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LEADERSHIP QUESTION AND THE MASSES' CULPABILITY: A CRITICAL RE-APPRAISAL OF NIYI OSUNDARE'S *THE STATE VISIT* AND PAUL UGBADE'S *OUR SON THE MINISTER*

KUFRE A. AKPAN
Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University
Obio Akpa Campus, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria
kufreakpan@aksu.edu.ng +2347069676843

&
MONICA UDOETTE
Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University
Obio Akpa Campus, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria
msudoette@gmail.com +2348038021551

Abstract

This paper interrogates the masses' culpability in the Nigerian leadership reality in Niyi Osundare's The State Visit and Paul Ugbede's Our Son the Minister. The paper notes that Nigerian literary canvass is replete with discourses that primarily attribute the socio-political impasse bedeviling the postcolonial Nigerian nation to leadership inanities and, Nigerian writers from inception have depicted this with benumbing verisimilitude in their various creative enterprises. However, these writers have consistently glossed over and ominously exonerate the 'followership' from the ruinous albatross hanging on the nation's neck. It is against the backdrop of this gap that this paper seeks to bridge. The paper adopts New Historicism as theoretical standpoint, and through a close reading and analysis of some extrapolations from the primary texts, the paper questions the canonised literary paradigm of scapegoating only the leadership class for the wreckage that has swallowed the Nigerian nation. The paper concludes that the followership should also be brought to literary spotlight as monstrous accomplices in the sadism that has engulfed the country.

Keywords: Nationhood, Followership, Leadership, Socio-political impasse, Nigerian writers.

Introduction

Since Nigeria's attainment of nationhood, the Nigerian literary and critical spaces have been flooded with discourses revolving around the gnawing leadership inanities, believed to be responsible for the myriads of socio-political and economic challenges that have suffocated the Nigerian humanity. The Nigerian literary forbears, represented by Chinua Achebe, set the platform in his early works, written after Nigeria's independence. And since then, scapegoating the leadership in the Nigerian woeful situation has become a canonized paradigm consolidated and sustained by subsequent generations of Nigerian writers. In different forms, technique and genres, they have consistently deployed their arts to vent virulent attacks and indicting satires on the leadership elite, whom they describe as monstrous gladiators in the wreckage of Nigerian nation. Thus, the general ambience of their works is that of total disgust for Nigerian leaders.

In the realm of literary criticism, Nigerian scholars and critics adopt various theoretical models and concept to express their disenchantment with Nigerian leaders. For example, Chinua Achebe constantly believes that the country's problems are as a result of maladroit management of its resources by corruption-ridden administrators. In his seminal monograph *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Achebe avers that: "The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else…Nigeria has been less fortunate in its leadership" (1). The ineptitude of Nigerian leaders, before the present near-political stability, is believed to have been responsible for the endless and aimless drifting of the country under either a blatantly corrupt civilian leadership or an autocratic and despotic military junta.

Grace Okereke, attributes the socio-political problems ravaging the entire continent of Africa to the continued flirtation with the Europeans after independence. According to her "the socio-political problems in Africa is the outcome of Europe's parasitic and predatory control of the political, economic and cultural destiny through the new African leaders who made themselves available in the oppressive position evacuated by the colonisers" (138). However, David Udoinwang and Chinenye Amonyeze seem to differ from Okereke when they state that blaming the Europeans for African woes has since lost its currency and should no longer be tenable. According to them: "The excuse of colonialism is seductive but ought to have lost currency by now if the Black race had determinedly risen from its basic state like other formerly colonized or suppressed peoples in other continents"(160).

Bayo Okunade's position is that, "political ideals as to how society can be organised and ruled to the best advantage of all, hardly entered into the calculation of the Nigerian ruling class" (20). Billy Dudley is of the opinion that "politics in Nigeria is not about alternative policies but about the control over men and resources." (23).

Obaro Ikimi blames it on the intractable ethnic problems in Nigeria. According to him, "the problem is indeed a national question around which a great deal of our national life revolves, and in the name of which all sorts of crimes have been perpetrated" (20). The author believes that leadership crises and every other socio-political problem in the country are attributed to her diverse ethnicities.

James Okpiliya and Kufre Akpan in their interrogation of armed conflicts and causes of insecurity in Nigeria reveal that "… Boko Haram activities in Nigeria may not have been prompted by the rejection of secular modernity or the drive to establish a sharia system in the country, but a creation of the leadership class, power seekers and corrupt politicians in the country who are bent on gaining greater control over the government and resources of the state" (51). There are other sundry positions canvassed by some literary critics to explain the misfortune of the Nigerian state, which could not be accommodated in this paper.

David Udoinwang and Kufre Akpan in their examination of leadership question in African literature summarily note that "African states, even when found in the midst of resources that are everywhere, ironically sit wretched and beggarly, bowl in hand, yawning in hunger, begging for the very things that are more than enough before them". (348)

However, it has been noted that, in their compositional strategies and critical trajectories, Nigerian writers and critics have been consciously and curiously demonstrating inexplicable caution in also exploring the failure of the citizenry or the followers in providing critical followership to the leaders, which has been seen as a useful imperative and catalyst for good leadership and development. This, to some extent, has created a misrepresentation and a kind of slippery slope in levelling charges on the leaders as orchestrators of the ruins of Nigerian nationhood. Thus, this paper attempts a shift from the seemingly unending scholastic debates on leadership, as though such wouldbring good governance that has eluded the country,to solution-specific examinationof curious, active, critical, interrogative and participatory followership as an imperative for good governance. Following this, the paper is vehement in its position thatjust like leadership, Nigeria is also burdened by followership deficit.

The departure, in this paper, from the conventional leadership discourses that replete Nigerian literary and critical space, is also premised on the fact that, at this stage of the Nigeria's socio-political life, Nigerian literature and its criticism should throw up more shifts in its artistic curve, especially in the areas of themes and other preoccupations. It is for this reason that Nigerian writers and critics should begin to question the little or no progress in the Nigerian leadership realities, despite the quantum of literary and critical works that have been churned out to engage the issue. It is high time literary and critical scholars shifted their literary and creative searchlight away from leadership and begin to interrogate followership as critical partner in renegotiating a workable nationhood. This, to a greater extent, will help writers evolve new templates to redirect and sustain the hopes and aspirations of the Nigerian people.

As noted earlier in this paper, critical followership is indispensable in the making of successful leadership. That makes it disturbing, especially when it is noted that followership is under emphasised in almost every forum of leadership discourses. It is indisputable that this group of citizens constitutes the largest bloc in every society and, given this strength of number, should wield a lot of power in determining/constituting leadership, moulding, shaping and checkmating leadership, and thereby stemming the tide of bad governance (Ogbonna et al, 65).

Thus, this paper establishes that most of the socio-political challenges in the country linger because the citizenry is bereft of critical followership. David Udoinwang and Kufre Akpan aver that: "Worsened by the existing phenomenon of socio-economic disparities in society, with the ever-widening gap between „the haves" and „the have-nots", there arises a gnawing atmosphere of panic and fears for the present and succeeding generation" (187).This is noticed in Achebe's *A Man of the People* when the people unabashedly become cynical, apathetic and rationalise the corrupt tendencies of the leaders, instead of holding them accountable. "Let them eat" (116) is their unfortunate summation:

> After all, when white men used to do all the eating, did we commit suicide? Of course not. And where is the all-powerful white man today? He came, he ate and he went. But we are still around. The important thing is to stay alive…and

> only those who survive can have it. Besides, if you survive, who knows? It may be your turn to eat tomorrow your son may bring home your share (116).

The above excerpt exemplifies a very unfortunate situation where the followers are not only apathetic and complacent, but also throws up some baseless premises to rationalise the pilfering of the common wealth of the people by the leaders.

This seems to be where Nigerian problem actually lies. At another instance, the narrator is disillusioned by the unfortunate inertia and complacency shown by the citizens on the issue of leadership. "Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they will ask you if you thought a sensible man will spit out juicy morsel that good fortune had placed in his mouth" (2).The manifestation of this height of complacency, apathy and cynicism on governance only help in instituting an unfortunate cyclic chain of misgovernance since every follower is a potential leader. According to Monica Udoette and Kufre Akpan, "in this way, the expectations become fundamental components of our personalities" (56).This is because one cannot give what one does not have. It is for this reason that John Ayoade posits that: "Politics is too important to be left to politicians…. Government is prone to crime and a government devoid of citizen control is a potential criminal" (55). It is also against the backdrop of Ayoade's position that this paper establishes that Nigerian citizens have been so acquiesced and had long abandoned leadership in the hands of the leaders. Therefore, the paper posits that to achieve good leadership, critical followership is needed for political transformation and taming the menace of those in the saddle of leadership.

The event of July20, 2021 at Bosunu District of West Gonia municipality in Ghana, exemplifies the role of the citizenry as indispensable partners in the making of an ideal nation. Factchech Hub, a blogging firm in Ghana reports that youths of the aforementioned district in Ghana rejected bags of rice donated by a federal legislator and, instead, asked for jobs and improved standard of living, which were part of his campaign manifestos. According to the blogger, Bosonu youth were heard chanting thus: "The era of promise and fail by politicians and political parties in Busunu is over. We didn't ask you to give us rice, you promised us jobs and not rice and we have gone beyond the rice" (info@factcheckhub.com). The above statement is suffused with acute disillusionment on the part of the people and, at the same time, creates an ambiance of disenchantment with the leaders. And until the citizenry rises from their habitual inertia and demand fordividends of leadership, instead of accepting crumbs fromtheir leaders, the country will continue to be a perpetual flux and will slowly but steadily sink in every measurable height.

The Nigerian citizenry seems not to have embraced this evolving consciousness in Ghana. The Nigerian people, especially the youth, are still being plagued by a malaise that incubates ethnocentric, tribal and other socio-cultural considerations at the expense of critical citizenry. Unlike the Ghanaian youth, almost all Nigerian youths seem to have sold their souls for peanuts and few cups of rice, and have allowed themselves to be used as political utility and stooges to amass political power. Many blame this on poverty but according to Lawrence Onwuegbuchunam: "…the biggest problems evident in Nigerian leadership and followership is anchored in their erroneous worldviews, beliefs, and assumptions on the meaning and the

context of leadership; worldviews that detach and distant values and servanthood from the meaning and the context of leadership, which translate to misconduct, unethical behaviour, and leadership crisis" (2). Joy Nwiyi and Monica Udoette equally state that: "This cultural configuration dictates, to a large extent, what is conventional, moral, disdainful or otherwise among members of the community" (8).

This fractured worldview, to some extent, has sustained a very complex cycle of developmental challenges and, if left unchecked, its replication could assume an alarming proportion. Thus, According to Kufre Akpan, "this development has continued to inspirewriters in every genre, and in diverse approaches, they have poignantly deployed their imaginative visions in exploring this universal dilemma (28).This is because, according to Uwem Affiah, "Every work of art is the product of an artist living in a particular place and time. Social forces inescapably shape the work of art" (284).Thus, Emmanuel Ogbonna et al advises that, to bridge the leadership vacuum, "…the followers should step up their game by actively involving in politics-be available in and for politics, curious, concerned, critical about the way they are governed" (66). In other words, Ogbonna seems to agree that the solution to leadership problem in Nigeria seem to lie in critical followership. Additionally, for critical followership to be sustainable, the Nigerian society essentiallyrequires vibrant youths who are committed to speaking truth to power andbeing factual crusaders of the democratic ideal. This scenario ultimately manifests in the creation of assertive citizens actively agitating for positive changes and development. Thus, Monica Udoette agrees that "self-assertion equals self-development" (77)

Theoretical Background

As stated in the abstract, this paper is anchored on the theoretical framework of New Historicism. As a critical model, New Historicism draws from textual and extra-textual materials in the interrogation of meanings in the text. The theory emerged to challenge earlier theories like Structuralism and Deconstruction which tried doggedly to erase history, politics, the author and his world from literature and literary criticism. Thus, Idaevbor Bello posits that "in spite of the variegated approach adopted by new historicists, the text's relationship with history is of intrinsic value in constructing its meaning" (139). Bello's position echoes Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle viewpoint that "literary texts are embedded within the social and economic circumstances in which they are produced and consumed" (119). In other words, Bello, Bennett and Royle seem to agree that literary text derives its live, preoccupations and form from the historical epoch and circumstances that birth it. It also means that the socio-political and economic conditions underpinning a particular period and locale affords authentication of meanings derived from texts emanated from the said period and locale.It is against this backdrop that M.H Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham aver that "new historicists conceive of a literary text as "situated" within the totality of the institutions, social practices, discourses that constitute the culture of a particular time and place, and with which the literary text interacts as both a product and a producer of cultural energies and codes" (244). Arising from this, Idaevbor further submits that "It is, therefore, clear that for the new historicists, the reader's understanding of a literary text is made easier by an understanding of the conditions under which the writer operates" (140).

Therefore, the term New Historicism refers to the reawakened interest in examining and placing literary works in their historical and political contexts. One of the basic assumptions that underlie this critical practice is to debunk the ahistorical approach to literature which, to many, seems to lead in the direction of philosophical abstractions, uncertainty and meaninglessness of discourse. New Historicism is based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and that of the critic in a specific cultural milieu.

New Historicism is an eclectic critical model, as it covers a wide range of approaches to the study of literature. Jenny Taylor establishes that "the theory cannot be described as a unified approach or position, but more a cluster of concerns which have been developed and elaborated in diverse ways-indeed the reluctance to adopt an overarching narrative of its own methodology has become one of its features" (484). It is often in conjunction with feminism, and also includes a questioning or even subversive view of social class, politics, gender, cultural institutions. It interrogates the experiences of the down-trodden, the poor women, and the dispossessed, and examines their lives in relation to the society and power. John Peck and Martin Coyle posit that "it overlaps with Feminism and Marxist criticism in taking a questioning view of the past, looking at the production and status of literary text" (183).

In view of the tenets of New Historicism explicated above, it is obvious that to undertake a result-oriented discourse on the subject of this paper using the plays under consideration, the application of New Historicism as theoretical framework becomes inevitable. The reason arises from the fact that when the subject of this paper is examined in line with the events of the texts, and when placed within the historical, socio-political and economic contexts of Nigeria, it will certainly create a universe that is realistic of the Nigerian situation. This is a significant edge that the theory has over other theories in this paper.

The Writer and the Burden of Followership in Osundare's *The State Visit* and Ugbede's *Our Son the Minister*

Niyi Osundare is a household name in the Nigerian literary and critical spaces. He is one of the foremost Nigerian poets, playwrights, linguists and literary critics. Like every other post-independence Nigerian writer, his creative and critical enterprises are associated with political and environmental activism. He is so committed and noted for always demonstrating unambiguous courage in firing literary missiles on Nigerian leaders, for instituting corruption that has been adjudged as responsible for the crumbling state of the Nigerian nation. It is for this reason that he offers a hot satirical treatment of corrupt, dictatorial and authoritarian leadership in Nigeria in *The State Visit*. He vehemently, through his characters, indicts the Nigerian leaders for the endemic and incurable corruption that has almost plunged Nigerian nation into an abyss and its attendant effects of squalor and poverty that daily strangulate the masses.

The State Visit re-enacts a realistic Nigerian leadership and political universe, where the leaders are endemically corrupt and possessed with incurable squandamania mentality on governance. The play revolves around the leaders of Yankeland, an imaginary country in Africa, and their brazen corruption and authoritarianism in running the affairs of the country.

During a cabinet meeting, the leader of Yankeland, known in this play as "Head" announces the visit of the Head of Wilama country, and as a very powerful Head of State, he emphasises the need to put up adequate preparation in his honour. To achieve this, the maize fund that was borrowed to cushion the effect of drought that that had ravaged Yankeland the previous year is misappropriated for the state visit. This leads to the resignation of the Minister of Finance who suddenly becomes a lone voice objecting the trading of people's welfare to the visit of an autocrat. The play produces a biting and dramatic satire on political authoritarianism and ignorance, which the author holds responsible for the backwardness of many African countries (Adegbite, 4).

It is noted that the aptness of the events of this drama text, like other post-independence literary works, has thrown up an upsurge of critics, who readily associate the corrupt, eating and sharing tendencies of some of the characters in the text with Nigerian leaders. For instance, Edward Imoh in his article "Satire as a Parable of an Ailing Nation: Lessons from Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*", attributes the ailing growth and development of some African states to corrupt and tyrannical leadership. At the end of this work, Imoh does not only advocate an enthronement of good and effective democratic leadership in Nigeria, but also push for ideological commitment among Nigerian playwrights. Tobalase Adegbite in his paper "Corruption and Social Protest in Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit* reveals that the major focus of Nigerian dramatists immediately after independence has been how to address the gross leadership failure in the country. The author posits that despite several attempts at governance, Nigerian leaders have not still got it right on how rightly the country should be governed. Zuhmboshi Nsuh in his examination of Osundare's *The State Visit* defends the premise that the African post-colony is retrogressing in development because of the kind of political leadership that cropped up in Africa after most African countries gained political independence. In a paper entitled: "Political Sychophantism and State Governance: A Political Discourse Analysis Reading of Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*", Nsuh submits that in this play there is an acute lack of visionary and patriotic leadership that can lay the foundation for meaningful development and progress in African States. This paper may not accommodate other sundry critical scholars and their paradigmatic scapegoating of Nigerian leaders in the political and leadership inanities that now define the country.

To some extent, this paper aligns with the above critical positions, and even with others not mentioned here, in indicting Nigerian leaders for orchestrating the sadism that has engulfed the country. However, to a greater extent, the paper is vehemently critical of the ominous silence of those scholars in underscoring the culpability of the Nigerian followers in ruining the country, even when it is very glaring. Thus, the paper diverges from the canonised critical tradition of blaming the depth of Nigerian absurdities on the leaders while the followers are curiously and ominously exonerated. Through analysis of the text, this paper indicts both the leaders and followers as ominous collaborators in the asphyxiation of the Nigerian state. The paper further establishes that, until the citizens provide critical followership, effective leadership may continue to elude Nigeria.

Interestingly, Rebecca Usoro and Monica Udoette rationalize "*the literary artist as one who interrogates socio-cultural, religious, political and historical experiences with the sole purpose of*

reconstructing and revitalising the narrative. In the process, the writer mirrors the inter-relationship between human nature and the society" (138). The above locus is indicative of Osundare and Ugbede's creative inventiveness. In the text, the reader quickly encounters a disoriented masses that have characteristically lapsed into dangerous and suicidal complacency and are set on a self-destruct, as they subvert the rules of governance against themselves. This is evidence in the Journalist, who is supposed to deploy his reportage skills and expose obnoxious policies of the government working against the people. On the contrary, the he has turned a minion for looting by accepting financial inducement to write all forms of lies to promote a corrupt leadership. The maize fund borrowed to cushion the effect of hunger, following a draught that had devastated the country is diverted to host the President of Wilama. Minister of Finance remarks that it is now a pattern to continually divert funds originally meant for poverty eradication or projects for frivolities without considering what consequences their actions will trigger. ". .. It has happened before. Remember the money for our water Dam project was diverted to the funeral ofour leader's grandfather. After all it was the people who ate the food and drank the wine' (19). Like the water Dam project, the journalist is drafted to refute the earlier press conference held by finance Minister that there is maize fund.The Head brags about how he has turned a once venomous journalist "whose pen set the *Daily Gist* ablaze… (26) into a horse that surrenders its back for eating double ration of food. The Head further reveals that "…with a little threat here and there, and a lot of money and other sweet things, we removed that venom and turned the cobra into a harmless string, ready to bend wherever you wish" (26). The docility and complacency of this journalist is seen as an unfortunate hallmark of people with brutalised psyche (Okereke, 12).

Also the Professor, given the level of his exposure, ought to be in the forefront of revolt against bad leadership in the country. But in this play, the Professor is seen stooping so low and singing the praises of an illiterate leader and bowing sheepishly to illiterate members of cabinet. He is to write a befitting welcome speech which will be read during the visit of the President of Wilama and this will brighten his chances of being appointed as Principal of a university college. Thus, he will protect his interest than speak against a corrupt government. His cowardice and complacency are equated to loyalty, humility and submissiveness to the government and so "deserves whatever honour our government can bestow" (49). The message here resonates poignantly with the current Nigeria's political and leadership reality, where citizens, instead of demanding accountability from leaders, connive in subverting the system against themselves.

The above thrust also resonates in Ugbade's *Our Son the* Minister (2017). The play is a political satire that re-enacts a familiar Nigerian situation and exposes the inertia, apathy and indifference of the citizenry in providing critical followership, which could help in moulding, shaping and checkmating leadership inanities in the country. Unlike some writers who consistently sustain the paradigm of scapegoating the leadership as a cog on the path of the country's greatness, Ugbede vehemently indicts the followership as ominous partners in orchestrating the country's destruction. Through this consciousness, the author charts a course for synergy, renegotiation and rejuvenation of the Nigerian nationhood. This position echoes Emeka Nwabueze's when he avers that:

> The writer should be committed to his trade…. He should unmask ignorance, pretence and hypocrisy. He should tackle the plethora of errors that impede our march to nationalism. He should deal heavy blows on errors that are on our national psyche: greed, recklessness, individualism, ignorance, megalomania and corruption in public places… in doing this he should not be afraid of being a literary hangman (14).

Nwabueze's position seems to have informed Ugbede's resolve in shifting the usual narrative of blame on the Nigerian leadership.

The events of this story revolve around Makoji, who has just been announced Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. On the day he is to be sworn-in, he is barraged byinconsiderable demands and favours from members of family and friends. Faced with these,he is upset and consequently declines the appointment. His family and friends are confused, as to why Makoji should even dream of throwing away such a life-time opportunity and all conclude that that he has lost his mind. Following this development, they all set out to find the fastest means to cure Makoji of this sudden madness and ensure that he becomes the Minister by all means to avoid having their dreams and aspirations crashed and also being laughed at by the community.

The play is hilariously satiric and blames the slow pace of Nigerian development not only on the corruption of public office holders, but also on the people's frivolous and criminal expectation of their leaders. The characters and their roles are delineated with benumbing verisimilitude typifying a realistic Nigerian situation where the masses, especially family members of a public officer, see a public office is as a cesspool for amassment of inordinate wealth, Imaji, captures this suicidal complacency vividly when he unabashedly nudges Makoji into pilfering public funds when he is sworn as a Minister.

> …If we don't shine our eyes, we will not make a single dime from this opportunity…we can make a hundred million naira every month. No magomago. Straight business…. Contracts, deals, kickbacks and 'kickforwards'. Don't worry, I have it all in black and white. I'll give you all the details after your swearing-in (22-23).

The above explains why Makoji's decision to turn down the ministerial appointment is equated with lunacy and thus, must be cured immediately so that he could be sworn-in. One of the emergency doctors hired to cure him candidly describes Makoji's case as peculiar and madness of another degree, for rejecting a ministerial appointment. Through this, the author projects and exposes a society that is fraught with self-abnegating contradictions and paradoxes. Makoji's pontification on what represents lunacy and sanity in this context heightens the contradictions and paradoxes that have engulfed the Nigerian masses:

> We bring our night quickly upon us! This is who we are! To be insane is sane and to be sane is insane! Not to steal is insanity while the stealing of billions is the highest peak of celebrated sanity! To stand up for something is insanity!

> To stand up for nothing is sanity! Oh, contradictions of contradictions and irony of ironies (134).

This is the contradiction that now seem to condition the psyche of an average Nigerian citizen. Thus, rather than being a critical partner in the building of a viable nation, citizens allow themselves to be conditioned to see those in leadership position as owners of the commonwealth, whom they look up to as embodying their collective aspirations in criminal conduct. They provide coverage for them to steal and cheat the system, so they can pick the crumbs from the pie. Anote Ajeluorou posits that:

> Government's office is equated to personal estate for self-enrichment instead of using it to work for the majority of the people. Ironically, the people for whom those in government ought to work for actively promote subverting the rules against themselves. This is what happens when government refuses to make governance work for everyone (https://guardian.ng/art/a-countrys-absurd-psyche-exposed-in-paul-ugbedes-our-son-the-minister)

Ajeluorou's position affirms the position of this paper that Nigerian followers have been the ones fashioning their exploitation through their criminal collaboration with the leaders. The peoples' nonchalant, docile and passive disposition to governance portrays a skewed system which has been responsible for acute stagnation in development.

Nigerian followership is noted for perpetrating a regrettable dimension of abnormality by pushing a hitherto upright leader into acts of flagrant corruption, instead of demanding accountability. This is one of the ugly realities the system has thrown up, and this scenario is adequately revealing in the conversation between Makoji and Imaji his friend. "You are sounding stupid. Open your eyes man. Who says you are a minister because of this country? Mr. patriotic, you are a minister because of 'such distractions! When your community clamoured for your nomination, it was for you to work for them" (18).This scenario evokes a regrettable social order that keeps drifting the country into abysmal depths of abnormality rather than rising above it to nobler virtues, where citizens demand accountability from leaders instead of fashioning platforms through which the commonwealth is pilfered. Makoji attributes the serial failures on the part of Nigerian leaders to this needless burden of expectation the citizens mount on them. "I see the reason why those before me have failed; because of a long line of personal interest, they must gratify. It is because of this reason I wanted to decline in the first place" (139). Thus, it could be noticed that Nigerian writers and critics' exoneration of the followers from leadership challenges in Nigeria seems to have created a lacuna in leadership discourses. It is pertinent Nigerian writers creates a new consciousness that places equal responsibility among both the leaders and followers, as imperative for good leadership.

Renegotiating Nationhood through Followership

The paper has so far interrogated the role of the masses in failed leadership, through analysis of some extrapolations from the texts under examination. The authors at the same time have weaved a thread of hope for the system by delineating some characters who are restive over

the mis governance and abysmal failure of leadership. This follows a template set by some early Nigerian and African writers that imbues their characters with revolutionary consciousness that demands accountability from their leaders. This could be could be seen in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* when the people of Abazon protest over the draught ravaging their region. Another example is the protest march of the people's representatives from IImorog to Nairobi against their member of parliament, Nderiwa Riera in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood.* The women's riot in Tess Onwume's *The Reign of Wazobia* is also one of the examples of this activism. All these exemplify the role of the masses in renegotiating a workable leadership.

Most times, literary activism earned the writers incarceration, exile or even death, especially in a despotic regime. Of course, the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa, a writer and environmental activist, by General Sani Abacha will remain indelible. In such times, Kalu Uka recommends a "mantle of invisibility" (76) for writers. According to him:

> ...if the insensitivity of the present holders of power becomes such that they must efface the writer physically, and so deny the future of the spiritual harvest, the writer can always anticipate them, pre-empt their moves, and have recourse himself to detours in symbolic and parabolic writings. (76)

Osofisan has already foretold what may possibly happen to a writer who dares to confront the leadership in a totalitarian regime. According to him:

> The artist who is merely truthful cannot but reflect in his work the appalling situation of social and political injustice; but when that happens, the artist treads on the open sore of the rulers, and the latter response is predictably one of repression and persecution. It is at such moment that the quest for relevance is met with terrorism and the agents of the state become for the writer potential executioners (88).

Osofisan here seems to say that Nigerian writers who desire relevance, should anticipate this while writing. Authur Nwankwo's advice is that "authors must be fearless and ruthless in attacking the evils of the time, authors are people who cannot be gaged" (1).

In Osudare's *The State Visit*, one character whose traits embody the ideals of good followership is the painter. He will rather die than paint a picture of the corrupt "Head" and his visitor. Unlike the journalist, he defies every inducement and intimidation to meddle in the business of the corrupt government. His radicality and protest serve as a means of calling attention of well-meaning citizens to and taming the menace of corrupt leadership. Instead of cowering in the face of intimidation, the painter blows hot thus: "There is no grace in your glitter, no wisdom in your "ways". To do your bidding, my brush would be coarser than the despot's moustache, its glide arrested in canvas-pit" (53). Through this, Osundare aligns with the thrust of this paper that there is a nodal nexus between critical citizenry exercised through active followership and democratic balance.

The Minister of Finance also demonstrates commendable courage in speaking against corruption in Yankeland. He refuses to collaborate in the diversion of the maize fund borrowed to cushion the effect of draught that had ravaged Yankeland. Since he had already done a broadcast, informing the people of the availability of such money, the arrangement now is for the journalist to rebroadcast and inform the people that there is no such money, but the Ministerof Finance declines from such a rebroadcast since he feels that it would put a clause on his integrity. Instead, he presents a minority opinion aimed at discouraging the Head of Yanke and his ministers from diverting the funds for the Maize Project.

> What is there to say when rulers have turned liars like prophets of the Bar Beach; when those pretending to be statesmen say one thing while they mean another? What am I to tell the poor people of Yanke? That their long and painful suffering and starvation have to continue because their Hunger Relief Funds have been diverted to hosting spree of overfed dictators and their followers... (27).

As expected, the Minister's protest here costs him his life even after he has put up a verbal resignation from his ministerial position. Through the character of the Minister of Finance, Osundare weaves a thread of hope for the nation and harps on viewing leadership as a shared responsibility between the leaders and followers.The old man, workers and students who stage a protest demanding for good governance from leaders of Yanke land is an indication that leadership is no longer business as usual. The people have come to a revived consciousness that demands accountability and change from the leaders.

In Ugbede's *Our Son the Minister,* the character of Makoji stands out and draws attention to the fact thata change of orientation by the citizens can reposition leadership in Nigeria. His idea of followership contrasts the ambience of greed and frivolous expectations that characterises the Nigerian followership. His rejection of the position of the Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria because of frivolous demands by his family and relatives sends strong anti-corruption message laced with alluring hilarity. By rejecting his relatives and their demands, the author, through the protagonist call for a total demolition of the erroneous worldviews held by most Nigerians on the meaning and context of leadership and followership. It is against this backdrop that Uwem Affiah, Offiong Ene Amaku and Kufre Akpan summarises that: "From its inception, Nigerian drama has always been a signpost for not only advertising its cultural milieu but also providing insights into its socio-political concerns" (64). Rebecca Usoro and Monica Udoette also add that creative imaginations " articulate dimensions of social experience in terms of what actually is, was, or could be" (61). Therefore, from its little beginning, drama has metamorphosed into a colourful canvas of indigenous and foreign aesthetics geared towards inspiring societal change.

Conclusion

This paper has opened up a new vista on Nigerian leadership discourses by interrogating the complicity of the Nigerian followers in the Nigerian leadership imbroglio, against a dominant and canonised literary paradigm of blaming the leaders for the Nigerian woes. The paper has established that the poor leadership reality in Nigeria is actually fashioned by the followers,

and attributes the complicity of the citizens to the skewed worldview held by majority of citizens that leadership position is an opportunity for exploitation, embezzlement of public fund, and accumulation of wealth for the leader and for his/her generations to come. Since every leader was a follower, this mentality becomes the driving force that motivate many Nigerians to use every possible means, especially, wrong avenues, to pursue and run for public offices. Thus, the paper plumbs the depth of Nigeria's absurdities and how development will continue to elude the country unless Nigerians reverse their current value proposition that encourages sleaze.

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