

# Exploring Post-Colonial Leadership Crisis in Africa: A Linguistic Stylistic Analysis of Osundare's *The State Visit* and *Two Plays*

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## Summary

The colonial experience in most African states alongside the attendant merger of nation-states based on administrative convenience precipitated the urgency for sustained positive leadership. However, the constant punctuations of civil democratic rule by military juntas forestalled the change envisaged by most African countries upon independence. Niyi Osundare is one of the most vocal literary activists from Nigeria whose writings, in reflecting the literary writer's social responsibility role, have documented and emphasised the paucity of quality leadership in Nigeria, nay the African continent. The present study is a linguistic stylistic analysis of *The State Visit*, a satirical drama on military encroachment into governance and *Two Plays*, a social commentary on the effects on leadership crisis on the masses. Emphasis is on lexicosemantics in the (re)presentation of the leadership lacuna in the texts. Culture-specific expressions, neologisms, lexical sense relations, collocational deviations and word range were established stylistic tools found to be preeminent in showcasing the post-colonial leadership rut in which African nations are bespattered.

## Opsomming

In verskeie Afrikalande het die juk van kolonialisme, en die samesmelting van nasiestate om administratiewe redes, 'n naartiglike soeke na volgehoue, positiewe leierskap ontketen. Burgerlike, demokratiese regerings word egter met reëlmaat opgevolg deur militêre junta's, wat enige veranderinge wat Afrikalande met onafhanklikheid in die vooruitsig stel, in die wiele ry. Die tekste van Niyi Osundare, een van Nigerië se mees uitgesproke literêre aktiviste, weerspieël die maatskaplike verantwoordelikheid wat letterkundiges het om die gebrek aan leierskap in Nigerië – in der waarheid, op die Afrika-kontinent – te verwoord en te benadruk. Die huidige studie is 'n linguisties-stilistiese analise van *The State Visit*, 'n satiriese drama oor die inbreuk wat militêre ingrype op staatsbestuur maak, en *Two Plays*, wat sosiale kommentaar lewer op die effek wat leierskapskrisisse op die massas het. In die tekste val die klem op die leksikaal-semantiese danksy 'n (her)voorstelling van die leierskapsvakuum. Kultuur-eie uitdrukkings, neologismes, leksikale betekenisoooreenkomste, maar ook afwykings in terme van teksverband en woordperke, is van die beproefde stilistiese instrumente wat deurgaans gebruik word om die post-koloniale leierskapsgroef waarin Afrikastate verval het, uit te beeld.

## Introduction

Literature is creative writing of artistic value; it is a recurring theme in human existence as it serves as a documentation of human experiences and aspirations. As literature encapsulates the essence of human existence, literary writers are usually concerned with the representation of reality in their fictive works. This is agreeable with the dictum that “literature is a mirror of the society”. To achieve verisimilitude, writers replicate events and situations around them especially as the replication ensures that their readers easily familiarise themselves with the contents of such works. Literary writers in their depiction of events also function as social commentators. A permeant literary form through which African writers perform the role of social commentary is satire. Satire refers to witty language used to convey insults or scorn; a “playful distortion of reality” (Cao 2016). It is also any piece of writing designed to make its reader feel critical of themselves, of their fellow human beings, of institutions, and of the society as a whole. Satirical social commentary as identifiable in texts functions as a mouthpiece for the masses as it generates introspection and spurs action towards resolving the situation being critiqued. The present study appraises *The State Visit* and *Two Plays* with focus on the linguistic portrayal of the African leadership conundrum and the implications of the linguistic framing on the degeneration of moral values.

## (Post)Colonial Existence, Militarised Leadership and the African Experience

Colonialism is the exploitation by a stronger country of a weaker one as well as the use of the weaker country’s resources to strengthen and enrich the stronger country (*Advanced English Dictionary* 2015). With the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia, all African countries underwent colonial administration. While the wave of independence swept through the continent from the 1950s, the expectation that democratic regimes would provide sustained development was truncated in many of these countries. Military overthrows became the norm. The false dawn of independence from the colonial experience owing to democratic deficits during colonialism ensured that the emergent nation-states were apparatuses kowtowing to the demands of the exiting colonialists. Olateju (2013: 4) submits that colonial administration was replaced with “neo-patrimonial autocracy and elite rulership that depended for its sustenance, upon the colonial and later foreign powers”. This Meredith (2005) contends spawned bad governance and extremely selfish and cruel rulers.

Of Nigeria’s 55 years post-independence, 1999 to date represents the lengthiest uninterrupted democratic reign. Eight of the 16 years were spent

under the regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired army general. Regardless, however, of the return to democracy, the expected dividends are yet to materialise for the generality of the citizenry. In fact, the last elections of 2015 brought Muhammadu Buhari, a retired army general and head of state, to the office of President. Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has been in the helm of affairs since 1980 as a Janus-like democrat. Majority of African states have had military interventions in their political affairs while some still have semblances of military in civilian regalia. The military's incursion into politics is not a new development. Agi (1999: 2) asserts that:

Throughout history, from Artaxerxes on, military has interested itself in politics. Military groups – the Sacred Band of Thebes, the Praetorian Guard in Rome, the Samurai in Japan, the Junkers in Prussia, the Janissaries in the Ottoman Empire, the army of France from the time of Napoleon – have often influenced political decision.

Ake (1996), in evaluating the effects and influences of military onslaught on governance, remarks that:

The ascendancy of the military is one of the great tragedies of Africa, for the military is nothing other than a highly specialized apparatus of violence whose salience begins when sociability has become impossible and when civilized values no longer apply, when we must take to the battle fields. That is why military rule is inherently and inevitably de-civilizing.

The military experience on the African continent, realised through oppressive and ruthless dictatorships, has spawned protest literatures that document the incidents of the era. Some of such are Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*, Achebe's *Anthill of the Savannah*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Wizard of the Crow*, Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, Osundare's *The State Visit*, Sefi Attah's *Everything Good Will Come*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Moussa Konate's *Le Prix de l'Ame* and *Une Aube Incertaine*, Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Soza Boy* and *Prisoners of Jebs*, Adebayo William's *The Remains of the Last Emperor*, Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*, and Festus Iyayi's *Heroes*. The necessity of such fictionalisation is affirmed by Chinua Achebe (2007) when he postulates that:

Art is man's constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him; an aspiration to provide himself with a second handle on existence through his imagination. In other words, we invent different fictions to help us out of particular problems we encounter in living... The great virtue of literary fiction is that it is able by engaging our imagination and leading us to discovery and recognition by an unexpected and intrusive route.

(107)

The African experience of military regimes as documented in literary texts thus recreates happenings for the purpose of foregrounding them as well as stimulating reactions to the incidents. The exploration of the fictionalised militaristic and bad leadership experience and the implications of such inordinate powers on contextualised reality form the focus the present study.

### **Linguistic Stylistics: Dissecting Lexico-Semantics**

Stylistics as a linguistic study analyses the varieties of styles identifiable within texts or utterances. In achieving this, it employs the traditional levels of linguistic description viz phonology, morphology, lexis, syntax, semantics and all discursive properties in its analysis (Leech & Short 1981). Stylistic analyses enable the immediate understanding of utterances and texts, thus ensuring the reader's appreciation of such utterance and texts. Linguistic stylistics studies the language use including the normative linguistic habits identifiable in the literary works of specific writers. The scientific underpinning of linguistic stylistics enables it to objectively examine the linguistic or non-linguistic features in any text. The central objective of stylistics is to enable a comprehension of the intent of an author via the information conveyed and the significance of the chosen style. Stylistics is multi-disciplinary in its analytical approach. It examines language use in different contexts in order to determine the style, purpose(s), meaning(s), etc. and the over-all merit of a particular work. According to Ayeomoni (2003: 177), the linguistic study of texts is precise and definite as it employs objective and verifiable methods of analysis and interpretation of texts. This can be traced to its inclination for scientificity as it concentrates on the "linguistic frameworks operative in the text" (Ayeomoni 2003: 177). Linguistic stylistics, alternatively called literary stylistics, is the application of stylistic tools to the analysis of literary texts. This is in contrast to the alternative approach of literary criticism which is perceived as reliant on subjective interpretation of texts.

Lexico-semantics constitutes a level of linguistic stylistics. It must be borne in mind that the consideration of "semantics" is implicit in all the levels of analysis since the motive of analysis is to identify the underlying meanings and their relevance to the text studied. Saeed (2009: 54) observes that "lexical relations are central to how speakers construct meaning". He further identifies two traditional descriptive aims of lexico-semantics. These represent the meaning of each word in a language and show how the meanings of words in a language are interrelated (53). The consideration of lexico-semantics in the present study is cognisant of these perspectives.

## Niyi Osundare and an Overview of the Texts

Niyi Osundare is one of the most prominent and prolific contemporary Nigerian writers. Notably a poet, he is of the third generation of Nigerian writers who started writing post-Nigerian civil war. The generation witnessed the evident decay and putrefaction that characterised the country's political system. This was a period between 1980 and 1999 when Nigeria witnessed four military regimes, three of which came to power through coup d'état. It is in this light that Osundare presents *The State Visit*. The text is a thoroughly biting satire of existing political system in Yankeland, an imaginary African nation. The leaders are conscienceless and almost rudimentary in their thoughts and (in)actions. They are also utterly selfish, greedy and conceited, preferring to misappropriate and lavish money on white elephant projects. The leaders are oppressive and rule with impunity, having no place for opposition. The Press is coerced and bribed; the Police is tamed and subjected to the whims of the ruling class; and the people are tied down through the crushing pain of poverty. Even when the masses stage a revolt, the military government crush the dissenting group through the collusion of the Police. The play reveals the sit-tight syndrome that African leaders are notoriously noted for. It also documents contemporary socio-political happenings.

The play starts with the Cabinet meeting of the Head and ministers of Yanke. There we observe that the nation anticipates the visit of the Head of a sister nation, the President of Wilama. In view of the cordial relationship in existence between the two nations, the Head of Yanke decides that a memorable State Visit ceremony must be organised for the august visitor even at the peril of Yankeans, the citizens of Yanke. Reserve funds to arrest the slump in the agriculture sector are diverted to fund the visit while beggars, a normal sight in Yanke, are to be cleared from sight so as to avoid negative publicity. The police and media are ready tools in the hands of the leaders; they do the hatchet man's job. Preparatory to the state visit however, the government moves to rid the streets of beggars and their filth. The action of the government in aggravating an already delicate and precarious situation arouses widespread protest from workers, students and the general public. It is at the stage of vehemence to upturn the 30year-rule of Head that the play ends.

In *Two Plays*, which indeed contains two plays, Osundare explores and reveals the effects of poor leadership on the public. In the first play, "The Man Who Walked Away", the plight of a family's breadwinner who is unable to come to terms with his retrenchment forms the focus. Faced by a society which celebrates crooks who achieve wealth through corrupt practices in government and which gives no room for honesty and diligence of labour, "the man", Deyi, did the unthinkable. He committed suicide out of frustration. In "The Wedding Car", the ephemerality of power is interspersed with a contrastive presentation of the lives of the rich and poor. A corrupt father of

the bride is ready to spend any amount in order to get tongues wagging during a period of recession and austerity while the son-in-law overreaches himself in order to look good before his new family. Things however come to a head when Custom Officers show up on the wedding day to arrest the father of the bride while also impounding the allegedly smuggled car.

The two texts are thus complementary: while *The State Visit* focuses on the actions and inactions of the people in power, *Two Plays* is elucidatory of the effects of the (in)actions of the political elites on the lives, values and psyche of their citizens.

### **Methodological Details**

Niyi Osundare is more renowned as a Nigerian poet. Consequently, his drama texts usually escape scholarly scrutiny. A writer with a Marxist leaning, his works draw attention to the plight of the masses and the pervasive exploitation by postcolonial elites. A close reading of two purposively selected drama texts by Niyi Osundare, namely *The State Visit* and *Two Plays*, is achieved with particular attention paid to the lexico-semantic level of stylistic analysis. The specific concerns identified are neologisms, loanings, word-range, collocational deviation. These realisations are contextualised in line with the thematic preoccupation of postcolonial leadership crisis and militarism in Africa and the implications on contemporary moral values.

### **The Lexico-Semantic Analysis of the texts: Exploring the Leadership Gulf**

In subsequent headings, the stylistic analysis of the two selected texts is undertaken. This is done with specific attention paid to the focus – the linguistic portrayal of the leadership conundrum.

### **Nouns are for Naming: The Stylistic Implications of Names in the Texts**

The first noteworthy lexical observation in *The State Visit* is the anagrammatic naming of the nations of the different rulers mentioned in the text. For instance Yanke is Kenya; Wilama is Malawi; Goto is Togo; Ireza is Zaire (Now Democratic Republic of Congo); Toloze is an apparent corruption of Lesotho. In fact the currency spent in Yanke is Arina, an anagram of Nigeria's naira. Through these anagrams, Osundare locates his story and foregrounds the realities on the African continent. The allusions to these nations and their leaders however do not portray them in positive light. The leaders rule their

nations despotically. They specially request concubines whenever they make foreign trips. They all milk the resources of their countries for personal enrichment. In addition, these leaders are surrounded by cabinet crews who encourage perpetuation in office. In fact, the President of Wilama took over from his father upon the father's death thus suggesting a demesial overlordship. The Head of Yanke has also ruled for 30 years and has no plans of relinquishing power.

Government cabinet meetings are expected to dwell on issues fundamental to the growth of the nation. However, the reverse is the case in Yanke. The meetings dwell on banal and outlandish agenda ranging from gawky and gaudy plans for a state visit, how to suppress opposition, how to misappropriate state funds and how to satisfy the sexual needs of randy visiting rulers. The meeting is also a venue where absolute power rules and reigns. There, Professor and Journalist are ridiculed while Painter is sentenced to death. Head is concerned with how to fund the visit and does not hesitate, even when Finance advises otherwise, to transfer the Maize Fund, a palliative measure in the face of drought and famine, for the Welcome Project. In fact, a previous fund for a Water Dam Project had been diverted to the funeral ceremony of Head's grandfather. We also learn through Finance that Head withdrew 300million without the knowledge of the Minister to purchase a fighter jet despite that the country was not at war. During a cabinet meeting, the service of a rainmaker who is to be paid five million to ensure a rain-free state visit is also sought. These emphatically portray these leaders as authoritarian, greedy and narcissistic.

In "The Wedding Car" from *Two Plays*, the names Ninalowo-Chamberlain, Professor Jim-East, Mrs. Flora Jim-East and Lazarus are also suggestively wielded by the author. Ninalowo, a Yoruba name, implies the philosophy that "money is to be spent". This reflects in Chief Chamberlain's spendthrift attitude as he willingly spares no cost in lavishly entertaining his guests. Chief Chamberlain represents the ruling class who are unaffected by the plight of other citizens as long as their avaricious needs are met, little wonder beggars who gate-crash the party are booted out. The names of Professor Jim-East and his wife Flora suggest the Eurocentric leaning of many postcolonial African educated elites. Quick to pander to the whims of the politicians in order to gain access to the largesse, these educated elites sacrifice their exposure and simply acquiesce to the dictates of the usually poorly educated rulers. Lazarus, Chief Chamberlain's domestic help represents the downtrodden. And like his name suggests, he holds on to the hope of a change in fortunes if he has the opportunity of a second coming. Lazarus therefore exemplifies the fatalism of life for the masses that have been conditioned to believe that poverty is their lot.

## Word-Range

The members of the Executive Council constitute the highest decision-making body in Yanke. However, while the author gives normal indigenous names to other characters in the text, characters in power or related to the corridors of power are given generic names. Thus we have Head, Finance, External Affairs, Public Morality and Agriculture. Even Professor, Journalist and Policeman are complicit in the thirst for and sustenance of power as long as their pockets are lined. By using generic names, the writer draws attention to the human craving for power and position. He also portrays those entities and their characters as being pervasive in the society; such is the malaise that the individuals could be anybody. This realisation also extends to the use of Landlord and Rich man in “The Man who Walked Away” and Bride, 1st Foil Bride, 2nd Foil Bride, Old Man in “The Wedding Car”.

Militaristic expressions are rife in the text. Such exemplifications are army uniform, soldier, Colonel, despot, chamber 40, whips, combat, guns, throne-like chair depicting oppression and vain-glory. Some others are “banned parliament”, “burnt down unfriendly media houses”, “dumped vocal critics in ... prison”. The Head was a soldier before he was handpicked to be the ruler of Yanke. His military background, albeit one of indistinction, suffuses his rule as he rules autocratically. The military motif is indicative of the period in African post-colonial countries where military overthrows were the fad. The identified lexical items substantiate the viewpoint.

The national armorial bearing is semiotically significant as it reveals the orientation of the ruling class. It depicts a running lion with a prey in its mouth. The lion is symbolic of a carnivorous preyer and the leaders epitomise this as they blatantly consume the riches of the nation through misappropriation and unrestrained embezzlement of public funds to the detriment of the citizenry. They embark on white elephant projects and masochistically quash all forms of opposition.

The Minister of External Affairs often comes to the rescue of Head particularly through the use of euphemistic highfalutin expressions all of which he claims are esoteric to the diplomatic circles. Some of such expressions are restatements (21), reasoned disparity (28), sanitised elimination (29), information squeeze (44), indoctrination by telepathy (55), and indirect revenue accumulation through penal imposition (57). Restatements refer to the denial of earlier government press releases under the guise that such earlier statements were misconstrued or quoted out of context. The necessity to ensure that rulers had maximum enjoyment of the perks of office even when the masses suffer is termed “reasoned disparity” while “sanitised elimination” describes extrajudicial killings by the State. “Information squeeze” is informed by the State’s forced control of information via clamp-down on the media. In justifying his belief that Painter had been radicalised through exposure to Communism, External Affairs informs that Painter was a product



of “indoctrination by telepathy” since he obviously is not rich enough to travel abroad. “Indirect revenue accumulation through penal imposition” is a suggestion of ways to raise internal revenue for the government through the imposition of fines for traffic offences.

In *Two Plays*, poverty and opulence are juxtaposed. Poverty pervades “The Man Who Walked Away”. For instance, Abeke, Deyi’s wife relies on the use of a 30-year old sewing machine to patch a second hand cloth for her child. The family lives in a dinghy “rat hole”; the children skip meals while the parents cannot afford to pay the house rent. However in “The Wedding Car”, while Chief Chamberlain purchases the costliest edibles and orders an expensive one-in-town car for his daughter’s wedding, his house servants wallow in hardship due to their poor pay. The servants discuss the pittance which their monthly wages is (it is equivalent to two bottles of exotic wines bought for the wedding!), particularly in line with their basic needs and the prevailing economic realities.

## Loanings

Loanings are expressions borrowed from another language and then subsequently domesticated into the new linguistic environment. Instances of this are found in the text. Some of such are:

- Lasy (for lazy)
- Subfasif (subversive)
- Sitiron (Citreon)
- Kumbans (Cubans)
- Pleyo (Pleasure)
- Keresi (crazy)
- Amorika (America)
- Bukuru (Book)

It is significant to mention that the identified lexical items were observed in the utterances of the members of the Executive Council, the highest decision-making body in Yanke. It is indicative of the leadership rut witnessed in most African countries as post-colonial office holders usually did not have the requisite educational qualifications to direct the affairs of their countries. For instance, Nigeria had her first university graduate as President in 2007, forty-seven years after its independence. Osundare satirises the situation as Sule, Etim, Abeke and Obi who are all beggars speak very good English. These beggars also think straight and it is through them that we glimpse the level of decay, rot and oppression that the ordinary Yankean undergoes. The relapse to “broken” English, Pidgin English and outright indigenous languages suggest that the leaders do not have what it takes to communicate competently. However, they cling strongly to power.

## Coinages/Neologisms

Lexical creativity is employed by the writer to present certain ideas. The creation of new expressions is neologism (Short 1996). Instances of linguistic creativity identified in the text are:

**Yankeans:** this follows the word-formation process of creating a noun or adjective from the name of a country. The word can be morphological divided into Yanke + -ans; with the Yanke as the root and -ans as a bound morpheme. **UniYanke** is a coinage in consonance with the slang naming of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Existing examples are Unilag, UnIfe (Now OAU) UniMaid and UniCal. UniYanke therefore finds provenance in the instances. **Consciencide** is an interesting coinage by the writer. Its morphological roots can be found in the blending of conscience and -cide. -cide is a suffix used to make nouns meaning the killing of the person or thing indicated by the first component of the word. Consciencide thus implies people who have killed their consciences; the death of their consciences makes them able to mete out inhumane and unjust treatments on other people. The word is especially pivotal as it lucidly reveals the core of the events in the text – tyrannical leadership. The word, and its accompanying text locale, resonates with Soyinka’s timeless expression that “the man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny”.

## Collocational Deviation

Collocation refers to the company that words keep. It implies that there are established environment in which certain expressions can be found and such habitual companies are regarded as collocation. However, language being a creative and dynamic tool is sometimes constructed to deviate from norms.

Therein come collocational deviations. Instances of such deviation in the text are:

‘Caves of the jaw’: This refers to the insatiable greed that drives the leaders of most African nations. While a normal jaw may have depressions during muscular movement so as to extend, the jaws of the African leader have caves to feed their voracious appetite for personal material aggrandisement, wealth and power.

‘His stethoscope placed on the pulse of his bank account’: The full excerpt reads – the doctor takes egg bribes from kwashiorkor patients; his stethoscope placed on the pulse of his bank account. The medical profession is not immune to the immanent rot. Doctors collect bribes from their patients even in situations where those things are essential to the health and wellbeing of the patient. The extortion is so rife and normal that patients are regarded as “bank account” through which the greed of doctors are gratified as they can fictionalise ailments just to extort funds from their patients.

“The magistrate counts justice in notes and coins; The guilty buy innocence from the courts as tender for public office”: In the absence of equity, justice becomes errant. Therefore, since materialism rules the day, even Magistrates who should dispense the law and are perceived to be incorruptible have also fallen for the filthy lucre. The highest bidder therefore gains favourable judgements. In Nigeria, until recently electoral cases are usually always won by the party in the centre. In addition, ex- and present office holders and civil servants who have been found guilty of misappropriation of funds have escaped imprisonment through plea-bargaining whereas the average man on the street is clapped into long-term jail sentences.

“He dumped vocal critics in some safe prison where they received royal treatment”: Safe prison and royal treatment are obviously not collocates. The euphemism of meting royal treatments to perceived enemies of the state is deceitful. However it satisfies the need of the government as those critics are away from the public where they can do damage. The excerpt concretises the fact that autocratic governments do not condone criticism, however constructive, of their activities.

“The policeman who flogs bribes out of mere suspects; the port worker who makes cargo disappear through the talisman of tricks; the clergy who breaks into holy sweat after swallowing all the widow’s mite; the university don who pawns his wife for a chair”: The magnitude of the putrescence occasioned by corruption in the society is identifiable in all sections of daily life. The police, civil servant, clergy and academic have all jettisoned their callings and are in pursuit of filthy lucre. To realise their objectives, they do anything – even if it entails selling their souls to Mephistopheles a la Christopher Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus.

“The guns have answered”: As military governments are wont to do, all forms of opposition are vanquished through force – chiefly by the use of guns. In the first place, the military capture power through force – a principal medium which is the gun. Violence is the principal response to critics. The spate of assassinations of vocal anti-government critics during “juntocratic” regimes is testament to the answering of guns. In Nigeria, the cold-blooded murder of Dele Giwa, a foremost journalist, in 1986 and that of Kudirat Abiola come to mind.

### **Contextualising the Findings: Negotiating Language, Power and the Degeneration of Values in Postcolonial African States**

Darah (2005) establishes satire as a literary device through which a satirist defends communal norms and virtues. In addition, Akingbe (2014) recognises satirical writings as requisite in the impassioned critique of Nigeria’s social and moral problems. The analysed texts in this study creatively locate the

incidents of gross misuse and abuse of power by postcolonial African leaders, with the resultant effect being a foregrounding of what should be as against what is. The implications of the degeneration of communal moral values as revealed through the linguistic analyses of the texts constitute the focus of the present heading.

The narcissistic and chameleonic nature of African leaders is emphatically replicated in the Head's raiment in *The State Visit*. He alternates between dressing in military regalia and civilian outfits. He however rules dictatorially. The records from most African countries reveal a disposition for sit-tight governments. Instances are also aplenty of rulers who have spanned several generations in power and morphed from dictatorships to democracies. Yaya Jammeh in Gambia, Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe and Olusegun Obasanjo and incumbent Muhammadu Buhari in Nigeria come to mind. Head's robe was "an imperial ceremonial coat bedecked with medals of different shapes, sizes and colours" with a decoration "that beats anything this country ... the world ... has ever seen". Landlord, Deyi's Manager in London and Chief Chamberlain also depict this narcissism in their concern with only their convenience to the detriment of others. In addition, the pedigree of most African leaders is suspect. Contractor and Chief Chamberlain's wealth border on corruption and misappropriation of government funds. So also is the rapid rise of the Head as a subaltern soldier, "the greatest shoe-polisher in the whole army" who never passed "many of the bukuru exams". This validates claims that European colonialists favoured brawn over brain and "appointed" puppets as heads of the new African states so as to continue the plunder and ruin of the economy of such states while the postcolonial governance experiences are simply artificial "hand-me-down" phenomenon (Ayang' Nyang'O 1987: 9).

Sycophancy and praise-singing are regular features in the corridors of power. In *The State Visit*, the poor leadership witnessed in Yankeland is fuelled by sycophancy on the part of some citizens. In the face of hardship, one would expect widespread criticism. The same obtains in Chief Chamberlain's household in "The Wedding Car" where his guests agree to his opinions just so they can benefit from the largesse his social position may bestow. Those who fail to toe the line are regarded as outcasts and left to suffer, as exemplified in the texts by the characters of Deyi, Painter and Finance. This mirrors the African reality where opposition are gagged and oftentimes hounded by the State. While flimsy charges may be orchestrated to subdue them, these charges usually disappear once the opposition voice joins the ruling party.

The role of the media is also depicted as compromised. The same can be said of the academia which should under normal circumstances function as a think-tank for the government. The reality however is that the media and the academia have been subjugated. Press officers are serially attacked by agents of the State in the course of their duties. They are often also compromised in

their reportage of events. Journalist in *The State Visit* is overwhelmed by the power exuded by the Cabinet members. He refers to the Head thus: My Head, my Leader, my Lord, Lion of Yanke, our God-chosen, our Messiah (20). The same scenario is played out through the representative of the academics – Professor. While Professor has the gait and garb of an academic, his meekness and bootlicking obsequiousness when he meets the Cabinet is disconcerting. We later find out that he is eyeing an appointment as Principal of the University College. The diffidence of the media and the academia reveal the emasculation of sections that should be at the forefront of the fight for justice and equity.

Religion and religious leaders are also conspiratorial and are partly responsible for the lacklustre leadership. Dictatorial Heads of government always look to legitimise their regimes by clinging to constituencies that control substantial chunks of their citizenry. As many African states are very religious, politicians constantly look to solicit and gain the support of religious blocs. As expressed on *The State Visit*, the religious leaders “promised interdenominational prayers on Friday and Sunday” and “assured that the Almighty is behind this great government and its God-fearing Head. They are praying for the success of the visit” (56). Even religion and religious leaders, like Soyinka’s Brother Jero, are contributory to the rot and cannot salvage the situation.

The complicity of western/developed countries and neo-colonisation in the plight of most contemporary African nations is further presented. The reference to America is a metaphor for the West. Western countries provide aid and support as long as their stream of business interests are protected in many African countries (Nugent 2004; Mwaura 2005; Easterly 2006). For instance, America provides financial “gift” for continued “business as usual” as long as Head in *The State Visit* denounces America’s enemies – the Russians. The neo-colonialist viewpoint is reinforced by the acquiescence of Head that “for allowing them [America] to use Biirona as military base”, America gave 200million dollars as “Thank you money”. References are also made to Switzerland and the Central American islands – notorious places known for expertise in providing havens for stolen funds and anonymity in banking affairs. The principal companies in most African countries are also owned by foreigners. Deyi in “The Man Who Walked Away” was retrenched from Pantibury Overseas Limited which has its headquarters in London. Chief Kagbade-Jones, the wealthy government contractor is also in cahoots with “Wentbury Enterprises with headquarters in London, Paris, New York and Yokohama” (23). Chief Chamberlain in “The Wedding Car” is reputed to come from a respected background as his father was the first agent of Y and B Foreign Holdings.

## **Power and the Diminishing Psyche of the Public**

Power is a controlling influence. It constitutes a tool in perpetuating the subjugation of a group by another. The reality in most African states substantiates this realisation. Just like the opposition are cowered into submission in the texts, the situation where party politics is devoid of ideological leanings and politicians simply switch to the party in power is commonplace. Truth has been compromised for pecuniary benefits. While the ruling class look to perpetuate themselves in office, the masses are left dejected. In “The Man Who Walked Away”, Deyi says “my manhood has been crushed under the might of the personnel manager’s pen” (8). Lazarus in “The Wedding Car” also remarks that “I am tired of this job but I don’t know where else to go” (36). Escapism therefore becomes the order of the day, and suicide morphs into a worthy option.

To negotiate an identification of contemporary decay of moral values, the attractive proposition of materialism and narcissism provide an insight. Money is the new god. Landlord in “The Man Who Walked Away” for instance does not care about the plight of his tenants. He says “I live on money ... if I do and it is not ready, I will throw out all these wretched things you call property”. Deyi’s friends also slaughter their conscience on the stable of materialism. They all rush to pick from the largesse of the lavish contractor at the night club. Although revealing the fact that their standards had truly been compromised, they hinge their newfound pragmatism on the necessity of survival, fondly musing that “the rustling of crisp notes is rhyme in the ears”. In the face of widespread unemployment, becoming willing tools in the hands of politicians or towing corrupt practices become attractive options for many young people.

Deremi, the groom in “The Wedding Car”, also reveals the contemporary malaise. He takes a loan to foot his wedding. He is neck-deep in debt while the Host Woman, a representative of the Chamberlain family fleeces the groom’s family of their hard-earned money. This is indicative of the trend wherein the rich and mighty continually exploit the hoi polloi, making more money to the detriment of the masses. News reports of the lavish lifestyles of the people in government, records of widespread misappropriation of funds and of slush funds kept in offshore tax havens daily compete on the airwaves. Hitherto conscientious workers and young people therefore are unsurprisingly motivated to get rich through any means. Online fraud, daylight robbery, advance fee scams are some of the contemporary manifestations through which impoverished African citizens seek to make ends meet.

## **Circumscribing Sanity: The Voices of Hope**

The first Minister of Finance and Painter from *The State Visit*; Deyi from “The

Man Who Walked Away” and Deremi and Lazarus from “The Wedding Car” represent the ideals of a sane human society. They function as the voices of reason and as the conscience of the people. Finance resigns from his enviable position when he notices that his advice are always ignored and that anti-masses decisions are always taken at the Cabinet meetings. He is always silent and ruminative while others engage in desultory conversations. Painter on the other hand is viewed by the Cabinet members as insane. This is because he had been given a project to paint Head and the visiting President of Wilama in a strategic location with the expectation that the contract will make Painter rich and win him to the part of the ruling class. Once it becomes obvious that Painter is not inclined to do the bidding of the Cabinet members, Head sentences him to Room 40 – hanging room – so as to “let him know what it means to be a victim of our wrath”. While Finance by escaping death is not martyred, Painter is. This is reminiscent of Steve Biko, Patrice Lumumba, Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni group who were martyred for standing for truth and justice by oppressive regimes in different African countries.

Beggars in both texts are used as representatives of civil societies. As Olateju (2013: 2) affirms, civil societies provide “the platform for the articulation of civil resistance”. The beggars therefore act of beacon of hope for the general society. Not only do they constitute an unwelcome presence in “The Wedding Car”, they undertake the protest for change in government in “The State Visit”.

## Conclusion

The endemic state of jejune leadership in most African countries has been laid bare. The elite as represented in the texts (as larger-than-life personalities) are symbolic of the kind of leadership African countries have had post-independence. While democracy is the current wave, as we see with Head and Chief Chamberlain, adorning civilian attires does not erase the despotic and kleptomaniacal tendencies of these rulers. The class struggles between the elites and the beggars signify a new orientation over the control of power. This reality is identifiable in the 2011 Egyptian protests of 2011 which sparked off the subsequent Arab Spring which enveloped the Middle East.

Despite the pervading negativity occasioned by the African leadership crisis, all hope is not lost. *The State Visit* ends with a protest aimed at installing change in the polity. This hints that individuals and citizens should not be silent or cowardly in the face of impunity. The writer’s role as a social commentator and agent of social change comes to the fore when Osundare (2002) through the voice of the narrator says:

Some know these problems exist but are too comfortable to stir; some hastily conclude that it is all God’s design. Of those who care, many do not know what

to do. They wring their fingers and shake their heads, explode loud hisses and grumble. But there is a few who know that silence and acquiescence are the tonic of oppression; that they are the nurturers of tyranny, who flatter when they should kick; they bequeath a dumb future who take asking questions as an act of treason.

(11)

Apart from advocating active public participation in African politics, public agencies must be strengthened to perform equitably while the tenets of true democracy must be fostered. More importantly, African nations must wean themselves off the continued dependence on Western ideals. In all, a lexico-semantic stylistic analysis substantiates *The State Visit* and *Two Plays* as embodiments of unflattering leadership decay identifiable in many African countries. It reveals the socio-political state of most African nations alongside the implications on the teeming masses. It further foregrounds the necessity of a communal abhorrence of corruption in sanitising the society. Eschewing the ideal in extending the repugnant reality forebodingly dictate that the society will plunge into a cesspit of decadence and turpitude. A word, they say, is enough for the wise.

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