistic mission is to examine the trouble with the nation "with a new third eye" (Brenda Cooper, 1998:67). *Songs of Enchantment*, the sequel to his prize winning *The Famished Road*, narrates the elaborate, nightmarish displays that are part of

quotidian existence in Nigeria, which is shown to be a phantasmagoria. The actions and inactions of the people who populate the world of the novel reveal demonstrations of random cruelty and pomp, fetishes of abusive power, bizarre magic, etc - all leading to a narration of pessimistic, postmodern characterization of Nigeria, marked by its excessive symbolization of arbitrary authority. It is a regime of violence, an entire obscene cosmology, from which there is no exit route. What mark the political climate of the society are extreme material scarcity, uncertainty, inertia and arbitrary power. However, the author does not fail to expose the vices of the governed too. The text is rife with indices of recurring defeat, dogged endurance and political docility/passivity.

Surprisingly, the binary oppositions of dominance and resistance have melted away in the milieu. The state is thus characterized by relations of disturbing conviviality between the ruler and the governed.

Okri, in the text, has pushed the Nigerian tradition of social realism in new directions. This is done by using the voice of an Abiku boy (Azaro) who inhabits a fantastic middle territory between the living and the dead. The inner world is populated both by the corrupt politicians of the time and by a pandemonium of monsters, spirits and ghosts. Azaro bears witness to this world of misery and suffering, as he is tormented by poverty, humiliation, malnutrition, illness and hunger. He has learnt very early in the story to distrust the Party of the Rich, after they had almost poisoned the whole neighborhood with the rotten milk they offered as a proof of friendship to the poor. His suspicions are confirmed later on, when a group of beggars suffer severe flogging at the hands of the thugs of the party. According to Maggi Phillips (1997: 170):

Despite the passage of the historical events, Okri's message is clear: the nation's genuine independence, like the

complete humanness of the abiku, is yet to be achieved.

Politicians of the country are denounced, and their corruption and ineptitude are railed against in Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* and *The Interpreters*; Achebe's *A Man of the People*; Femi Osofisan's *Who is Afraid of Tai Solarin* and Okigbo's "Paths of Thunder" (which offers a recreation of Nigerian politicians' hollowness and charlatanism). In *A Man of the People*, a socio-political satire, Odili, the intellectual protagonist, rather than succumb to cynicism and nihilism, believes that the decadent system can be internally cleansed. However, the result is an odyssey of naïveté, graft, corruption and political ineptitude. He is idealistic and superficial. The would-be democrat reformer himself is hardly fired by altruism and the dream of heroic glory. He is a victim of moral myopia, becoming like the populace he despises. The novel explores the indecency of the politicians and the desperation with which they desire wealth. Odili is a prototype of the Nigerian politicians in this regard. The text touches the ingratitude and the misuse of opportunities and privileges by the Nigerian politicians. The world of the novel is that of corrupt and rich politicians who have not one atom of decency in their persons; they worship at the altar of money. Therefore, civil rule is not endorsed by Achebe in the novel. He therefore enlists soldiers to put an end to the rot and mess. However, Army coup proves to be mere cosmetics. Later events in the country reveal this to be a controversial denouement. The military therefore are depicted as having no solution to the problems of the nation.

Soyinka's *Before the Black Out* also rejects the political class in the governance of the nation. What the audience/reader comes across in the play is a cornucopia of high spirits that serve both as an antidote and an indicator to everything ambiguous, angst

ridden, cynical, difficult and depressing in the Nigerian political scene. In fact, the play presents an alarming scenario of disaster. Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* also refuses to enlist the politicians in the governance of the nation. Rahman Lejoka Brown joins politics because he wants to be popular. He also wants to have a share of the national wealth which he refers to as the 'national chin-chin', and he intends to have a 'mouthful of it'.

Nigerian Literature and the Failure of Academic and Religious Leaders in Governance

Satirical denunciation of bad leadership in Nigeria does not spare the academia. There is a seeming consensus in post-independence Nigerian writings that the intellectuals would do greater damage to the nation than any other political class if allowed to rule. In Soyinka's *The Road*, Professor has a problem with the church funds kept in his custody. This is revealed in the conversation between Samson and Salubi:

*Samson: Where are you born that you don't know
Professor?*

*Salubi: I only know there was the matter of church funds.
Did he go to prison? (62).*

The above conversation points to the fact that corruption, mismanagement and misappropriation of funds which are known to exist in public and private sectors of the society have crept into religious bodies and academia. Professor is obsessed with the idea of the essence of death, while the nation demands urgent solutions to unemployment, road accidents and thuggery.

In Zulu Sofola's *The Sweet Trap*, the intellectuals degenerate to such pettiness as

to invite thugs to disrupt the social lives of their colleagues. Such a vice is also identifiable in Bode Sowande's *The Night Before*. In this text, Sowande presents a grim situation in which the Vice Chancellor and the Senate are unable to settle a minor problem on the campus and have to call in the anti-riot policemen, who, out of nervousness, maul down helpless students instead of at most firing into the air to scare them. Soyinka's *Madmen and the Specialists* also foregrounds a bizarre image of inhumanity perpetuated by an intellectual, who is the embodiment of perverted intellectualism, exposed to weaknesses, criminal propensities and cannibalism. He combines his knowledge of medicine with secret intelligent service to destroy whatever hope man has in survival. The picture of the intellectual given in these Nigerian post independence plays is that of an individual who cannot be trusted with the governance of the nation.

Lakunle in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* and Bambulu in Ene Henshaw's *This is our Chance* create a communication barrier between themselves and other people. They are also egocentric. Bambulu is the only educated person in the village, but he wants to know from the illiterate Ajugo whether the composition of a certain concoction is miotic, pyretic, caustic, mydriatic, hypnotic, anaesthetic or narcotic!

Lakunle's pseudo-intellectualism is far worse than Bambulu's. He has a misconception of civilization and is thereby capable of disrupting everything a nation stands for. His idea of civilization is how to eat with forks and knives from breakable plates and how to dance waltz and foxtrot in night clubs. Of course, to him, bride-price should be a thing of the past, and newspapers should carry pictures of seductive girls! These are all false values, and whoever exhibits them either does not have a clear idea of leadership or is

completely ignorant of it.

Records of priests and priestesses who give some forms of leadership to their people are available in the country. Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* offers an acid test for gauging the relevance of the religious class as rulers in post independence Nigeria. For instance, the Kadiye lives well in the midst of famine caused by floods. His skin is tender, smooth and well-preserved. He is a selfish and careless man who perpetuates a system which makes possible the inequality between the affluent priestly class and the indigent ordinary people. Oyin Ogunba (1975), in an insightful and extended analysis of the text, testifies to this assertion:

The Kadiye, deeply sunk in avarice and gluttony, is the kind of spiritual leader who enjoys the perquisites of office to the fullest. He himself observes that whether it rains all the year round or not, people still die and give birth to children. Since he performs burial and circumcision rites (for fees) for members of the community, this means he will always be able to live far above the level of the masses and keep exploiting them (20).

The Kadiye, the ghoul who keeps preying on the innocent swamp dwellers, does not possess messianic qualities; thus, he cannot be a reliable political leader. Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, proves that Brother Jero, a lecherous charlatan of a prophet cannot be a true leader. He is a man with two faces, one for private life and the other for public appearance. He is a debtor and a self-confessed rogue. *Jero's Metamorphoses*, the sequel to *The Trial of Brother Jero*, confirms further the vices and foibles of the fake prophet. Now, Brother Jero takes prophesy as a real business and transacts his spiritual businesses with more confidence and precision. A man of this caliber cannot lead the nation.

Another Frustrated Hope: Nigerian Literature and the Failure of Traditional Leadership in Governance

In pre-independence Nigeria, traditional rulers, like Obi, Emirs, Oba, Ogbuefi, and the like, were in control of the administration of their respective communities. They provided the leadership on which the era survived. But what is their worth in the governance of the post-independence Nigerian societies? Traditional rulers are shown to be political failures in Nigeria. For instance, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo, the title holder, is depicted as a choleric, impatient and egocentric community leader who oversteps the bounds of reason. He is rash, paranoiac, extreme and obsessive. He is neither a reflective nor introspective leader. Also, Ezeulu, a chief priest of Umuaro, in *Arrow of God*, fails as a ruler because he is too rigid, dogged and untactful. He unwittingly acts against the Umuaro society that he is supposed to defend, thereby bringing disaster on himself and the society at large. He lacks the will and power to balance the demands of his office with his own personal interests.

In Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, Baroka, the Bale of Ilujinle, is not only egocentric, he is antithetical to progress. He is thereby an obstacle to the demands of the new age. He cannot guarantee efficient and effective leadership. He does not possess the requirements for leadership in the spirit of the new age, but he clings to it tenaciously. He is also rapacious and voluptuous. The tensions of the age have made him a destroyer. Sidi, the jewel of Ilujinle is 'seized' by Baroka, the 'God's deputy'. When one gives a pearl or a jewel to a lion, it gets destroyed by the latter. The traditional ruler (Baroka) cannot be the desired leader for the country because he indulges in corrupt practices and bribery.

In order to foil the public works' attempt to build a railway through Ilujinle, which would have brought some modernizing influences to the village and thereby challenge, to some extent, the conservative authority of the Bale, Baroka resorts to bribery. He also feigns impotence to entrap the innocent Sidi.

Henshaw's *This is our Chance* further disqualifies the traditional leadership in the country. Damba, the traditional ruler of Koloro, is anti-education. To him, education is corrosive to tradition, and the sanity of a people depends on tradition. He sees himself not only as an executor of tradition but as tradition itself. He hates those who want to pervert his kingdom with new and heretical ideas that are likely to upset the whole of its tradition, peace and dignity. Hence, the traditional institution cannot offer the required political leadership in the nation because traditional rulers are depicted to be power drunk, bribe-offering, self-important and die-hard rulers who see leadership as a birth right and would do anything to keep it to themselves.

Biyi Bandele-Thomas's novels, despite the authors' diasporic status, always dwell on the problem of governance in his country. In an interview with Neil Kortendar, he bares his mind on the trouble with his homeland:

we had the misfortune of being led by people devoid any sort of integrity, people without any sense of leadership, people whose only obligation, it seems has always been to line their pockets - and that's the major problem with Nigeria(2001 :95).

It can therefore be asserted that Bandele- Thomas's novels are fictional working out of his concerns in some of his non-fictional statements like the one above. He avers that Nigeria's leaders have always placed their own interests before those of the country. His *The Sympathetic Undertakes and Other Dreams*, for instance, reveals the misdeeds of

a traditional ruler in Nigeria. He is depicted as rapacious and voluptuous, a destroyer and looter of national wealth, who indulges in corrupt practices and bribery and dehumanizes his subjects. While the masses wallow in poverty and penury, the traditional ruler purchases sophisticated cars which are worth millions of dollars. Commenting on one of those cars, the narrator declares:

Among other luxury features the car possessed facilities for a bath, a mini-swimming pool, satellite television, a bed installed with phone and fax machine; it was totally bullet-proof, and, to ice the cakes fully remote controlled... and, also, there were only three of its type in the world. One was owned by an American billionaire, another by an Arab oil Sheikh and the third by a Nigerian traditional chief (The Sympathetic Undertakers, p.103).

Narrating the Misdeeds of Nigerian Youths in Governance

The fictional searchlight for political leadership in Nigerian literature does not focus only on Nigerians at home, it includes the Nigerian Diaspora. Unfortunately, the Nigerian youths both at home and in the Diaspora are also revealed as lacking the requisite qualities for sustainable governance in the country. Biyi Bandele's *The Street*, a surreal and picaresque novel, satirically shows the vices of the undependable, unserious, comic Nigerian youths in a multi-racial community in Britain (Brixton High Street). In the text, a group of Nigerian youths are paraded as unserious and perverted individuals. Among them are Mide, the bookseller who moonlights as a stand-up comedian and Abiodun, the Heckler, who wittily taunts the sandwich-board preachers outside the tube station. He spends most of his time berating the various sandwich-board preachers. Both of them are sent to the best schools the country (Britain) could offer, but all is in vain. They engage in excessive alcoholic consumption, chain-smoking, flirting and loafing.

They are mostly odd and very funny characters, who engage in grotesque activities and eccentric behaviors. Majority of them are failures. For instance, Osie says, "the golden fleece is elusive" (50). Even Nehushta, with her fiancé (Ron), robs a theatre twice at gunpoint. Actually, the images of Nigerian youths depicted in the novel are those of psychopath, paranoia, depression and dementia. Brixton High Street and its inhabitants are described in the text thus:

Busy and frenetic, packed with the ever-present floating cast of the walking wounded and the clinically Undead; stricken men whose conscience hovered above them like flies over a banquet of dung; damaged souls haunted by memories of past transgressions and paralyzed with guilt for sins not yet committed (11).

Also, in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, Obi, Okonkwo's grandson, a graduate of a British University, tries hard but cannot fight against corruption, inefficient and other social vices. He is full of contradictions. Although he has fine ideas, when it is time to act, he crumbles because he lacks moral strength and conviction.

In Abayomi Awelewa's *Dilemma of an African Prince*, we encounter a new group of young Nigerian leaders represented by Obalolu, the heir apparent to the throne of Onigbadi. He is young, vibrant, educated and exposed. He is a lawyer by training, and one expects that as a 'learned' person, he is the right choice for the community as the leader. But this group proves not to be capable and ready to assume the role of leadership the society is thrusting on them. Obalolu's half-brother, Obadele, another prince, leads an attack against the elders, pushing that he be made king instead of the 'exiled' prince and chosen heir. Jagunmolu's son, Ajadi, a university undergraduate, is a cult member and a rapist. The future Queen, Iyun, is already infected with "a dreaded HIV, an impediment

to her role as the mother of the community. Where then lies the hope of the society at large, symbolized by the Igbadi society?

To worsen the matters, the protagonist, Obalolu, loses his sense of self-identity and esteem. In spite of his awareness of tradition, he goes ahead to impregnate an alien woman, Florentina, an African American, who later bears him a son. Upon his return to Nigeria, he is faced with a Queen-to-be already a carrier of the deadly virus. The custom stipulates that he has to marry the chosen bride if he must climb the throne of his forefathers. The complex situation presents a dilemma that offers him no respite whichever way the die is cast. He finally chooses to marry Iyun and accept Florentina's baby and herself into the kingdom. However, it is glaring that greater challenges lie ahead of this young man whose leadership has been fraught with myriads of problems right from the outset. Some of these problems are self-induced, while some are societal. Whichever way the dilemma is resolved, the motif is that there is leadership crisis in Nigeria, and Awelewa's *Dilemma of an African Prince* has critically endorsed this claim.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has revealed that post-independence Nigerian writers, in their individual rights, are skillful artists who project their political messages without vitiating their arts. They maintain a nice balance between matters and manners, and they are political artists who are, first of all, artists. The intersection of matter and manner may be a reason why post-independence Nigerian writings continue to have relevance and interest for current-day readers. The various rulers in the country, as reflected in post independence Nigeria literature, are failures because of their trivialization of culture and

lack of culture compass and a political system that are rooted in autochthonous culture. What recur in the texts are tremors of anguished souls, lamenting the fate of their country, Nigeria, the so-called giant of Africa now reduced to a paltry midget. The texts can be described as tragedies of the traumatized collective soul of a country, due to betrayal of polity, the asphyxiation of democracy. Nigerian writers, at home and in the Diaspora, have always given vent to their nostalgic emotions in literature, that is, a desire for a reenactment of the idyllic age of the country. They use their texts to reprimand, castigate, lampoon, satirize and cajole their homeland, its people and their national and cultural idiosyncrasies and maladies. Even most Nigerian writers in exile/Diaspora keep on singing the unpalatable dirges in foreign lands, a demystification of a taboo that it is forbidden to recount one's woes in a foreign land. One motif that runs through the works examined is that Nigerian rulers have lost their senses of patriotism, communal responsibility, pedigree pride, attachment and cultural duty.

The texts reveal that the ideal dreams of independence in the country have sizzled out. The only ambition of the new rulers is to move into the spaces vacated by the colonizers without restructuring the political, social and cultural arrangement left behind by them. According to Frantz Fanon (1963), "each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it" (166). Nigerian writers have actually met this expectation by their disenchantment with the socio-cultural and political happenings around them. They are therefore the awakening conscience of the people. Their principal objective is not only to inform, educate and entertain, but to equally change the society. As the intelligentsia and the spokespersons of their people, the writers are therefore responsible for the conscientization of the masses. The mood of the writings

is that of personal sorrow over the political trouble bedeviling their natal mother, Nigeria, their motherland.

The literary search for social and political changes that can transform Nigerian life has revealed that the citizens must determine not only to achieve victory over imperialism but also to triumph over hunger, diseases, despair and misgovernance. What the country requires therefore is a leadership that recognizes the problems at the roots of the national life, a leadership which decides to risk its will and reputation in solving the myriads of problems bedeviling the country. The writers are indeed sensitive and perceptive observers of the life and socio-political events in the country. They have, through their literary works, unmasked the masquerades in Nigerian contemporary leadership and governance. They keep on conscientizing Nigerian masses to rethink their purpose as a nation in the twenty-first century, their sense of direction as a race and the true meaning of patriotism and national service. Through literary works, post independence Nigerian writers are admonishing their fellow country (wo)men to avoid the tendency whereby all the woes and misfortunes of the country are attributed to the colonialists. Rather, they should consider the impacts of the neocolonial rulers, their fratricidal avarice and the in-grown machinations on the problems of the country. Also to be considered is the issue of the frightening nonchalant acceptance of the country's inglorious national sodomy as a divine heritage, immutable and irreversible. In fact, the writer is the solution that Nigeria needs at this crucial moment to tell the truth. Where the rulers have failed, the artists seem to have succeeded.

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