Literature and History: Study of Nigerian Indigenous Historical Novels*

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Abstract

The assumption that history posits itself as a fact, while literature is to be taken as an artistic form, only for entertainment (i.e., the difference between truth and falsehood, reality and illusion) has long been debated by formalists and sociologists of literature. In Yorùbá society, literature and history are important in explaining the fullness of life and the world around us. It is against this background that this paper examines the relationship between literature and history and how Yorùbá novelists use their works as vehicles for the representation of history. We adopt the theory of New Historicism to analyze T.A.A. Ládélé's *Igbì Ayé ń yí* and Olú Owólabí's *Ọ̀tẹ̀ Nlbò*. Some of the findings reveal that: both Yorùbá literature and history are closely related, they are both based on Yorùbá experience and Yorùbá existence either in the past or present; while Ládélé interprets the history of the dignity and royal glamour of the Yorùbá ọba in the precolonial era as a form of domination which is often achieved through culturally-orchestrated consent rather than force; Owólabí represents the history of party politics in Yorùbá society as fraudulent, deceitful, full of bitterness and violence. The paper concludes that both novelists are subjective in their representation of Yorùbá history, but they successfully establish the fact that the novel is a repository of history; however, such history is not a mere chronicle of facts and events, but rather a complex description of human reality and a challenge to the preconceived notions of the societies from which they emerged.

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1. Introduction

There are three generations of Yorùbá literary writers, according to Karin Barber: the long-established giants like D.O. Fágúnwà, Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí, J.F. Ọdúnjọ, T. A. A. Ládélé, Ògúndélé Lágbóndókò, and Isaac Délànò, all of whom began writing in the colonial era; the writers of the 1960s and 1970s like Olú Owólabí, Afọ́lábí Ọlábímtán, Ọládiípọ̀ Yemitan, Láwuyì Ògúnníran, Ọládẹ̀jọ Òkédìjí, and Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá; and a new prolific category of post-oil boom newcomers like Bámijí Òjó, Jíbọ́lá Abíọ́dún, Bọ̀dé Akinọlá, and others (Barber). Most of these writers use historical materials in their literary works to respond to the challenges of their society. As aptly attested by Ògúnṣínà, A writer responds with his total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time for the writer himself lives in, and is shaped by history. Although most of the literary works of these writers (poetry, drama, and prose) have been subjected to critical analysis by prominent Yorùbá critics — for example, Yai, Irele, Iṣọla, Barber, Ògúnṣínà, Bámgbóṣé, Adélékè, Akínyẹmí, Adéyẹmí, Afọláyan, and Adékúnlé, among numerous others — Yorùbá literary scholars have yet to focus their critical attention on the relationship between history and literature as portrayed in the literary works of these writers. Scholars of Yorùbá literature have examined various themes, including economy, social relations, gender, culture, and philosophy, but a more conscious insertion of the study of history and literature has yet to be elaborately done.

The thrust of this study is to examine the relationship between literature and history and how the writers use literature as a vehicle for the representation of Yorùbá history. Our focus is on Yorùbá historical fiction, which is becoming increasingly popular and critically received by academic historians, literary critics, and readers.

2. Conceptualization of the Yorùbá Historical Novel

As Bísí Ògúnṣínà has noted, the historical novel is a kind of imaginative portrayal of some definite aspects of history (1992:126. It deals with the past states of affairs and how they affect human experience. The Yorùbá historical novel within the context of this study is a literary genre in which the plot takes place in the past. In this setting, the manners and social conditions of the persons or times presented in the story are portrayed. Such novels reconstruct the past. There is a thin line between the Yorùbá historical novel and

the Yorùbá political novel; this is because most historical novels in Yorùbá can also be categorized as political novels. For example, *Aiyé Daiye Oyinbo* by Délànọ̀ and *Ọmọ Olókùn Ẹsin* by Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí are historical novels, yet they portray precolonial and colonial politics in Yorùbá society. In fact, the Yorùbá historical novel is often inspired by politics and other factors. This position is supported by Ògúnṣínà when he states that the historical novel "has a specific link with history in its use of real events and personages of historical significance" (1992:126). Yorùbá historical novels are mainly a mixture of fictional materials with both political and historical events. In other words, political issues are common in the Yorùbá historical novel.

Délànọ̀'s *Aiye Daiye Oyinbo*, which was the first Yorùbá historical novel, attempts a presentation of precolonial life and traditional politics in contact with colonialism. Other Yorùbá historical novels are Délànọ̀'s *Lójọ́ Ọjọ́un*, Fálétí's *Ọmọ Olókùn Ẹsin*, and Ládélé's *Ẹ Ng Lò Gbà Tèmi*. All these historical novels have been subjected to critical analysis by leading Yorùbá literary critics; for example, Ìṣọ̀lá and Ògúnṣínà have done monumental criticisms on the texts. The two selected texts for this study have not yet been analyzed as historical novels. Akínyẹmí has analyzed Olú Owólabí's *Ọ̀tẹ̀ Nìbò* as a documentary on Nigeria's political instability. Adéyẹmí evaluated the same novel within the postcolonial theory in 2003. Both critics regard the novel as historical documentation of the bitter experiences of life in postcolonial Nigeria. Literary criticism on Ládélé's *Igbì Ayé ń yí* and Owólabí's *Ọ̀tẹ̀ Nìbò* is sparse. In fact, to the best of our knowledge, apart from Ògúnṣínà's brief comment on Ládélé's *Igbì Ayé ń yí*, in his book titled *The Development of the Yorùbá Novel*, no critical work exists on the novel, which is why we include it as one of the two novels in this study. At present, no historical Yorùbá novel has been made into a movie, unlike some Yorùbá historical plays. Examples are Fálétí's *Baṣọrun Gáà*, Owólabí's *Agbòngbò Àkàlà*, and lately *Jógunómi*,a fair reflection of Láwuyì Ògúnníran's *Ọmọ Aláṭẹ Ìlẹ̀kẹ̀*.

This study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between literature and history?
2. How do the selected Yorùbá novelists use literature as a vehicle for the representation of history?
3. What is the role of historical context in interpreting literary texts?

This type of study involves a broad knowledge of other disciplines, especially the history of different phases in Yorùbá society, precolonial, colonial, decolonization and post-independence. Thus, we consider an interdisciplinary discourse to be germane to our study but our primary sources are the selected novels. We limit our selection to the historical novels of T. A. A. Ládélé and Olú Owólabí. The reason for this scope is because the early Yorubá historical

novels, namely Délànọ̀'s *Lọ́jọ́ Ọjọ́un* and *Aiyé Daiyé Òyìnbó*, Fálétí's *Ọmọ Olókùn Ẹṣin*, and Ládélé's *Ẹ ń lògbà Tèmi* have received critical attention fromYorùbá literary scholars while the selected novels have not. Secondly, the theory of New Historicism is just emerging in Yorùbá literary scholarship and we have decided to test the tool and a few novels for in-depth analysis. The works of the two novelists cover the different historical phases in Yorùbáland. Yorùbá literary critics have not given these authors due attention, unlike with other prominent writers such as D.O. Fágúnwà, Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí, Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá, and Ọládẹ̀jọ Òkédìjí.

Our theoretical framework for the study is New Historicism. New Historicism emerged as a recognizable theory in 1980 when Stephen Greenblatt published *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Brannigan). Historicism understands the stories of the past as society's way of constructing a narrative which unconsciously fits its own interests. The theory of New Historicism is influenced by post-structuralist theory and it seeks to reconnect a work with the time period in which it was produced and with the cultural and political movements of the time. New Historicism assumes that every work is a product of the historic moment that created it. Unlike the Historicist theory of the past, which asks questions such as "what happened "and "what does the event tell us about history", "New Historicism asks, "how has the event been interpreted?" Other typical questions new historicism asks are: What language/characters/events present in the work reflect the current events of the author's day? How are events' interpretation and presentation a product of the culture of the author? How does the work criticize the leading political figures or movements of the day? How does the work consider traditionally marginalized populations? New Historicists do not believe that we can look at history objectively, but rather that we interpret events as products of our time and culture. In other words, history here is not a mere chronicle of facts and events, but rather a complex description of human reality and a challenge to the preconceived notions of the societies from which they emerged. New historicism, according to Jürgen Pieters, gained the immediate interest of those who had become dissatisfied with the stringent texualist ideology upheld by most American deconstructionists. New historicism is more "sociohistorical ," whereas formalism and structuralism restrict their observations to within the text itself.

New historicism allows cross-fertilization of ideas between historians and literary critics. It is broad-based and new in Yorùbá literary scholarship. New Historicists believe that authors are motivated by power and they have a hard time comprehending religious beliefs, seeing rather as a front for pursuit of power. New ideas usually bring innovations. Literary critics who have subjected the early Yorùbá historical novels such as *Lọ́jọ́ Ọjọ́un, Aiye Daiye Oyinbo*, and *Ọmọ Olókùn Ẹṣin* to analysis use either sociology of literature or

the historical approach, as seen in Ògúnṣínà and Ìṣòlá's works, for example. Even though their works are pathfinders and intellectually enriching, none of the existing works uses New Historicism. It is hoped that this study will be an innovation in the critical study of Yorùbá novels and contribute to the existing knowledge of Yorùbá literary criticism. Academic historians will also benefit from the study because it would expand and enrich their knowledge about Yoruba history in particular and Nigerian political history in general as interpreted by Yorùbá novelists.

3. Relationship between History and Literature

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, literary critics seemed to become more interested in the relationship between literature and history. In Britain and America, according to Brannigan(417), the contents of literary journals, the subjects of critical books and university courses, and the titles of academic conferences were reflecting a growing interest in examining how literature reflected, shaped, and represented history. Frisina cites the statement of Eli Whitney, first chairman of the "Tutorial Board of History and Literature" in the *Fields of Concentration Handbook 1928* that:

> The field of history and literature is designed primarily for those men who have, shall we say, a philosophic turn of mind. At all events, they must be interested in cause and effect, they must have the capacity and background to see the inter-relation of events; and must be possessed of sufficient imagination to apply the lessons of the past to the problems of the future. (12)

The critical point here is that literature and history are related and they interact in cause and effect in order to apply the lessons of the past to the problems of the future.

In precolonial African society, history and literature were not strange bedfellows. The relationship between literature and history has never been subjected to serious contention in Yorùbá society. The provocative blurring of boundaries and crossing of borders among disciplines have long been part of the Yorùbá knowledge system. Departmentalization of knowledge is rare in traditional Yorùbá society. The traditional chanters and dramatists were great recorders and revealers of history. The griots, the poets and musicians, were repositories of historical facts. At a period when writing was unknown, the oral medium served the people for the preservation of their ancient experiences and historical events. Much of what Nigerian people could learn today could be found in their oral and written literature.

Ìtàn is the generic name for any kind of story, and history which is regarded as a true story belongs to *ìtàn*. Other types of *ìtàn* include myths (*ìtàn ìgbà ìwáṣẹ̀*), legends (*ìtàn ìgbàani*), origin stories (*ìtàn orírun*), folktales (*àlọ́ onítàn*), and in modern times the novel (*ìtàn àròsọ*). Yorùbá narratives belong to different classes according to the criterion of factuality. Some narratives are thought to happen in real life, and others are imagined. Factual traditions or accounts are transmitted differently — with more regard to faithful reproduction of content — than are fictional narratives such as folktales. Vansina (85) observes a close relationship between historical tales and historical accounts in Rwanda. He states that historical accounts of Ruganzu Ndori show obvious influences from the popular version of tales about him, and exhibit the full effects of artistic license. Vansina asserts that the only significant difference between historical tales and historical accounts is that the tale is told for entertainment and subject to the dynamics of fiction, while historical accounts are not, but both retain the authentic history. In precolonial Yorùbá society, myths and legends were used by historians to establish oral historical tradition. For example, the myth of Ṣàngó is a manifestation of the deity among the worshippers. However, there is also an oral historical version which sees Ṣàngó as human. The real name of Ṣàngó, the fourth *aláàfin* of Ọyọ is Ìtíolú Babáyẹmí; he assumed the name Sàngó because certain of his actions were like those of the Ṣàngó divinity. As Bohrer and Wenger observe,"Ṣàngó is also important because of his human history as the *aláàfin* of Oyọ. He is not a myth like others; he is both very human and very godly" (12). In the myth of Mọrèmi of Ifẹ, we observe the process of the transformation of an oral traditional historical event into mythological manifestation. Both stories are respected as correct and sacrosanct. Quayson (74) cautioned against a postcolonial historiography that would erase local traditions of storytelling about the past. Knowledge based solely on documents, he argues, serves ultimately to over-determine the very ways by which indigenous peoples later imagine their histories.

The novel is fundamentally a story, but it is a story of a particular type, and as Ògúnṣínà notes, a novel is essentially a written prose narrative of some length, an imaginative portrayal of life, with plot, situation, and characterization all based on facts of existence (1992: 297). History, on the other hand, is the chronological recording of events in time, often with an analysis of their causes. History deals with the overall achievements, events of an entire population. Literature (the novel) deals with the same events, from a much more personal viewpoint. Both history and literature, especially the novel, depend on occurrences in the society.

Until far into the eighteenth century, Ankersmit relates, the word "novel" could refer to a true story, and within this episteme, the novel and history

could hardly be expected to become independent of each other (4). The traditional material of myth, legend, and folktale is so intimately connected with the life of the Yorùbá people that some knowledge of it is necessary to an intelligent understanding of some aspects of their history. The close relation which had existed between literature and history changed in the nineteenth century. Ranke an historian, explains in clear terms that:

> History is distinguished from all other sciences in that it is also an art. History is a science in collecting, founding, penetrating; it is an art because it recreates and portrays that which it has found and recognized, other sciences are satisfied simply with recording what has been found. History requires the ability to recreate. (Ankersmit, 5)

According to Ranke, history contains a scientific component — which is associated with "historical research," a poetical component which he calls "historical writing." He lists six qualities of an historian, namely, love of truth, an accurate production of history, a complete openness to the past, penetration into causal relations, impartiality, and the pursuit of an overall picture of the area of the past being studied. He concludes that what is required of a historian is a passive surrender to the past with no space at all for the aesthetic dimension of historical writing. On the relationship between literature and history, Professor Barrette Weddell, the first chair of History and Literature at Harvard University, insisted that writers could never have been what they were but for the historical forces that surged about them; conversely, it is through the literary voices of the past that the historian comes to understand not only bare facts but also how those facts made the living men feel who knew them in the flesh (Follansbee 1).

The contention that history posits itself as a fact, while the novel is taken to be an artistic form i.e., the difference between truth and falsehood, reality and illusion, serious and non-serious discourse, is no longer fashionable. The point is that both literature and history are important in *explaining the fullness of life and the world around us.* Literature is the historical life in reality. Historical facts like the novel are constructed not found; documents do not possess their own meaning but are given meaning by historians. Literature and history are based on human experience and human existence, either past or present. Even though history consists of descriptions of the past in direct unadorned language and though literature may use simile and metaphor and is characterized primarily by the imaginative spirit, both the historian and the historic novelist are engaged in the process of selecting, ordering, and narrating the events of the past. History, like literature, is presented as the site of knowledge, what Haraway calls "situated knowledge" (195) — where we can talk about things like the politics and epistemologies of location, positioning,

and situation, and where particularity and not universality is the condition of being heard without partiality we can make rational claims. In other words, literature and history are not separable categories of discourse in the modern day, and some contemporary Yorùbá novels have shown the creative possibilities of cross-border activity between the Yorùbá novel and history.

The truth-value of a historical narrative itself is subject to the interpretation of the historian. The practitioners of both literature and history i.e. novelists and historians can aspire to promote the integration of the two disciplines and strike a balance between general knowledge and specific expertise. Thus, the close relationship between literature and history gives birth to the historical novel, where the writer studies a particular era in order to write a story. Such stories may be wholly fictional or they might be fictionalized accounts of real people and real events. In this study, the indigenous literature of Southwest Nigeria (Yorùbá) is our focus.

4. Yorùbá Political History in the selected novels of T. A. A. Ládélé and Olú Owólabí

The political history and development of the Yorùbá people and of Nigeria in general pose special problems, especially in dealing with the history of the years of their existence before contact with the Europeans. Yorùbá historians depend largely on materials transmitted by oral tradition to construct the history of the people. Also, the Yorùbá novelists generally use their knowledge of Yorùbá oral traditions, personal experiences, and other written sources to represent and interpret Yorùbá history. Délànọ̀, whose novels (namely *Lọ́jọ́ Ọjọ́un* and *Aiyé Daiyé Òyìnbó*) constitute the first examples of the Yorùbá historical novel, depends on his deep knowledge of Yorùbá oral tradition, his personal experience, and events of his own days. *Lọ́jọ́ Ọjọ́un* is set in Abẹ́òkúta, his hometown, to reflect the splendor and pleasantness of traditional Yorùbá life before the coming of the Europeans. The novel is a representation of Yorùbá cultural history in the precolonial era, especially in the nineteenth century. *Aiyé Daiyé Òyìnbó*, on the other hand, portrays the historical contact the Yorùbá people had with white men and the consequences of such contact on Yorùbá traditional politics. Délànọ̀ is no doubt the first Yorùbá literary historian to portray the precolonial and early colonial periods without a clear rejection of the colonial legacies, unlike T.A.A. Ládélé and Olú Owólabí, who not only reflect and refract the colonial and postcolonial history but evaluate the legacies of the colonial masters in Yorùbá society.

T. A.A. Ládélé and Olú Owólabí are literary historians whose novels are vehicles for the representation of history, and which reveal the processes and tensions by which historical change comes about. Ládélé's *Igbì Ayé ń yí* and

Owólabí's *Ọtẹ Nìbò* do not just document Yorùbá political history; rather, they recreate and re-evaluate active parts of a particular historical moment from the perspective of community historians. The two novels make a historical exploration of the precolonial period. While Ládélé reflects the precolonial era, Owólabí recreates and evaluates the colonial Yorùbá experience. Even though there is no chronological representation of historical facts in the texts; the two authors relate various aspects of Yorùbá life before the advent of the colonial masters.

In *Igbì Ayé ń yí*, Ládélé reflects the sociopolitical organization of the Yorùbá during the precolonial years of their history, which was dominated by the special position occupied by the *ọba*. The *ọba* wielded enormous power and he was then highly respected. An *ọba* was rarely seen in the public. Whenever he came out during an annual festival, he was veiled. The king had the power of life and death. Even though no Yorùbá king could afford to be autocratic, he was called *aláṣẹ igbákejì òrìṣà*. The setting of the novel is the old Ọyọ kingdom, which the novelist calls Òtólú, and Olú is the *ọba*. Olú means the paramount ruler, the leader of many leaders, or the apex of authority. His power is unquestionable and not only does he use his power to accumulate wealth, wives, slaves, and other material prosperity to the detriment of his subjects, such power and influence are transferred to his sons.

In *Igbì Ayé ń yí*, Adéríbigbé and Ọlátóngẹ́ẹ́, who are the princes of Òtólú, ride on human beings like horses. They snatch other peoples' wives and terminate lives of people who fail to bow down to them. The misuse and abuse of political power by the *ọba* is satirically portrayed in the characterization technique. Characters such as Ajitọ́-ọba (Eater of *ọba*'s saliva), Anuba (He who feeds the *ọba*), Tọbaṣẹ (The carrier of *ọba* to the toilet), and Kọ́ba-ń-rìn (He who walks for the king) represent the type of luxury and monopoly of power by the Yorùbá *ọba* in the precolonial era at the expense of his subjects. However, the story of the importance and the royal splendor of Yorùbá *ọba* changed with the effective occupation of the colonial masters. The emergent elite class, represented by Bánkárere, Bàkó-ń-mọ́kà, and Ajénifúnjà, teams up with the colonial masters to change the political structure and history of ọbaship in the kingdom. None of the kings portrayed in Òtólú and its environment could resist or fight against the colonial political order because they could not withstand the military superiority of the colonial masters. In fact, the first Olú of Òtólú and his son Adéríbigbé are imprisoned for unlawful and criminal activities in the town. The Olú of Òtólú dies after the imprisonment episode and the second king is forced to concede the territories of Òtólúto the white people. In *Igbì Ayé ń yí* the new political order gives no role to the *ọba*. The district officer, a white man, says:

A ó yan àwọn tí wọ́n lajú ní ìlú yìí, àwọn ni yóò máa pàṣẹ,
Ọba yóò máa fọwọ́ sí i lásán ni. (91)
[We will select members of the elite in this town, they would be giving the orders, which the king would merely endorse.]

The king remembers how he has suffered great humiliation at the hands of colonial police officers, and in response to the collective conspiracy of the elite, who are his subjects, all he can muster is a sigh of sadness and hopelessness. He sorrowfully laments thus: *Igbì ayé ń yí lóòótọ́*! (92).

The narrator, through the colonial governor, asserts the reasons for the change of power from ọbaship to democracy. He states:

A rí i pé ètò ìṣèlú tí à ń bábọ̀ tẹ́lẹ̀ mẹ́heẹ́ díẹ̀, ó sì ń fẹ́ àtúnṣe látí mú kí àwọn mẹ̀kúnnù lè jẹ, kí wọn mu, kí wọ́n sì ní àlàáfíà ... Láyé àtijọ́, a fi gbogbo agbára lé Olú Òtólú lọ́wọ́ ... gégé bí èyin náà sì ṣe rí i, ọ̀pọ̀lọpọ̀ ìgbà ni ọba tàbí súnmọ́ba ń ṣi agbára yìí lò. (88)
[We have seen the weaknesses of the traditional politics, there is need for correction so that the masses will have peace of mind and freedom from oppression ... In the past, all the powers were given to Olú Òtólú and as you can see he and his closest men misuse the power.]

Ládélé has not only represented Yorùbá precolonial political history in *Igbi Ayé ń yí*, he has debunked the traditional view of perfection of rulership attached to Yorùbá *ọba*. The Yorùbá *ọbas* were neither flawless nor were they all divine. They were domineering and typically enjoyed luxury which they had not labored for. They depended on the sweat of the teeming masses for their existence and disregarded human rights. However, in line with new historicism, domination is often achieved through culturally-orchestrated consent rather than force. The people attribute the domination of their kings over them as part of the tradition and they agree to be dominated without being forced. The novelist, whose work takes particular interest in representation of marginalized people, calls for a change.

In Owólabí's *Ọ̀tẹ̀ Nìbò*, a survey of the traditional past of the Yorùbá people is given at the beginning of the novel. The narrator comments thus:

Ayé àwọn baba wa mà kúkú dùn o! Wọn kì í fi ayé ni ara wọn Lára, wọn kì í dalẹ̀ ọ̀rẹ́, wọn kì í ṣèké ògún, wọn kì í búra ẹ̀tàn.(13)
[The life of our forefathers was very pleasant. They do not make life difficult for one another. They do not betray their friends, or bear false testimony against Ògún (god of iron) and they do not swear falsely.]

The arrival of the colonial masters leads to the disruption of the peaceful and harmonious existence of the people. The narrator laments:

> *Nínú ìgbádùn tí kò légbé ni àwọn baba ńlá wa wà, tí àwọn òyìnbó Gẹ́ẹ́sì fi dé. Òyìnbó dé, ọgbọ́n ẹ̀wẹ́ dé, òyìnbó dé, ìpáǹle dé, pákáleke dé.*(3)
> [Our forefathers were living in matchless joy before the white man came. The white man came and craftiness came. The arrival of the white man brought troubles and difficulties.]

In the novel, the arrival of the white men fuels the fire of intra-tribal wars in Yorùbáland, during which the *ọbas* buy and sell men and women as slaves, even after the wars. Owólabí is silent on the negative roles of the Yorùbá *ọbas* in the nineteenth century, when they assisted the slave masters to purchase their subjects, or when they lost their status and empires because of internal dissension. Owólabí documents that various representatives of the colonial government exploited the turmoil of Yorùbá politics by playing one group against another. The colonial masters realized that each warring tribal king needed firearms. Non-trading governmental missions colluded with trade companies, e.g., the Royal Niger Company (RNC), to weaken the kings who did not suspect the intentions of their supposed helpers. At the end of the encounter, one king after another was made to sign a treaty. On one of his visits, Ajẹ́lẹ̀ (the Resident Officer) declares:

> *Lórúkọ ọbaìlú òyìnbó, mo kí yín mo sì kí gbogbo ìjòyè. Iṣẹ́ takuntakun tí ń bẹ lọ́wọ́ mi ni láti fi yé yín pé ètò òṣèlú irú èyí tí wọ́n ń lò ní ìlú òyìnbó ni a ó máa lò báyìí. Èyí ni pé a ó máa yan àwọn tí yóò máa ṣojú agbègbè kọ̀ọ̀kan ní ilé aṣòfin.* (11)
> [In the name of the Queen of England, I greet you and all the chiefs of the town. The arduous assignment before me is to let you know that we shall henceforth adopt the British system of government. This is the system whereby an elected representative will represent each area in the House of Assembly.]

From this stage of declaration by the British representative, until the end of the novel, Owólabí makes scenic presentations of various incidents and situations which the new order brings to the Yorùbá society.

Owólabí interprets the history of party politics in Yorùbá society through events, characterizations, language, and themes. In *Òtẹ̀ Nìbò*, political parties are formed along tribal and ethnic lines. For example, Ọbáyẹmí Ọ̀rẹ̀òfẹ́rọ́ teams up with notable Yorùbá figures to form Ẹgbẹ́ Olóko. He is assisted by Akinjọ́la, an acclaimed orator. Àríkàwé is influential in the East. He teams up with Ẹjalónibú (a Yorùbá man) to head Ẹgbẹ́ Alágùnfọn, while Ṣẹ́ríkí, together

with Jẹ́jẹ́níwà, forms Ẹgbẹ́ Olówó — a feudal party based in the North. In the election, Ẹgbẹ́ Olówó wins and forms a coalition government, because it has no comfortable majority, with Ẹgbẹ́ Alágùnfọn. Ẹgbẹ́ Olóko becomes the main opposition.

The colonial government favors Ẹgbẹ́ Olówó (the party in the North) to win the federal elections before independence. At the regional level, Ṣeéní Akínjọlà becomes the premier of Western Region, while Ọ̀rẹ́òfẹ́rọ́ becomes the opposition leader at the federal level. Suddenly, Ẹjalónibú dies in a motor accident and this leads to violence in Ibadan. Ideological differences occur between Akínjọlà and Ọ̀rẹ́òfẹ́rọ́. The party cannot resolve the differences and the party members become divided. The division leads to the removal of Akínjọlà as the premier. He refuses to be removed and problems erupt in the House of Assembly. The conflict leads to political fracas in the Western Region and the national government declares a state of emergency in the region. Later, Chief Ọbáyẹmí Ọ̀rẹ́òfẹ́rọ́ is set up and accused of treasonable felony. He and a few of closest supporters are arraigned and found guilty. Ọ̀rẹ́òfẹ́rọ́ is sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. In the election that follows, Akínjọlà teams up with Ẹgbẹ́ Olówó to form Ẹgbẹ́ Olómi. Ẹgbẹ́ Olóko unites with Ẹgbẹ́ Alágùnfọn to form Ẹgbẹ́ Ọbágorí, but the elections result in violence, looting, and anarchy. To stop the dangerous political trend, full of violence, looting, and killing, the military strikes for the first time and the story ends tragically. The prime minister, Jẹ́jẹ́níwà, Akinjọla (the premier of Western Region), and a host of other politicians are killed in the *coup d'état*.

The political structure portrayed in the novel coincides with the three regional groupings into which Nigeria was divided by the Littleton Constitution of 1954. The names of the three political parties — as Ẹgbẹ́ Olóko, Ẹgbẹ́ Alágùnfọn, and Ẹgbẹ́ Olówó — should not be seen as mere labels. The characters and events within the political parties are presented to interpret the agony of our historical past. Ẹgbẹ́ Olóko represents the Action Group whose members are mainly from the southwest. The Action Group was historically called Ẹgbẹ́ Ọlọ́pẹ, led by Chief Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀. Ẹgbẹ́ Alágùnfọn is symbolic of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC) headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, while Ẹgbẹ́ Olówó is reminiscent of the Northern People's Congress (NPC), led by Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. The artistic creation of these political parties does not vividly illustrate the structure and nature of political parties of the early 1950s in Nigeria. However, from the ways the author depicts the main characters in each political party, he recreates and interprets the history of party politics in Yorùbá society as a very sad one. The title of the novel, *Ọ̀tẹ̀ Nìbò*, is deliberate. It points to the bitter experience of the Yorùbá people at the elections during the First Republic. The novelist's regret is revealed in the way he depicts the themes of violence, ethnicity, and the

bitterness of party politics in the First Republic in Nigeria. Each of the three major ethnic groups believes that it is its destiny to dictate the future of the country politically, economically, and socially.

Political campaigns are one of the means of disseminating political information and beliefs to the electorate. The postcolonial experience reveals that political campaigns are used to attack political opponents. Politicians in the novels resort to blackmail, abusive words are freely traded, and chaotic manipulation of words is usually the order of the day. Apart from the use of campaign of calumny, there is the notorious strategy of thuggery and violence at campaign rallies. The thugs employed by politicians bear frightful, intimidating, and strange names such as *dagbangbaru* (the spoilers, disorganizers), *omi-ata* (the pepperish water), and *aṣúdẹdẹ* (the silent mischief-maker), among others (76). Owólabí, the literary historian, creates such characters to bring out the variety of wickedness among the political players of the post-independence era, up to the turbulent *wẹ́ẹ̀tiẹ̀* days in the "wild wild West" of Nigeria between 1964 and 1966. Owólabí seems to wrongly attributes thuggery to the 1954 election whereas it was the election of 1964 that led to political violence. However, he is opposed to political thuggery which is a product of colonial influence on Nigerian politics. The story of the thugs is re-enacted to paint a lurid picture of the wickedness and the heartlessness that colonial politics brought to our body politics and remains with us today.

Owólabí also brings to memory the historical figures that played critical roles in the politics of the First Republic. The depiction of the characters is so direct that the main characters can easily be identified among the political actors of the first republic. For example, Ọbáyẹmí is a pseudonym for Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀. Ṣeéní Akínjọlà is a pseudonym for Samuel Akíntọ́lá. Jìnádù Séríkí is Ahmadu Bello, while Jẹ́jẹ́niwa is Alhaji Tafawa Balewa. Faramọ́ni Àríkàwé is Nnamdi Azikwe. Ọládòkè Ẹjalónibú is Adégòkè Adélabú. Owólabí uses his knowledge of Yorùbá phonology and folk etymology to transform the real names of the political actors into fictitious ones. Adégòkè Adélabú, for example, is a political leader in Ibadan; the novelist calls him Ẹjalónibú. He is satirized in a song as follows:

> *Ẹjalónibú, máa náwó wa lọ (repeat)*
> *Igunu ló ni Tápà, Tápà ló nìgunu*
> *Máa náwó wa lọ.*(56)
> [Ẹjalónibú continues to squander our money (repeat)
> The Igunu masquerade owns the Nupes, the Nupes own the Igunu masquerade, continue to squander our money.]

In precolonial Yorùbá society, swindlers or looters of the treasury were not condoned. They were disgraced and ridiculed; but from the First Republic

until today they have been celebrated by those who benefited from their loots. Even though this novel was written many years ago, it reflects the current events in postcolonial Nigeria.

In Yorùbá political history, the names of political heroes are usually symptomatic of their exploits and their ideological positions. For example, we have such names as Ògbórí Ẹlémọ̀ṣọ́ (the warlord who killed and cut off the head of Ẹlémọ̀ṣọ́, the troubler of Ọ̀yọ́ kingdom, during the reign of Ọba Àjàgbó) and Tìmì Àgbàlé Ọlọ́fà-iná (the political head of Ẹdẹ renowned for his arrows of fire). Others are Ajagunlà of Ìlá Ọ̀ràngún (the great warrior), Olúwò Àbánikánńdá Àmùdá of Ìwó, and Baṣọ̀run Ògúnmọ́lá of Ìbàdàn. Their names suggest the type of leaders they were: they were leaders of power and authority. By contrast, the names of the leaders in the current dispensation suggest leaders of "bread and butter." The marginalized population constitutes the background characters that are entirely anonymous. They are mere voices rather than individualized characters.

Owólabí also brings to memory the powerful oratorical style of the Yorùbá political class during the struggle for independence in *Ọ̀tẹ̀ Nibò*. Historical songs associated with a particular political party are creatively interpreted. For example, after a fruitful rally led by Ọbáyẹmí, his supporters burst into song:

Ibí bá kù sí ẹ wí o (repeat)
Ẹnikan kì í dáradára
Kó má kù síbi kan
Ibí bá kù sí ẹ wí o. (73)
[Tell us his weakness (repeat)
No one can be perfect without one weakness
Tell us his weakness.]

The first line of the song is repetitive not only for aesthetics but also to register their conviction that their candidate, as far as they are concerned and to the best of their knowledge, is perfect and qualified without any physical, social, political, moral, or intellectual blemish. The song cited is reminiscent of the one composed for Chief Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀ in 1954 by his supporters:

Awólọ́wọ̀ baba Láyínká
Méjèèjì lo ní,
Owó ń bẹ, èèyan ń bẹ
[Awólọ́wọ̀, the father of Layinka
You have the two,
There is money, supporters are also there]

Owólabí changes the contents of the song in the novel but the message of the song is retained. The song is composed to instill confidence not only in the party leaders but in the general public and their supporters. At times, such a song is composed for the party, for example:

Ẹgbẹ́ olóko làwa ó ṣe o (repeat)
Ẹni tó bá fẹ́ kó kí wa
Ẹni tí kò fẹ́ kó yan wá lódì
Ẹgbẹ́ olóko làwa ó ṣe o. (24)
[We shall be members of Oloko party (repeat)
He who likes may greet us
He who does not like may decide not to greet us.
We shall remain members of Oloko party.]

The message of the song is a declaration of loyalty and consolidation of party image. The original song is not only a song of solidarity, but also of protest and condemnation of the NCNC party and their leaders. The original song goes thus:

Ẹgbẹ́ ọlọ́pẹ̀ làwa ó ṣe o (repeat)
Àkùkọ ti kú ú ooee
Àkùkọ ti kú,
Adélabú ti nù ùn
Ẹgbẹ́ ọlọ́pẹ̀ làwa ó ṣe o.
[We shall be members of Action Group (repeat)
NCNC is dead
The cock is dead
Adélabú has disappeared,
We shall be members of the Action Group.]

Apart from the use of language for political propaganda and demobilization of political opponents, Owólabí appreciates the politicians' oratorical style and their effective use of their mother-tongue during political rallies, but he denounces the use of violence which has become a historical heritage in Nigerian politics.

The political history of Yorùbá society from the precolonial era to the postcolonial times in *Igbì Ayé ń yí* and *Ọ̀tẹ̀ Nìbò* is not as simple and straightforward as the two novelists present it in the two novels. Events that cover several years of the people's existence are narrated as if the events occurred in a straightforward and simple manner. Many historical facts and details are omitted. This is one of the shortcomings of the historical novel, perhaps to keep the action moving quickly. Historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context

of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. A literary work must be judged in the context in which it was written.

Ládélé and Owólabí could be rated as unbiased literary historians who have used their wide knowledge of Yorùbá traditions, their personal experience, and historical events to interpret the history of Yorùbá society in particular and Nigeria in general. New Historicists do not believe that we can look at history objectively, but rather that we interpret events as products of our time and culture and that we are subjective interpreters of what we observe. To that extent, we can say that the two authors have only portrayed the aspects of history they are ideologically committed to. For example, Ládélé is a prince from Ọyọ and his interest is in the power relation between the colonial masters and the Yorùbá *ọbas*, and the subsequent relegation of the royal splendor of the *ọbas*. Ládélé is not only concerned about the misuse of power by the *ọbas* against their subjects in *Igbì Ayé ń yí*; neither is the novelist only interested in the benefits of the new political dispensation brought about by the colonial masters. His sole interest is change. Political power has to change from monolithic leadership to democratic dispensation, change that will bring prosperity, equality, and justice to the masses, change that will end oppression of the masses by a few prominent families.

Owólabí, on the other hand, in *Ọ̀tẹ̀ Nìbò* narrates the history of pre-independence and the First Republic as experienced in Yorùbá society based on his social background and the ideas circulating at the time. Adeyẹmi (51) noted that Olú Owólabí was an influential politician in Ẹ̀gbádò land. He was a strong member and supporter of the Action Group (AG) in the First Republic and an active member of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) in the Second Republic. It is clear from the representation of history in Owólabí's novel that his interpretation of the First Republic's political history is rather subjective. He has an undying commitment to Chief Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀'s political ideology and this is reflected in his portrayal of the characters in the novel. Ọbáyẹmí Ọ̀rẹ̀òfẹ́ẹ́ró (i.e., Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọ́wọ̀) is portrayed as perfect, without any blemish, who hates lies of any kind. Akinjọ́la and Ẹjalónibú (Akíntọ́lá and Adélabú), who are in the opposition party, are described as traitors and deceitful politicians. The author portrays only their weaknesses and nothing is said about their strengths. The author uses only the ideas circulating then and the preconceived notions of the opposition party to interpret the history. This confirms the view of New Historicists that even though literary works may supply an objective assessment of history, it can be manipulated by the writer.

5. Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it is clear that history and literature are related and the two novelists have proved that Yorùbá literature and history are both important in explaining the fullness of life and the world around us however with subjectivity. Literature is the historical life in reality. Ládélé interprets the history of royal splendor and glory of the Yorùbá *ọba* as a form of domination which is culturally orchestrated, while Owólabí represents the history of party politics in Yorùbá society as fraudulent, tyrannical, deceitful, and violent. Both novelists are subjective, in line with the principle of New Historicism, because history or the novel is not a mere chronicle of facts and events, but rather a complex description of human reality. The novelists, in line with the views of New Historicist theorists, concern themselves with the political function of literature and with the concept of power, the intricate means by which cultures produce and reproduce themselves.

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