

# Inverted Disillusionment in Postcolonial African Literature

**Oyewumi Olatoye Agunbiade**

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2474-1068>

Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

oyebiade@gmail.com

## Abstract

This study introduces the concept of inverted disillusionment as a new conceptual framework for reading African literature of the postcolonial era. It is conceived to philosophically account for the collective complicity of the people in their predicament in postcolonial Africa. It thus re-examines the concept of post-independence disillusionment of postcolonial theory, which blames postcolonial-era realities of disillusionment on African leaders and, consequently, places disillusionment and indifference to development in a broader context of human features everywhere. Achille Mbembe's version of postcolonial theory and Derrida's deconstructive operation are adopted as a framework, while textual evidence is drawn from selected literature to authenticate the ideological standpoints conceived as indices of the study. Theoretically and philosophically conceived, inverted disillusionment is foregrounded as an alternative engagement paradigm in reading African literature of the postcolonial era. It sits at the crossroads of postcolonial African literature and criticism as it advocates the extension of the frontiers of disillusionment in African Literature.

**Keywords:** inverted disillusionment; postcolonial theory; post-independence disillusionment; ordinary people; followers' complicity in disillusionment; African literature

UNISA   
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA  
PRESS

Imbizo

<https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/Imbizo>

Volume 14 | Number 1 | 2023 | #11408 | 19 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6565/11408>

ISSN 2663-6565 (Online)

© Unisa Press 2023



Published by Unisa Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

## Introduction

Emerging realities in postcolonial Africa have incited severely critical questions about the validity, usefulness, and rebirth of postcolonial theory (Maes-Jelinek 2004, 9; Mbembe 1992, 2001; Mongia 1997, 408; Young 2001). This is as a vast body of challenging research produced under the auspices of the theory advocates a rethink on some of its strengths and principles. Mongia (1997) precisely contends that there is a crisis in contemporary postcolonial theory, noting the need to engage with the issues raised by contemporary practitioners and also offering arguments that strongly challenge postcolonial theory. Maes-Jelinek (2004, 9) corroborates this in a remark that “we have reached a turning-point and possibly a dead-end is suggested in quite a number of essays” in postcolonial studies, criticism, literature, and the field in general. He substantiates this with a highlight of works which include Huggan’s “Postcolonialism and Its Discontents” (1993), Chambers and Curti’s *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (1996), and MacDermott’s “What Comes After Post? Some Considerations on the Future of Post-Colonial Literature with Special Reference to India” (1993), among others. These critics and a lot of others, as Quayson (2000) argues, have adjudged postcolonialism as an “epistemological marker” which should be grounded on process and not fixed ideology to guarantee its continued tenability in postcolonial emerging realities. This is because “no theory develops without encountering a wall” and “it is practice that is necessary for piercing that wall,” though it takes a process to use the much-quoted phrase of Gilles Deleuze (cited in Foucault 1977, 206). Practice in this sense is continued engagement with the works that have been produced under the theory in question, which over the years have revealed gaps and the need for such to be filled. Deleuze in a conversation with Foucault explains further that,

[f]rom the moment a theory moves into its proper domain, it begins to encounter obstacles, walls, and blockages which require its relay by another type of discourse (it is through this other discourse that it eventually passes to a different domain). (Foucault 1977, 206)

Foucault, however, warned that in partaking to fill such gap “the will to knowledge must be constructed and defined according to the needs and possibilities that arise from a series of concrete studies” (Foucault 1977, 201).

Accordingly, trends in African history and literature have shored up a few concrete pieces of evidence to suggest a new dawn in postcolonial theory and criticism. For instance, there are literary works that now demonstrate beyond doubt that imperialism and disillusionment have assumed wider contexts in which the will-to-power, ambition, and the proneness to exploit others are no more the prerogative of one type of human being, aimed at aliens only, but are features of humans everywhere, yet hardly taken into account in comparative discourse analysis (Cates 1992, 254; Maes-Jelinek 2004, 12). In line with this position, Mbembe (1992, 25) avers that “in the postcolonial historical trajectory, the authoritarian mode can no longer be interpreted strictly in terms

of search operations, surveillance or the politics of coercion *but* in the postcolony an intimate tyranny links the rulers with the ruled.” There is also indifference to development among the people, which is another form of disillusionment. Given these, the current study contends for a postcolonial theory that will not only analyse issues relating to the neo-colonials and plight of the former colonised, but also combine the new realities reproducing colonial conditions or inhibiting development among the ordinary people in postcolonial Africa.

It is, however, unfortunate that in spite of demonstrable works on postcolonial Africa from writers as diverse as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka from Nigeria, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o from East Africa, Ayi Kwei Armah from Ghana, and a host of other contemporary writers, there is a dearth of literary works that dissect the ordinary African man and woman as complicit in his or her condition and predicament. In contrast, the production of anti-colonial, nationalist and later neo-colonial works has become an industry. While one could attribute this development to writers’ claim that such issues are not of major or popular concern or worth committing their art to, it is amazing that such are quotidian realities in the news media. Hence, many critical works engaging the actions and inactions of the common people have not been prominent because such issues have not been treated as concrete in the genres. As one of the influencers of the early postcolonial thinkers, Michel Foucault’s position above becomes a challenge in postcolonial studies both to the writers of literature and the contemporary critics who could well be described as taking a nap in their response to emerging realities. In light of this, post-independence disillusionment, a later trend and one of the tenets of postcolonial theory, comes under attack in the face of concrete evidence of emerging socio-economic and political realities bedevilling postcolonial Africa as occasioned by the idealised people. Therefore, the concept of inverted disillusionment is presented as a new conceptual framework for reading African literature of the postcolonial era to account for how the people have consciously and unconsciously contributed to their predicament.

Although the term Africa is used in the title of this article, the study does not analyse plays and novels across African societies. Instead, the study sees the entire continent as a community because the indices identified in the texts used to illustrate this study can be found in plays, novels and in poetry all over Africa. Using Nigeria as its milieu, the study further derives its strength by engaging some perceived Marxist texts for analysis. This is deliberate as it is to authenticate that our established writers, in their wanton criticism of the neo-colonials, have unconsciously presented in their works the contributions of the idealised followers to their disillusionment. The delineation of the followers and ordinary people covers the masses and, to an extent (using a backwards glance), those who rose to the middle class but whose actions now betray their humble beginning. The term “postcolony” is also hereafter used to represent post-independence Africa. The literary works cover sex, ethnicity and religious perspectives to show how submerged the common people are in contributing to their malaise. The study, therefore, subjects the chosen primary texts to critical reading through the lenses of postcolonial

and post-structuralist theories to deconstruct the popular opinion that leadership is entirely the problem of Nigeria and, by extension, of Africa.

### The Postcolonial Blame Game: A Review

One of the innate characteristics of human beings is that they are quick to blame another person, situation, or entity for their failure or mistake (Gimba 2008). This is known as the blame game culture/syndrome and African literature, being a reflection of African society, has consistently depicted these characteristics. That is why from the colonial era, through the gaining of independence and the years that followed, known as the post-independence period, the blame game of backwardness in Africa has moved from one victim to another. First were the colonialists who disturbed the idyllic stage typified as paradise on earth (Kehinde 2011). Critics and the nationalists, at this point, adopted all possible means to redeem the glory of Africa by taking its leadership back from the colonialists. Literary and critical works from the likes of Hamidou Kane, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Camara Laye, J.P. Clark, Es’kiah Mphahlele, and others pointed to the fact that Africans are capable of ruling themselves while the colonialists were blamed for altering the existing peace of the land (Dasylyva 2004; Dasylyva and Jegede 2005; Kehinde 2011; Ngũgĩ 1969). However, not long after Africans gained independence from the colonialists, the baton of the blame game shifted to the new African leaders who fought for independence. Thus, the mood of “paradise lost” pervaded Africa. According to Kehinde (2005, 224), in this period “African writers have become more realistic than ever before. The writers now examine critically how Africans have been governing themselves and what they have made of their independence.”

The most resounding salvo in this blame game on the leaders that has enjoyed much critical comment over the years was fired by Chinua Achebe in his *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1984, 1), where he emphatically submitted that “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership.” The height of this development in literary criticism is now described as “post-independence disillusionment” (Ravenscroft 1973)—a condition that captures the betrayal of the African people and their ideals by their leaders. Hence, African literature of the last six decades has redefined the theme of disillusionment: where the coloniser was once the entire object of criticism, the African leaders, technocrats, and cadres are now represented as exploiting the masses they vowed to uplift (Ibrahim 1990). These unpleasant and unexpected attitudes of the new African leaders (neo-colonialists) and politicians are depicted in early works of African playwrights—for example, in Wole Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forest* (1963), J.P. Clark’s *The Raft* (1964), Femi Osofisan’s *The Chattering and the Song* (1977), Bode Sowande’s *Farewell to Babylon* (1979) and in prose in Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) and Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966).

However, Gimba (2008), Ademeso (2009), and Osundare (2015), among other critical minds, have challenged the status quo. These scholars believe that such claims that

leadership is the problem of Africa and idealisation of the people need to be examined critically given the emerging trends in the postcolony. Ademeso, for instance, argues in this line that:

The search for a good society does not necessarily mean that the common man is the most perfect man for the job. The poor man must be examined so that if he finds himself at the helm of affairs, he would not turn against the masses. (Ademeso 2009, 55)

These, among other issues relating to the people, form the impetus for this study, which is to partake in filling an observed critical gap by carrying out a critical literary investigation of the selected works to see if a paradigm shift from the unending scholarly debate on leadership to a critical examination of (in)actions of the people/followers would help create the ideal society African literature targets. A new reading to midwife this development is conceived in inverted disillusionment.

### Theoretical Considerations

The postcolonial-era realities of disillusionment which trace the problems of Africa to failures of leadership are to be examined through the inward-looking approach of Achille Mbembe to postcolonial theory and the deconstructive tool of post-structuralism to establish the stance that the people have contributed to their disillusionment. By adopting Achille Mbembe's (1992) version of the postcolonial theory as a framework, the study seeks to explain not the anti-colonial past but the globalised variegated present where the "authoritarian mode can no longer be interpreted strictly in terms of search operations, surveillance or the politics of coercion," but rather with an understanding of the interconnectedness and the innateness of tyranny (Mbembe 1992, 25). It further seeks to explain the implication of the replacement of patriotism with docility or indifference to development in the postcolony. Mbembe's effort as conceived in this study is what Gayatri Spivak has described as a "systemic unlearning by the postcolonial intellectual" which involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide (Spivak 1988, 91). Accordingly, Mbembe submits that:

The practices of ordinary people cannot always be read in terms of "opposition to the state", "deconstructing power" and "disengagement" ... because the postcolonial mode of domination is a regime that involves not just control but conviviality, even connivance—as shown by the constant compromises, the small tokens of fealty, people's inherent cautiousness—the analyst must watch out for the myriad ways in which ordinary people guide, deceive and actually toy with power instead of confronting it directly. (Mbembe 1992, 24–25)

Mbembe argues that an "intimate tyranny" links the rulers with the ruled, hence the need for the analyst to be mindful in the sympathy for and placement of the "subjects" (followers) who often have been idealised. In other words, the ordinary people now either share intimacy with the rulers in reproducing the authoritarian epistemology or

have become docile to changing their lot to the point where they are adjudged complicit in their disillusionment.

Mbembe, having provided this background, gives leeway for a complementary framework in post-structuralism—a theory that hinges on deconstructionist critique to create avenues for the production of novel theoretical values and techniques within structured systems (Castle 2007). As a style of thought, post-structuralism became prominent with the deconstructive operations of Jacques Derrida, the work of the French historian Michel Foucault, and the works of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan and the feminist philosopher Julia Kristeva (Eagleton 1983). Derrida, in *Dissemination*, throws light on the deconstructive reading:

The critique reads backward from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal, to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a (natural) given but a (cultural) construct, usually blind to itself. (Derrida 1981, xv)

Thus, the post-structuralist literary critic is engaged in the task of deconstructing the text and theory. It is this capacity that affords this study the ability to re-examine certain positions on postcolonialism. One other facet of post-structuralism relevant to the current study, to cite Barry (1995, 74), is “its tendency to reverse the polarity of common binary oppositions like male and female, day and night . . . so that the second term, rather than the first is privileged and regarded as the more desirable.” In other words, the idea of the leaders being the problem of Nigeria is to be deconstructed while the role of the people is examined. This study thus strives to use post-structuralism to deconstruct the sense of post-independence disillusionment of postcolonial theory in selected African literature. It deliberately selects Achebe’s *A Man of the People* and other texts from Soyinka (*Trials of Brother Jero*) (1987), Osofisan (*Love’s Unlike Lading* [2012], *The Inspector and the Hero* [1990]), Yerima (*The Sick People*) (2015), and Ododo (*Hard Choice*) (2011) for analysis to re-address the polarity of disillusionment as encapsulated in the concept of inverted disillusionment. From such a radical, revisionary perspective is to emerge an affiliative compendium of interpretation and intervention such that postcolonialism as a theoretical discourse can operate as a kind of popular front for a whole range of different interrelated concerns in postcolonial Africa (Young 2004).

### Conceptual Framework: Inverted Disillusionment

One of the theoretical phenomena that African writers and critics have benefitted consciously or unwittingly from is the post-structuralist phenomenon which contends that interpretation depends on the interpretative envisioning of an individual reader of any given text (Obafemi 2008). According to this view, the real work begins when the writer drops his or her pen as the critic finishes the work with infinite possibilities of interpretations. Inverted disillusionment is premised on this as it re-examines the ideology of “post-independence disillusionment,” especially from works of certain perceived Marxist authors. It is a shift from seeing the leaders in postcolonial Africa as

entirely the cause of the continent’s back-flip development to understanding the deep-rooted flaws of the people, which in part contribute to the backwards status of the continent. The concept takes shape from Jacques Derrida in *Dissemination* where he explains the elevation and the demotion of every two-sided concept in life, that

Western philosophical tradition and everyday thought and language has always been structured in terms of dichotomies or polarities: good vs. evil, man vs. woman. ... The second term in each pair is always considered the negative, corrupt, undesirable version of the first, a fall away from it. (Derrida 1981, vii)

Post-structuralism, however, affords a framework that reverses such polarities so that the second term, rather than the first, is privileged. Consequently, in this case, we have the leader and the people/led placed side by side. Rather than privileging the leaders as the cause of Africa’s problems, inverted disillusionment inverts (reverses) the polarity so that the people are investigated in their contribution to the status quo, as diagrammatically presented below.

**Diagrammatic Representation of Inverted and Post-Independence Disillusionment**



**Post-independence disillusionment**

**Inverted disillusionment**

Note: Downward sloping arrow indicates seeds of disillusionment

**Figure 1:** Juxtaposition: disillusionment, leadership and the people (model developed by the author)

Achille Mbembe (1992) corroborates this conception when he opines that the conventional standard interpretation of postcolonial relations of domination such as “resistance v. passivity, autonomy v. subjection, state v. civil society, hegemony v. counter-hegemony, totalisation v. detotalisation” (1992, 3) have clouded our understanding of postcolonial relations. Mbembe suggests that it is only by a shift in perspective that we can comprehend that the postcolonial relationship is fraught with “illicit cohabitation” between the *commandement* (the leaders) and their “subjects” who share the same living space. By illicit cohabitation, Mbembe gives an image of the intimacy of tyranny between the leader and the subject. There is, therefore, a paradox when one considers the over-flogged discourse of leadership as the problem of Africa,

while the real problem, according to Abubakar Gimba in his *Letter to the Unborn Child* (2008), is followership (the people). Gimba's seminal work ignites a backwards glance which traces the seeds of disillusionment from infancy to leadership. This has not enjoyed much applause in the African literary space as it is contrary to established critical opinion bolstered by our foremost compatriot writer—Chinua Achebe, who in his fuming outrage and frustration with our downward slide, writes: “The trouble with Nigeria [Africa] is simply and squarely a failure of leadership” (Achebe 1984, 1; my emphasis). Achebe, however, forgets his stance in *A Man of the People* (1966, 166), where he describes the people's cynical acquiescence, docility, and notorious sycophancy as instrumental to the collapse of their society. This, however, will not relieve African literature of its unwavering position in the portrayal of a real slice of life.

Considering the above, one would have expected literary works to balance this apparent gap in the representation of African society, but the pendulum more often swings to the leaders as the problem, while the few works that espouse these complicities do not make them of major concern. The veracity of Derrida's claim in “Differance” (1968) that writing is not superior to speech substantiates this view as he explains using the word “differance” that:

The “a” of differance, is not heard, remains silent, secret, and discreet, like a tomb. It is however a tomb that (provided one knows how to decipher its legend) is not far from signaling the death of the king. (Derrida 1968, 257)

Derrida is saying that trying to make speech inferior because “a” is not pronounced in “differance” is like denying the presence of a tomb capable of engulfing an individual. In other words, trying to deny the fact that the people are complicit in their disillusionment is like denying the presence of an obvious tomb big enough to swallow the society. Accordingly, the ills, wickedness, and tragic connivance of the people remain silent, but that of the leaders because of their position is blown beyond proportion both in the media and literature. Abubakar Gimba describes this in a fuming rage:

Our leadership is no more blameworthy than the foreman or the driver, nor is the followership in our country any less culpable than the gang of tree-felling labourers, or the hapless passengers. Indeed, the labourers, the passengers are the real problem. For our country *the real problem is the followership*. All of us, simple. We are, individually, the real trouble with Nigeria. *The character which Achebe cleared* of any culpability, is all that is wrong with us. Many of us, followers in particular, have acquired the reprehensible character that has been our national albatross in our bid to rise to the level to which we have great ability. We, individually, vary in the degrees of our character delinquencies. But, it has now become so dominant, contagious, and almost endemic as a culture, defying age, gender, ethnic group, religious belief, and social as well as economic divides. (Gimba 2008, 20)



Gimba, however, believes that the attempt to address this character will require a re-evaluation of societal sense of judgment. In other words, the tools and critical lens with which the society has viewed governance, leadership and development must be revisited, hence the application of deconstructive critique in the current study to reverse the conventional viewpoint of disillusionment. Correspondingly, the critique of post-independence disillusionment could be described as a demonstration that the concept which begins with the leaders as the basic problem of post-independence Africa is blind to where the leaders emerge from—namely, the people (followers). This is simply because “today’s leadership was yesterday’s followership ... as leaders do not fall from the sky” (Gimba 2008, 30). This is why Fashina (2009, 76) criticises both the Marxist and postcolonial theories, avowing that “the Marxist dogma about social conflict and opposition of thesis and antithesis seems to blind the early Postcolonial critic from the reality of the more meaningful ‘intrinsic’ theories of textual interpretation.” This, however, is not surprising, as Derrida (1981, xvi) reveals that “every theory starts somewhere, every critique exposes what that starting point conceals and thereby displaces all the idea that follows.” Inverted disillusionment is thus conceived to make up the lapses in the earlier conventional conception of disillusionment by postcolonial critics in order to put disillusionment in its proper perspective. The popular opinion on disillusionment is therefore inverted, while a philosophical articulation of conscious and unwitting actions of the people that have aided their dilemma is spelt out. They are identified and discussed as indices of inverted disillusionment below, followed by textual evidence from selected literature.

First is the general moral decadence among the people, which draws back the wheel of change in terms of acute lies, treachery, false love, greed, distrust, selfishness, lack of compassion for one another, wickedness, hatred, and lack of love. These are evident in the family, the smallest unit of the society, from which such characteristics take wings and get reproduced among the traders, priests, down-trodden, youths and every other member of the society, including even traditional rulers who failed in their responsibility to the people. The second manifestation of inverted disillusionment is indifference, ill conception, and a general sense of apathy to politics among the people, while those who muster the strength to venture in sometimes perform even more horribly (Osundare 2015). In this category are those who coerce their leaders to steal, telling them it is their turn to eat of the national cake (Achebe 1966). Still in this category are those who were once very poor (ordinary people), whom one will normally judge as promising, but they betray the masses once they get into power or become rich. The third category is the working class, who put forward a bad attitude towards the government’s work. This includes the bad eggs in the ivory tower of knowledge traditionally meant to shape human ideas for society’s development. This is another disappointment. We shall briefly examine the first and second indices with textual evidence reflexive of their historical and contemporary manifestations.

## General Moral Decadence

The general moral decadence in contemporary Nigeria reflects the kind of leadership the country continues to produce. The simple truth is that one cannot give what one does not have. Hence, a society fraught with selfishness, greed, thuggery, betrayal and wickedness will only produce corrupt and wicked leaders since today's followers are tomorrow's leaders. Gimba (2008, 30) reflects this view when he submits that "[I]eaders are not little angels dropped on us from the sky: they are born and bred among us and by us. How could they be different from us?" Gimba thus points to the fact that leaders are no different from those they rule and by extension ignites the need to re-examine the literary and critical positions on the social problem in Africa. Literary evidence of this position is not of major concern in many works, as earlier noted, but pockets of fair depiction are identified in some plays and novels. Ahmed Yerima's *The Sick People* (2015) is, however, distinct, as the playwright uncovers this mass disillusionment from the perspective of the family, which is the smallest unit of the society. Yerima uses the Icodis family of Ajegunle, Lagos, as a metaphor for the country. With Yerima's aptonymic title, we are introduced to a corpus of ordinary people who indeed are sick—"sick not in terms of physical disability" (Yerima 2015, 8), but rather a paradigm for moral decadence. In his foreword to the play, Bayo Awala explains that the story "is about the lives of very ordinary people, devoid of the stuck-up mien of the upper class, their foibles couched in poetic idioms in an essentially stage drama" (Awala 2015, 8). The story begins with a cleansing ritual for Mama Icodi, who has contravened her marital vows by sleeping with Solomon—a friend of Baba Icodi. Solomon dies mysteriously, while Baba Icodi is expected back following 15 years' imprisonment after being convicted of taking a bribe—a set-up by his police colleague to deter his promotion to the position of inspector. Yerima presents a sexcapade where Mama Icodi only realises at the climax and on her mother's deathbed that she and her twin sister, Iviki, are not the offspring of the man they believed to be their father. Iviki is also revealed to have been raped by her father—Omagbome. The Icodis children are not left out of the mess as Icodi is discovered pregnant for Patriki, who has been set ablaze for armed robbery, while the police are seeking Jumble, their last born, as an accomplice to Patriki's robberies. Baba Icodi, too, is revealed as an adulterer before being imprisoned. Amidst these contradictions, Mama Icodi laments:

I must be going mad. The whole world is sick ... the dew falls on me in daytime, and I run to my mother, who should cover me up. But she sends me out again hoping that I will catch a cold and die. (Yerima 2015, 54)

In *The Sick People*, Yerima has therefore metaphorically shown that everybody in the country has contributed to the present status quo of the country. All the family members, including the head of the family and the children, who translate to the leaders and the followers, are depicted as soiled in infidelity, incest, and promiscuity. Yerima's preoccupation in the play is not different from the goal of his counterpart playwright—Femi Osofisan, who says, "it is obvious to tell the story just as you see it that the fault is not just with the rulers, the fault is with all of us" (cited in Agunbiade 2019, 193).

It is, therefore, not strange when Osofisan, in *Love's Unlike Lading: A Comedy from Shakespeare* (2012), takes us a step out of the family to show how a lack of love among the people becomes an impediment to growth and development. He presents this through an uncanny disposition to money, as evident in usury business. The attitude of Bassey, the alter-ego of Shylock in *Merchant of Venice*, reveals to us that usurers are only economic wolves in the dress of humanitarian lambs. One who lends someone money in a time of difficulty is often regarded as hospitable, but this is not the case for usurers whose overall aim is to confiscate the pawn of their borrowers and make them end in abject poverty. This demonstrates greed, wickedness and a lack of love, which will never advance any society. It is, however, of quotidian reality among the ordinary people in society. The authorial message is clear when Fowosanu replies, following Bassey's initial reluctance to loan Boma 20,000 naira to pay as ransom to the kidnappers of her husband, Tariboh. Bassey has been reluctant and expresses displeasure to lend her the money following the fact that Fowosanu, who has always criticised his usury business and lends people money without interest, is the one standing as the guarantor for the loan. Fowosanu reacts by saying:

You know I can never change my mind. This trade you practice is wicked. No God-fearing man should make his living by exploiting the misfortune of others the way you do ... I've never lent out money using the guise of friendship and trust to make people sign all sorts of dubious contracts. Knowing all the time that it is all just a sordid trick to bring ruin on them in the end ... you make people commit themselves to bonds which seem totally harmless. But just let the repayment be late for a day, even an hour, and you pounce on the hapless debtor and seize all his property! Everything he has spent his whole life putting together, without compassion! Ah, I tell you, your greed and your heartlessness, you usurers, will take you to hell! (Osofisan 2012, 33–34)

The build-up to this scenario is the abduction of Tariboh, the crusader for change and gubernatorial candidate, by the youths whose plight he is fighting to alleviate. This loss of sense of direction and judgment by the youth shows the height of moral decadence among the people as they inhibit development in their society. This is Osofisan's surreptitious attempt to show that the common people have not fared well in their relationship with themselves. A recent phenomenon that buttresses this is the fake kidnap syndrome in Nigeria, where certain individuals kidnap themselves to get ransom from family members. Such was the case of a man, Adelana Ayomikun, in Ekiti State in mid-October 2022, whose wife, twin sister and three children alleged they were kidnapped and called him to say that the kidnappers demanded 100 million naira. It was, however, discovered that the victims staged their kidnap as they later confessed after being nabbed by the police that they planned the kidnapping to enable them to get money to pay some debts (Radio Nigeria 2022). This dog-eat-dog syndrome is indeed strange and a contemporary disillusionment we have come to grapple with. This is partly what Mbembe (1992) describes as the elements of the "grotesque" and "obscene" that are intrinsic to the dominant and the dominated (ordinary people).

This trend is also evident in religious circles where clerics, who should be custodians of morality and shepherds of their members, have desecrated the sacred altar to recycle imperialism and immoralities with their false prophecies in order to keep their members in perpetual servitude. Megbowon (2019, 102), in her assessment of this development, notes that “religion sells like Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) in Nigeria” as false prophets make a trade out of it. Wole Soyinka in *The Trials of Brother Jero* (1987) depicts this decadence with the antics of Brother Jero, who represents these false prophets who promise their members promotion at work and magical miracles while they perpetuate many misdeeds such as wife-snatching and telling acute lies. Jero is good at this as he keeps his assistant, Chume, under servitude. The delusion these crops of prophets have brought into Christianity is illustrated in the prayer of Chume to God below:

Give us money to satisfy our daily necessities. Make you no forget those of us who dey struggle daily. Those who be clerk today, make them Chief Clerk tomorrow... I say those who dey push bicycle, give them big car tomorrow. Give them big car tomorrow, give them big car tomorrow. (Soyinka 1987, 29)

Chume’s prayer reflects desperation and impatience as a messenger of his sort wants to ride a luxury vehicle such as an SUV Jeep by all means. This desperation has led many people into crime and perpetration of other evils against fellow human beings, as we see in Patriki and Jumble in Yerima’s *The Sick People*. Since such prophets are not grounded in proper doctrine, they fail to inform their members that prayers do not work like magic. Contemporary Naija hip-hop music further enhances this desperation by hyping the need to get rich by all means instead of projecting hard work at credible jobs (Ogunrinade 2016).

This category of disillusionment also includes the rancour, betrayal and ethnic hostilities among the people, which will not allow them to have a common front to address issues of development in the country, let alone present credible candidates for governance. Sunnie Ododo’s *Hard Choice* (2011) is a surreptitious reflection of the perception of the Igbos and the Yorubas of themselves. Through a royal marriage between the families of an Igbo king and a Yoruba king, Ododo reflects suspicion and lack of trust between both tribes. In the play, the crown of king Iginla of Igedu kingdom from the Yoruba tribe is stolen by miscreants during the marriage of his son to the daughter of Eze Okiakoh of Emepiri kingdom. Love for each other facilitates cross-cultural marriages, but in this context, love is betrayed. This is obvious in the challenge of Basorun (one of the chiefs to King Iginla) to Eze Okiakoh:

You betrayed friendship and humiliated the crown essence of Igedu kingdom. Why Eze Okiakoh, why? ... If in three days it is not recovered and surrendered, we shall be left with no other choice but to march on your kingdom and recover the crown ourselves. (Ododo 2011, 23)

What Ododo has depicted in *Hard Choice* can be described as nothing but a fictional representation of the relationship that exists between the Igbos and the other two tribes

of Yoruba and Hausa in Nigeria when one considers the futile attempt of the Igbos to produce the nation's president after the return to democracy in Nigeria in 1999. There is, therefore, an aura of suspicion in relationships with regard to business, marriage and politics among the people and followers, which ought not to be if they are to change the debilitating status of the nation.

When we consider this decadence among the people, it becomes easy to conclude that blaming leadership for the status quo is simply uncritical because a sick, morally deficient, and corrupt followership will also reproduce bad leadership, as is experienced in contemporary Nigeria (Megbowon and Uwah 2020).

### Disorientation and Apathy to Politics

The followers' bad attitude and perception of politics take centre stage in the second category of inverted disillusionment. There is no denying that the rate of corruption in governance in Africa is responsible for the wrong perception of and apathy towards politics—which is the route to achieving political leadership. It is, however, apposite to submit that corruption is ingrained in individuals and not an act that suddenly jumps on the leaders when they assume the position of authority. “That character which Achebe cleared of any culpability,” according to Gimba (2008, 20), “is all that is wrong with us.” In other words, in contrast to Achebe's declaration against the leadership, as Gimba puts it, “we are individually the real trouble with Nigeria” (20). Unfortunately, when Achebe fired the salvo that the trouble with Nigeria is leadership, he seems to have quickly forgotten his position in his social realistic novel, *A Man of the People* (1966), where he expresses his disappointment both with the leaders and the followers through his main characters Chief Nanga and Odili Samalu. Achebe expresses his disillusionment in the novel with the people's perception of politics. Hence, Odili, the new politician who wants to change the status quo of corruption as represented by Chief Nanga, is surprised at his countrymen when he says:

They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man had used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you—as my father did—if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel, that good fortune placed in his mouth. (Achebe 1966, 2)

At another instance, when Odili is presented as a parliamentary candidate by his party, an elderly man remarks:

There is one word he speaks which entered my ear more than everything else—not only entered but built a house there. That word was that our own son should go and bring our share. (*There was great applause from the crowd*). The village of Anata has already eaten, now they must make way for us to reach the plate. No man in Urua will give his paper to a stranger when his own son needs it. (Achebe 1966, 116)

This mindset has deteriorated over the 60 years since the publication of Achebe's novel from a "eat-and-let-eat syndrome" to a "vote-buying syndrome" where the electorate views the highest bidder for their vote as the right candidate. This is the highest form of disillusionment, where the people have traded their conscience and the power of their vote. We see this in contemporary Nigeria, where the people know what to do, which is to vote out the wrong leaders, but because of paltry amounts received during the election, they keep recycling their problem. They are, therefore, not innocent but complicit in their predicament.

This complicity is also evident in the people's apathy to politics. While some individuals have a lopsided orientation, others are apathetic to politics. The greater part of the remaining population are sycophants and supporters of the neo-colonials, singing their praise and swaying the minds of the feeble electorate even when they know their masters are rogues. These are the people and followers that the works of Achebe and many others have idealised. This political resentment is indeed an albatross, which the people have placed against their progress. Meanwhile, politics is too important to be left to politicians and, according to Ayoade (2010, 5), "a government devoid of citizens control is a potential criminal." Therefore, choosing to distance oneself from politics and discouraging those interested in it are similar to perpetrating acts of corruption in governance. This is because such acts deliberately give leeway to the bad eggs to do what pleases them with the life and economy of the country. Osofisan also demonstrates this untoward trend in *Love's Unlike Lading* (2012) with the characters of Basiru and Boma. In the play, Tariboh is kidnapped ahead of his gubernatorial election, and his family and friends enter a season of unrest to gather the huge ransom requested by the kidnappers. Boma is Tariboh's wife, while Basiru is a friend who is critical of Tariboh's political participation. The play opens with Boma's arrival at her friend's home in Lagos all the way from Port Harcourt in the peak of Tariboh's campaign. She explains to her friend, Tosan, why she left Port Harcourt: "I was just tired of PH, especially of my husband and his endless money problem! So, I decided to run away here to Lagos to catch some fun" (2012, 7). Boma also recalls Basiru's reaction when Tariboh notifies him of his political plans:

When Tariboh told him of his political plans, his answer was blunt—Don't, he said!  
And when Tariboh ignored his advice and went ahead, Bash stopped calling. (Osofisan  
2012, 10)

Osofisan, in this piece, shows how indifferent Nigerians and, by extension, Africans have been to the issues of politics. Unfortunately, this bad attitude is directed at the right candidate, as Tariboh's wife describes him as "the proverbial angry young man, burning to change the world" (7). While those personified by Boma prefer a jamboree to commitment to politics, those Basiru represents do not want to hear of politics at all. Although Boma and Basiru regret this attitude as they suffer most in procuring the ransom for Tariboh, Osofisan has theatrically shown us what the likes of Tariboh in Africa go through in their bid to change the sick narrative of Africa. These are the

painful but apparent reasons why competent but unpopular presidential and gubernatorial candidates in Nigeria and Africa are yet to have their political ambitions realised as the people whose lot they are crusading to change have an untoward attitude to politics, elections, and governance.

Osofisan, however, presents a shocker and stalemate on this discourse of disorientation and apathy to politics with a backwards glance at the lives of one-time crusaders in *The Inspector and the Hero (The Inspector)* (1990), where he dissects the humble beginning of an aspiring governor. Chief Ereniyi has just retired from the customs service, where he amassed a fortune to contest the next gubernatorial poll in his state. He is arrested by Inspector Akindele from the police force after the party he threw to celebrate his nomination as the flagbearer of his political party. The reader is introduced to how myopic, selfish, and ungrateful many politicians are after emerging from very humble and poor beginnings, which logically should propel them to rewrite the narrative of their country. After his attempt to bribe the Inspector fails, Chief Ereniyi gives an untenable childhood experience as motivation for his corrupt lifestyle. The excerpt below illustrates this:

From a wretched village urchin, yes! That is where I came from. I was one of those born with jiggers in our toes, big as footballs. Sometimes with craw-craw on my head. Itching! ... and when it pained too much, we scrubbed out the craw-craw with sand. ... We wake up early in the shivering dawn, tie a rag to our waist, and trek in a file down to the stream four to five miles away. That is where our history of worms comes from. It's from the infested stream which we drank from, and washed in, with our germs and jiggers. (Osofisan 1990, 129)

Chief Ereniyi further explains how difficult it was for his mother to pay his school fees and how she was noted for dancing for grace before his teachers as well as the nickname he bore from such experience from his friends, which is “Omo mama elekun” (son of the sniveling mother) (131), all in the bid to ensure he completes school. Osofisan, however, shows that such experience is not enough to authenticate an individual as a messiah in politics. Instead, most of them later become vindictive, as further revealed in Chief Ereniyi's reflection when he says:

I survived it all, storing it up in my breast, swearing one day I would avenge it! Everything! That those people would fall on their faces one day and worship that same woman they were humiliating! ... I have dreamt of her placing her feet on the heads of those arrogant boys one day, of her pronouncing sentence, and of them begging in their broken voices! (Osofisan 1990, 131)

This is a paradox in the camp of the people, and unfortunately, it is the mindset of most candidates who have risen from a poor background. If, therefore, corruption and this vindictive attitude are the reasons for the people's indifference to politics, then everyone is complicit in Africa's backwardness, as no one is competent to lead the desired change.

The indices, therefore, that make up post-independence disillusionment must be amended as the entire discourse becomes convoluted.

## Conclusion

This study proposed inverted disillusionment as a new conceptual framework for reading African literature of the postcolonial era. It is philosophically conceived to account for the excesses of the idealised people in postcolonial Africa. Two of the indices highlighted—general moral decadence and disorientation/apathy to politics—were further explored in six Nigerian literary texts from which pockets of depictions were identified as evidence. It is observed that although these indices are not of major concern in the selected texts, they are often read by critics in favour of their idealised masses. The analysis, therefore, ignites a rethink in African literature and criticism against its one-sided jeremiad account that leadership is entirely Nigeria's, and by extension Africa's, problem. With specific interest in the (in)actions of idealised members of the society, the study has shown the less examined causes of backwardness in Nigeria and Africa. From the radical revisionary perspective of inverted disillusionment as explored in the texts, it becomes evident that the idea of post-independence disillusionment cannot remain intact as the idealised people now take turns to sow some seeds of disillusionment. This is what Mbembe (1992, 29) calls the “real inversion ... when the masses clothe themselves in cheap imitation of power.” This study contributes to emerging criticism of postcolonialism with the concept of inverted disillusionment in its effort to place disillusionment in its proper perspective. Inverted disillusionment, therefore, with its indices, offers an alternative engagement paradigm in African literary criticism so that postcolonial theory can operate as a broad front for a whole range of different interrelated everyday realities, which now include the investigation of the untoward quotidian realities of the oft-idealised people in postcolonial Africa.

## References

- Achebe, Chinua. 1966. *A Man of the People*. London: Penguin Books.
- Achebe, Chinua. 1984. *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Oxford: Heinemann Books.
- Ademeso, Adebola. 2009. “National Development and the Concept of Compassion.” In *Emerging Perspectives on Femi Osofisan*, edited by Tunde Akinyemi and Toyin Falola, 53–63. Eritrea: Africa World Press.
- Agunbiade, Oyewumi Olatoye. 2019. “Followership and Post-Independence Disillusionment in Selected Plays of Femi Osofisan.” PhD diss., University of Ibadan.
- Armah, Ayi Kwei. 1969. *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. London: Heinemann.
- Awala, Bayo. 2015. Foreword to *Selected Plays 1: The Sick People. The Silent Gods. Kaffir's Last Game*, by Ahmed Yerima, 8–9. Ibadan: Kraft Books



- Ayoade, J. 2010. "Nigeria: Positive Pessimism and Negative Optimism." Valedictory lecture delivered on September 17, 2010, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Ibadan.
- Barry, Peter. 1995. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. New York, NY: Manchester University Press.
- Castle, Gregory. 2007. *The Blackwell Guide to Literary Theory*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Cates, Diana Fritz. 1992. "Wickedness." *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 12: 251–62. <https://doi.org/10.5840/asce19921214>.
- Chambers, Iain, and Lidia Curti, eds. 1996. *The Post-Colonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203297865>.
- Clark, John Pepper. 1964. *Three Plays: Song of a Goat, The Masquerade, and The Raft*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.
- Dasylva, Ademola. 2004. *Studies in Drama*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers.
- Dasylva, Ademola, and Oluwatoyin Jegede. 2005. *Studies in Poetry*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1968. "Differance." In *Theorie d' Ensemble*. Editions Seuil. Accessed July 15, 2015. <http://mforbes.sites.gettysburg.edu/cims226/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Week-5a-Jacques-Derrida.pdf>.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1981. *Dissemination*. Britain: The Athlone Press. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226816340.001.0001>.
- Eagleton, Terry. 1983. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Fashina, Nelson. 2009. "Of What Sex Is the Text? A New Reading of Gender Characterization as a Trope of Harmony, Cooperative Principle and Joint Heroism in Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*." *African Study Monographs* 30 (2): 71–87.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. Edited by Donald F. Bouchard and translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. New York, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Gimba, Abubakar. 2008. *Letter to the Unborn Child*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Huggan, Graham. 1993. "Postcolonialism and Its Discontents." *Transition* 62: 130–35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2935208>.
- Ibrahim, Huma. 1990. "The Violated Universe: Neo-Colonial Sexual and Political Consciousness in Dambudzo Marechera." *Research in African Literatures* 21 (2): 79–90.

- Kehinde, Ayobami. 2005. "Rethinking African Fiction in the Era of Globalization: A Contest of Text and Context." *Journal of the Nigeria English Studies Association* 11 (1): 87–97.
- Kehinde, Ayobami. 2011. "Two of a Kind: Thematic, Ideological and Aesthetic Convergencies in American and African Literatures." *Impressions* 5 (1). Accessed January 18, 2023. [http://www.impressions.org.in/jan11/ar\\_ayobamik.html](http://www.impressions.org.in/jan11/ar_ayobamik.html).
- MacDermott, Doireann. 1993. "What Comes After Post? Some Considerations on the Future of Post-Colonial Literature with Special Reference to India." In *Imagination and the Creative Impulse in the New Literatures in English*, Cross/Culture, Vol. 9, edited by Maria Teresa Bindella and Geoffrey V. Davis, 33–40. Amsterdam: Rodopi. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004503076\\_005](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004503076_005).
- Maes-Jelinek, Hena. 2004. "Postcolonial Criticism at the Crossroads: Subjective Questionings of an Old-Timer." In *Towards a Transcultural Future: Literature and Society in a 'Post'-Colonial World I*, Cross/Cultures, Vol. 77/9.1, edited by Geoffrey V. Davis, Peter H. Marsden, Bénédicte Ledent, and Marc Delrez, 1–19. Amsterdam: Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200073\\_004](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200073_004).
- Mbembe, Achille. 1992. "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony." *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62 (1): 3–37. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1160062>.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2001. *On the Postcolony*. London: University of California Press.
- Megbowon, Funmilola. 2019. "'Culture' as an Agent of Societal Regeneration: A Study of Selected Dramatic Literature by Soyinka, Osofisan and Rotimi." PhD diss., University of Fort Hare. <http://hdl.handle.net/10353/15826>.
- Megbowon, Funmilola Kemi, and Chijioke Uwah. 2020. "African Literature: A Tool for Societal Regeneration." *Imbizo* 11 (1): 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-6565/6432>.
- Mongia, Padmini. 1997. *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. London: Arnold.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. 1969. "Satire in Nigeria: C. Achebe, T.M Aluko and W. Soyinka." In *Protest and Conflict in African Literature*, edited by Cosmo Pieterse and Donald Munro, 56–69. Heinemann.
- Obafemi, Olu. 2008. *Politics and Aesthetics: Essays in Drama, Theatre and Performance*. Ilorin: Haytee Press and Publishing.
- Ododo, Sunnie. 2011. *Hard Choice*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Ogunrinade, D.O.A. 2016. "Contemporary Nigerian Popular Music: A Menace to National Development." *Journal of Arts and Humanities* 5 (1): 54–62. <https://doi.org/10.18533/journal.v5i1.865>.
- Osofisan, Femi. 1977. *The Chattering and the Song*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.

- Osofisan, Femi. 1990. *Birthdays Are Not for Dying and Other Plays: Fires Burn and Die Hard, The Inspector and the Hero*. Lagos: Malthouse Press.
- Osofisan, Femi. 2012. *Love's Unlike Lading: A Comedy from Shakespeare*. Lagos: Concept Publications.
- Osundare, Niyi. 2015. "No More Business as Usual: Nigeria's New-Found 'Change' and Lessons." *Sahara Reporters*, May, 20. <https://saharareporters.com/2015/05/20/no-more-business-usual-nigeria%E2%80%99s-new-found-%E2%80%98change%E2%80%99-and-lessons-our-recent-past-niyi>.
- Quayson, Ato. 2000. *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process?* Cambridge: Polity.
- Radio Nigeria. 2022. "Fake Kidnapping: Police Nab Twin Sisters, Three Others in Ekiti." Radio Nigeria, October 21, 2022. Accessed October 25, 2022. <https://radionigeriaibadan.gov.ng/2022/10/21/fake-kidnapping-police-nab-twin-sisters-three-others-in-ekiti/>.
- Ravenscroft, Arthur. 1973. "Novels of Disillusion." In *Readings in Commonwealth Literature*, edited by Williams Walsh, 186–205. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sowande, Bode. 1979. *Farewell to Babylon and Other Plays*. Ibadan: Longman.
- Soyinka, Wole. 1963. *A Dance of the Forest*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Soyinka, Wole. 1987. *The Trials of Brother Jero*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Spivak, Gayatri C. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 66–111. London: Macmillan.
- Yerima, Ahmed. 2015. *Collected Plays: 1 The Sick People. The Silent Gods. Kaffir's Last Game; 2 Agudua. Owiwi. 3. The Last Grain of Wheat. 4. Erelu-Kuti. The Wives. The Sisters*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Young, Robert. 2001. *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Young, Robert. 2004. *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203461815>.