

The Brass-Bells Drum: An African Literary Writers Imaging of Neo-colonial Woes in Nigeria

Àrinpé G. Adéjùmó

Department of Linguistics and African Languages

University of Ibadan,

Ibadan, Nigeria

agadejumo@yahoo.com

&

Emmanuel Akínyínka Ilori

Department of Yorùbá

Federal College of Education

Katsina, Nigeria

Abstract

Literature reflects and refracts socio-political issues. Novels, a genre of literature, images of socio-political realities with a view to proffering solutions to some of the threats to human and social development. This essay examines the depiction of postcolonial disillusion and neo-colonial woes in Nigeria as represented in Akiñwùmí Ìṣòlá's *Saworoide* translated, as *The Brass-Bells Drum* by Pamela Olubunmi J. Smith. The paper hinged on the Marxist Sociology of Literature and Postcolonial approaches, it critically evaluates inept political leadership and corrupt practices. The analysis reveals that corrupt leadership and followership undermine the development of Nigeria. Some of the major challenges undermining the development of Nigeria are the insincerity and insensitivity of political leaders to the plight of the masses, selection/electoral corruption, mismanagement of public funds, abuse of power, neglect of the masses, political assassination, bribery, and corruption. It is established in the novel that, the greatest obstacles to Nigeria's development are inept leadership and corruption. The paper concludes that the uniqueness of Ìṣòlá's discourse of postcolonial woes manifests in the adroit blend of motifs and narrative techniques of political instability, betrayal of trust, acute leadership crisis, and corruption. The novelist advocates harnessing some tangible and intangible cultural heritage as well as communal revolt to checkmate the continuing spread of this menace of (mis)governance in Nigeria.

Keynote: Corruption, Yoruba novelists, political instability, misgovernance.

Introduction

Literary art involves the use of imaginative expressions to expose, explore, criticize, sensitize, and discover feelings, ideas, opinions, thoughts, and values in prose, poetry, and drama. Literary artists and social realities shape society in conformity with acceptable norms and standards. African writers, through their creative ingenuity, often create a world of their own or re-create a semblance of the existing world or society through careful selection of words. They reflect or refract present events, past events, and future expectations with the aim of censuring and tacitly suggesting a sanitized society.

African novel, a distinctive genre of literature that presents ideas, characters, relationships, things, and worlds, is replete with social and political issues with the aim of censuring the nature of polity and governance. The focus of this paper is to appraise Akinwumi Isola's *Saworoide*, recently translated by Pamela J. Olubunmi Smith as *The Brass-Bells Drum*, with a view to examining the neo-colonial woes in Nigerian society. Excerpts from *The Brass-Bells Drum* are used for referencing. The choice of *The Brass-Bells Drum* for this study is based on its uniqueness. The original version appeared as a film. It was later transposed into a novel by the original author. The translation is a blend of the storyline and images in the film and the plot of the Yoruba version of the novel. The Brass-Bells Drums, therefore, straddles the film and novel genres. Through the juxtaposition of the images in films and the prosaic expression in the Yoruba version, Pamela Smith achieves a more robust and vivid description of the plot of the novel and a well-rounded scenic presentation of events.

***Saworoide/The Brass-Bells Drum* and the Nigerian Society**

Saworoide (*The Brass-Bells Drum*) centers on politics and political misdealing in Jogbo, the micro setting of the novel. In the view of Babarinde (2022:v) "*Saworoide* tells a story of high political drama, of villains who pursue for selfish gains..." Leadership corruption in the corridors of power pervades the novel, which eventually leads to an experience of neo-colonial misgovernance as found in many African societies. *The Brass-Bells Drum* (*Saworoide*) considered a novel of revolt against inept leadership and corruption. It is a response to a depressed political situation in Nigeria. It is also a cynical satirical novel used to depict the postcolonial idiosyncrasies of post-colonial leadership and the painful experience of the masses in the hands of tyrannical and corrupt leaders. The novelist identifies with the suffering and

disenchantment of the masses because of the betrayal of hope by the ruling class. He exposes the dissatisfaction in his society by reducing the experience of the masses in the novel to the reality of disillusionment with evidence of growing seeds of corruption and bad leadership. Lindfors (1971, p. 1) opines that “writers have served not only as chroniclers of contemporary political history but also as advocates of radical changes”, *Işola* provocatively portrays a scene of skepticism through the representation of misgovernance and bad leadership in the novel.

Theoretical Framework

The paper hinges on Marxist Sociology of Literature and Postcolonial Theory. The Marxist theory is of the view that political power is committed into the hands of certain groups of people (bourgeoisie) in society. The bourgeoisie use their political power to cheat and oppress other classes of people (proletariat). Writers, novelists, poets, and playwrights are compelled to expose all forms of political and economic oppression by the bourgeoisie against the proletariats in the society. They are also duty-bound to write on the emancipation of the masses and total freedom of the masses from political and economic oppression (Opefeyitimi, 1997) Marxists believe that class antagonism exists but eradicated through protests of the masses. There is the belief that the state is an arena in which the haves and have-nots struggle. For instance, the fundamental struggle in Nigeria today is between the haves ‘the political elites, and the have-nots, (the masses). In capitalist and traditional societies, Nigeria inclusive, class conflict between the feudal ruling class and the proletariat has not brought about the eradication of the feudal superstructure or capitalism.

The Marxist sociology of literature is a scientific theory of human societies and how the oppressed in these societies can change the oppression through organized struggles of the masses targeted at their freedom from exploitation and oppression. There are three components of applications of this theory to the analysis of literary texts: alienation, co-modification, and characterization. *Işola* uses characterization to represent corrupt political leadership and corruption in the Nigerian political space.

The Postcolonial Theory is concerned with the struggle that occurs when one culture is dominated by another. Postcolonial literature is three-dimensional. First, it is an intellectual attempt to re-write misconceptions and assumptions foisted on the colonized people by their colonial masters during the colonial master’s era. Second, it is an attempt to redefine the identity of the ones colonized and made inferior in the face of the colonizer. Anti-colonial struggle used to present through the decolonization of the minds of the colonized. Presently, it depicts the realities that accompany independence; this

present stage is referred to as the postcolonial era of realities of disillusionment. This era represents a portrayal of the persistent period of disillusionment when the promise of a better Africa was not yet realized for all.

This essay adopts Robert Young's version of postcolonial theory, which explains not only the anti-colonial past but also the present situation. Using a blend of the Marxist's Sociology of Literature and the Postcolonial theory the paper contributes to the existing knowledge on Yorùbá literary criticism. It construes the issues of corruption, (mis)governance, exploitation, and oppression of the masses in the macro setting of the text and it reflects the realities that accompany independence in Nigeria.

Conceptualizations of leadership and corruption

Leadership is a process whereby an individual or a group of people influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. It is a central position in any human endeavor or organization (Burn, 1978; Okunade, 1989; Yuki, 2002; Northouse, 2004). Olumese (1985. P.54) asserts that a good leader should possess or have the following personal qualities: vision, drive, good judgment, initiative, poise, maturity, experience, and exposure. His personal magnetism should be able to command acceptability by the followers, enthusiasm, loyalty, and cooperation, coupled with natural sincerity, tact, courtesy, and a sense of humility. Leadership is one of the intrinsic elements for efficient and effective management and administration.

A leader is expected to radiate confidence, show an ability to dominate circumstances especially when required to achieve given ends, keep up morale, and display control through inspiration, rather than command, for effective and efficient results. A leader must possess the ability to create in his followers, the required enthusiasm/motivation to put in every necessary effort to deliver on the set goals. Leaders emerge, not that they are born with the traits. A leader displays the ability to inspire and instill passion and direction in a group of individuals he/she is leading through affecting the group consciously or unconsciously.

Eze (2002) avers that, all over the world, leadership is the most important factor that determines whether a nation can develop. Good leadership is free, brave, patriotic, people-oriented, and destination-bound. A leader who understands the psychology of leading and applies it to the development of the people must be at the affairs of men.

Corruption is a global phenomenon that has turned into a subject of discourse all over the world today because of its direct impact on lives, progress, development, and stability. It is an anti-social behavior which is both endemic and epidemic in nature. Corruption is seen as improper activities and

transactions aimed at changing the normal course of events, judgment, and position of trust. According to Andrig and Fjedstad (2001, P. 4), corruption is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with multiple causes and effects: it takes on various forms and functions in different contexts. It is a universal menace.

Gboyega (1996 P. 6) is of the view that corruption is any decision, act, or conduct that subverts the integrity of the people in authority or institutions charged with promoting, defending, or sustaining the democratization process, thereby undermining its effectiveness in performing its assigned role. Corruption, as a potent cancer, remains a pervasive problem in society. It reduces the value of democracy and good governance by subverting formal processes. It undermines the legitimacy of government and democratic values of trust and tolerance. It also aggravates the suffering and increases the poverty level of the masses.

Corruption encompasses numerous unwholesome and unethical practices by rulers or leaders in collaboration with family members, associates, proxies and relations to subvert the existing standard in society. These practices include, mismanagement of public funds, political assassination, moral corruption, neglect of the masses, and selection/election corruption. Corruption is a betrayal of public trust for individual or public gain. It is a ruthless violation of established rules for personal gain and benefits (Ogundiya, 2009).

Characterizing and satirizing the neo-colonial leadership in *The Brass-Bells Drum*

Leadership is a major obstacle to the pace of development in Nigeria. Since her independence from the British in 1960, the Nigerian political apparatus and structure have been managed and led by a coalition of inept leadership. The political leadership in Nigeria since 1960, from the first democratic experiment to military intervention and back to democracy, has been managed and led by perfidious leaders. This has a devastating effect on the hopes and aspirations of a better society for the masses. Achebe (1983, P. 10) asserts that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simple and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to its responsibility to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmark of true leadership.

The ruling class is responsible for underdevelopment. *The Brass-Bells Drum*, is a fictional attempt to reflect the realities of political life in a plausible

manner. In *The Brass-Bells Drum*, Işola satirizes political experience which is a reminiscence of the end of an era and the beginning of a new administration in government. This symbolizes civilian rule and military intrusion in government in Nigeria. In the novel, Jogbo, the micro setting, is used to reflect the transition of power in the traditional Yoruba setting of Nigeria as well as the transition of power at the federal government level. The enthronement of Lapite as King Onijogbo reflects traditional power and civilian government, while the taking over of power by Lagata and Lagata symbolizes military administration.

The various nefarious activities and political gimmicks associated with the selection or election of candidates into positions of governance at the local and national levels are depicted in the novel. The contest between Adebomi, Lapite, and other contestants for the Onijogbo throne is a vivid example of how transparency and real democratization are perverted. The manifestation of such perversion is narrated in the way Adebomi is loved by the citizens, but he is not eventually picked as the king-designate (44). There are about five princes from different ruling houses contesting for the post of obaship in Jogbo land but only two are well recognized because of their popularity and influence. Lapite and Adebomi are at the forefront of the contest but going by the general assessment and people's expectations of their popularity, influence, and acceptability, Adebomi is the preferred candidate for the post because of the love the Jogbo people have for him. The citizens and rhapsodists are serenading him and conferring on him kingly accolades. Isola portrays a scene of selection/electoral fraud or corruption. He reveals that Lapite is more skilled in the dirty game of politics than other intending princes are. Instead of selecting Adebomi, Lapite is selected and recommended for the exalted post.

After the death of the King of Jogbo, Adebomi was convinced that he should be the next in line to the throne. He was quite popular, and the Jogbo people loved him. Like Adebomi, Lapite also aspired to and contested the throne. There were also an additional three or so aspirants. They all ran around, making their case and spending money free-handedly. But there is a method and madness to all things. It appeared Lapite was the first to find a way to reach the kingmakers before the others to announce his candidacy. Even at that, all candidates that came forward were considered eligible. Simply, the candidate selected by the Oracle was always the candidate announced by the kingmakers since modernized Jogbo, unlike the old system in traditional Jogbo. 45

The author uses the above scenario to depict the dented selection process of aspirants for political offices in Nigeria. More often, the election or selection

of political office holders is not based on due process or merit but on how an aspirant could spend money lavishly.

Furthermore, the depiction of unethical practices associated with the selection/election process is foregrounded in the novel. Some of the unethical practices highlighted are bribery, godfatherism, and assassination of political opponents. This unethical method of attaining political power reflected in the way Lapite spends money lavishly to win the hearts of the kingmakers and his choice of Balogun as his godfather in the state council. In addition, the issue of the highest bidder comes into play in Lapite's selection, a common experience in the contemporary Nigerian political terrain. Lapite equally opts for the total annihilation of Adebomi's nuclear and extended family after the contest. This is because he perceives him and his family as his political enemies and a threat to his government and political ideology. In Lapite's view, Adebomi must be taken out of the way of his governance. He he contracts Adebomi's assassination:

"Well, well, well! Now, you must be the culprits hassling the King!" the second thug mocked menacingly. "Hassling the King? Are you serious? We have quietly accepted without any form of contention our loss of ascension to the throne," "Adebomi responded. Accepted your loss, did you say?" the club-wielding intruder mocked. "Oh no! Now, after this, you will have accepted your lot, your loss," he assured them menacingly. Then, turning to his gun-toting partner, and subtly giving him the wink and a nod, he ordered him to "go ahead and give them one each." On cue, the gunman pumped one shot each into the chest of husband and wife, killing them instantly. 49

The above excerpt captures vividly the political killings and maiming that have pervaded Nigeria's political space since independence. The political trajectory of the nation reveals clearly that there is no political change in Nigeria that does not involve political bigwigs manipulating and exploiting the masses. Some of the peculiarities of the Nigerian political space include force or coercion, godfatherism, and political assassination. These are deployed to subvert standards and merit during selection/ election into political offices. In other words, the global standard and method of a credible selection/election of political office holders, which ordinarily ought to be free and fair, is subverted in Nigeria.

Subverting merit and standards in selection/election processes depicted in *The Brass-Bells Drum* as an enormous leadership-corroding task, encapsulated in the character of Lapite. He employs a do-or-die approach to attain the obaship status in Jogbo because of his selfish interest, greed, and lust for

power and money. Opalaba states the ideal and the expectation of the citizens while discussing with Balogun, a member of the chiefs-in-council. This is the fact that the monarch in Jogbo should have the interest of Jogbo and her citizens at heart:

Well, as I said, whoever wants to enjoy life and have a carefree time should not seek the throne. The monarch serves the citizens, not the other way around. No one King of Jogbo can enrich himself nor can he aspire to wealth like other monarchs elsewhere. (24)

However, Lapite's motive is not in tandem with the people's expectation as captured in the response given by Balogun. He aptly declares that Lapite's motive of becoming a king is to loot Jogbo's treasury. He asserts that

Well, you see, the next aspirant to the Jogbo throne is a friend of mine! And I would love to see him get wealthy like his contemporaries elsewhere since the town has now transformed into a city, the monarch's economic standing must be elevated to reflect his status. Jogbo is now a large city, it behooves the monarchy to grow and modernize to reflect the signs of the times. Wouldn't you agree? (24)

It is evident in the above excerpt that Lapite never has the interest of Jogbo at heart. Hence is the refusal to follow due process and normal steps of taking oath before ascending the throne. In Jogbo, an oath of allegiance is required to the people and is administered before a king is enthroned in order to checkmate him from being involved in illicit acts, looting of treasury, or any form of corrupt practices. Lapite does not comply with the instructions given by Amawomaro, (the diviner) and Ayangalu, who symbolically represent the tradition. He defiantly and forcefully ignores the norm of swearing an oath to the oracular rite that forbids a monarch from pilfering and depleting the nation's treasury. He also violently coerces the two custodians of tradition to act in accordance with his rebellious dictate by threatening them with a gun. The excerpt below reveals this:

Lapite screeched at them. After all, who is the king-elect, you or me? I have told you, and I shall tell you again, my enthronement shall be free of any pagan oath-swearing and ancient ritual skin lancing. Now as far as I am concerned, this swearing-in ceremony is over. That is it! We are done! Case closed! Lapite thundered. Amawomaro shook his head visibly in disgust and with equal defiance. What swearing-in is over? But we have yet to begin... Before he could complete his phrase, Lapite cut him short. Well,

Mister diviner, Sir! You are not done with what?” He shot back mockingly and menacingly as he slowly, slyly reached into the pocket of his garment and pulled out a gun. Pointing and waving it in turn at each man, he told them firmly, I said we are done! What and which part of that do you men not understand?” Then, even more menacingly, he instructed them both to repeat after him, “We are done!” Moreover, the two trembling men quickly echoed him, “You said ‘we are done’! 33

The above excerpt demonstrates how coercion is used to prevent people from acting rightly in the political space, to subvert standards and merit. This eventually culminated in partiality, marginalization, injustice, ethnic bias, and nepotism, which eventually led to a failed state.

Furthermore, in *The Brass-Bells Drum*, Isola projects the image of a forceful transition of power from civilian government to military rule. Through the rounded characterization of Lagata, Isola depicts a reminiscence of the military taking over power from the civilian government through violence, as it is the practice in Nigerian politics. Lagata, a retired military officer, represents the military in Jogbo. The historical account of the coup and transition of power to military government has revealed that military juntas usually accuse civilians of maladministration, corruption, and looting of government treasury. Captured picturesquely in the conversation between Kanjuko and Lagata after the party is done to celebrate the return of the crown rebelliously taken away from Lapite by the youth wing. In Kanjuko’s view, the civilian leaders are greedy. He says

Think about it, what could have motivated the youth to rebel the way they did if it were not greed-driven? Literally, we sit on riches, yet wallow in want! We are blessed with ample fuel underground, yet we are subjected to austere measures; we have a good supply of salt but choose to choke on pepper! Where exists comfortable bedding, yet we turn to thatch grass (185).

A picture of a nation flowing with milk and honey yet her citizens are suffering is presented. Lagata sees socio-economic dysfunction in the state as the main reason for plotting a coup against Lapite’s regime. In a persuasive manner, he highlights the reason for snatching power thus:

Behold the present condition of our state! You Elders, you must remember the good old days of Jogbo’s glory, that is, during the founding of the nation when the government was run by honest, honorable men!”...And is the situation any better today? Far from it! How about the malicious,

wanted plunderer, intemperate rogue, imbecilic freebooter that sits on the throne and wallows in the mire like a pig?”... “Look, I fully support the action of the Youth Brigade. Their attempt to rescue the crown from a counterfeit incompetent impostor like this one speaks to their desire and search for change, the very earnest change that all of us true-blooded sons and daughters of Jogbo had been craving all this while. I congratulate all of you today because that change has now arrived! Today, therefore, we, soldiers of Jogbo nation, seize the reigns of the government of Jogbo, henceforth...(192).

The above speech by Lagata is at the core reason military juntas usually take over governance. Any resistance by the civilian ruler usually leads to death, as it happens in the case of Lapite. Lapite attempts to resist the coup, and he is shot by Lagata, the captain of the army. Other characteristics of military coup and administration that follow are imposition of curfew, enactment of decrees in order to suppress the masses and all forms of opposition, arrest and detention of real and imaginary enemies of the government. Because military government is not always accepted by the citizen, there is patrol of military officers in the town to forestall peace and security to both man and property (193-195). Unfortunately, Lagata gradually transforms himself into an embodiment of the very evils he initially claimed as reason for military incursion into the political arena in Jogbo land.

In the novel, Işl   depicts cruel or violent deployment of political power. The arbitrary use of power by political leaders as deployed by both civilian and military administration in Nigeria, is refracted to build the character and actions of Lapite and Lagata. They abuse political power by silencing critics of their government and those they imagine to be against their ideology and policies. The spate of abuse of political power resulted in violation of the fundamental rights of citizens and illegal arrest and incarceration of human rights activists. For instance, for challenging the governance of Lapite on how he handled the issue of reforestation law and the development of Jogbo, the journalist affiliated with *Okodoro Newspaper* is billed for arrest (127-129). In the same vein, Lapite ordered that Bada, one of the chiefs opposed to illegal arrest and detention of innocent citizens, those police arrested and imprisoned for three months (129-130). The abuse of innocent citizens is further portrayed in the arrest of the innocent pregnant wife of the publisher of the propagandistic flyer that exposes government insincerity and corrupt practices. In addition, Lapite’s snatching of Tinuola from her fianc  , Lalude, and his overture to Adedewe depict how public figures and the political elite use influence and power to sleep and carouse around with women of shady character and easy virtues (37-41;63;85,88).

Although the military always accuses the civilian government of ineptitude and gross abuse of power, the military government is always a case of the pot calling the kettle black. This is portrayed in the way Isola characterizes Lagata's regime, with more perfidious actions and abuse of political power. Similar to Lapite's action, Lagata consents to the bad advice given by Balogun and Seriki by ordering the arrest of innocent citizens:

Seriki stood up and grabbed his stuff in his hand like a broom. "Look!" he said, and making sweeping motions, "look, this is how ...yes, just like this ...you will sweep them all..." he said, as Lagata completed the phrase, "...sweep them all out!" "What do you mean 'sweep them out?' You must sweep them all up into prison!" Balogun countered. Seriki looked at them both, pursed his lips and likewise countered them with, "what Prison? No, you must mean send them all to hell without return!"...Lagata punched his right fist into his left hand and returned to sit down. "Done! That will be all for now. What I want you to do for me now without delay is to compose a list of the names of all these vile creatures. I will hasten to purge them from the land so I can successfully accomplish the goals I want to accomplish" (215)

It is obvious from the presentation of Balogun and Seriki's discourse with Lagata that Işolá foregrounds the motif of embezzlement of public funds as a goal the political leaders want to accomplish. The civilian and military leaders in the novel, like those in the Nigerian political space, are parochial, rather than national. They corruptly convert state resources into their project of primitive accumulation. This is in consonance with the general mentality in Nigeria that politics is a means to accumulate wealth and that the end justifies the means. Balogun, Lapite's chief counselor teaches him how to accomplish the above task by introducing the secret of wealth to him, "And you are aware, of course, that our remuneration comes from forest logging. Indeed, the forest is gold" (56). Lapite in his response, reveals that he is a willing horse when it comes to plundering of Jogbo's treasury. He says, 'We are the landowners, we too, have a right to our kick-backs, our own grift' (56). Political leaders' exploitative strategies of siphoning public funds and mismanagement of state resources for their selfish gains are further exemplified in Lapite's ulterior motive of acquiring state wealth through the treasury and mineral resources. Lapite and timber contractors hold a meeting and the decision taken is to the detriment of the masses and the future of Jogbo. Lapite and timber dealers arrange how public funds in Jogbo land would be siphoned by Lapite and his chiefs and saved in their foreign accounts. The excerpt below reveals this:

“That is no problem, your Majesty,” they chorus assuredly. Then Olokoto went bravely and directly to the heart of the matter.” Now, on the matter of the shares, we will offer you a 10% kickback from our profits.” Lapite frowned, disappointed, and leaned forward. He leaned quite far forward so that his mouth could be close to their ears as he whispered “10% is far too small! It is a mere pittance!” Too small, your Majesty?” Alayun cut in. “With so many hands in the pot? The forest guards will get a kickback bonus. The farmers whose farm boundary lines we trample will get their own share. And we expect them to stretch an ‘expectant hand; of course, your traditional chiefs as well” they complained. “My traditional chiefs? Why include them on the list? Am I not the Monarch? Why, am I not the sole authority on matters of finance? I, alone get to decide what money they get how they get it, and how much I want to give them. So, let us forget about any kickbacks to the chiefs,” Lapite interjected, decisively. “Very well then, your Majesty, that is fair enough. And where would you like us to deposit your share?” Olokoto enquired Overseas of course! There are far too many sharks in and around this country I do not want anyone dipping their eyes and nose into my financial affairs” Lapite instructed them (72-73).

Lapite’s decision that his share of the money sent overseas is a reflection of siphoned money from Nigeria to Swiss banks and some other parts of the world. Up until now, ‘Abacha loot’ is being paid back to Nigeria by banks in Europe and the West in billions. The intention of Lagata, a military leader, is not different from that of Lapite. He also declares, while discussing with Balogun and Seriki, that, “*I want to forge a path to wealth. I want to make some money*” (214). Balogun and Seriki volunteer to be his coach, and like his predecessors whom he declared as plunderers when he assumed office, he also gets involved in more perfidious acts.

As noticed from Isola’s point of view, the mismanagement of state resources is not limited to the political leaders. Many of the followers also connive with the leaders to perpetrate evil. For instance, in the novel, as Lapite and Lagata, the heads of civilian and military governments respectively are looting the treasury, members of the Council-of-Chiefs also demand that their kickbacks be paid to a foreign account. The Largesse through the deal between the timber contractor’s company, is used to purchase exotic cars for the chiefs to the detriment of the welfare of the masses (92-93).

The corrupt practice in a failed state noticed by the masses. In Isola’s view, some members of the public flock with the leaders to aid and abet the heinous act of pilfering, maiming, and killing of innocent citizens and oppression of the masses at large. For instance, owing to selfishness, self-aggrandizement,

and lust for money, some members of the public hired to kill Adebomi and his wife (49). Some are used for propagandist purposes, singing praises of Lagata's government. The popularization of Lagata's regime is narrated thus:

It was barely a week later when the first two groups made their appearance before the king at the palace! What a large crowd of boys and girls they were! Dressed in matching uniforms, each one of them carried a white handkerchief, which they threw up, caught, and waved back and forth to the rhythm of their dance steps, as they sang; The town is divided into opposing sides. But we are supporters of the king... (221)

The above is satire used by Isola to censure how some leaders in a failed nation deploy the "Youth-for-king" promotional clubs and societies" (220) to popularize their unpopular government and at times their political parties.

It is evident from the above instances that oppression of the masses is not unidirectional in the novel. The first level of oppression is inter-class oppression, a case where the bourgeois oppress the proletariat. The second level of oppression is intra-class, a case where a few privileged members of the proletariat oppress the proletariat. Usually, the remote and underlying cause of both forms of oppression is economy and the control of economic power.

The oppression of the majority of the masses comes with the challenge of insensitivity to the plight of the masses. This has the adverse effect on the poor citizens, with the presence of abject poverty, hunger, disease, destitution, and squalor. The above is reflected in the way Lapite neglects the plight of the masses on their encounter with the timber dealers on destruction of their land and property because of their economic gain without making any effort to replace the cut trees. The masses were greatly disappointed by the response received from Lapite after their complaint of illegal operations of the timber dealers and the effects on their farmlands. Isola uses the timber business as a metaphor of oil exploration in Nigeria. The case of the farmers is similar to the situation in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, where people suffer on their land because of oil exploration. The farmland is destroyed, and the masses are subjected to undue suffering and hardship. The timber dealers represent the oil company extracting oil from the Niger Delta region and their dealings with the federal government of Nigeria without any consideration for the land-owners who cannot farm or use their land for any other purpose. Instead of the government to addressing the suffering of the people of the region, it subjects them to harassment, attacks, murder and other treatments from the government (63-65). Fadiya's observation in the excerpt below reveals that the attitudes of the military and civilian rulers to the plight of the masses are the same. In fact, in his opinion, their nature and outlook to life is the same:

Fádiyà **spoke first**, “**Now you see what I** have been telling you all, all this time. See what I am talking about? When you all were so convinced that the new king would be the arbiter of all our suffering, what did I tell you? I said, ‘I don’t know about that, but we shall see,’ didn’t I? Birds of the same feather flock together. They are all the same, the whole lot of them. (66)

Since Nigeria’s independence, there has been the search for a government that will be interested in the plight of the masses but the Nigerian ruling class has disappointed the masses through their responses. It is obvious that both civilian and military rulers are the same in their oppressive attitude.

Bribery is another motif that Işolá exposes as one of the neo-colonial woes ravaging developing nations. In the novel, it is revealed that bribery is a conventional mark in the corridors of power. Bribery is satirized when the timber dealers visit Lápité, the king of Jogbo land, to ask for his cooperation on their illegal activities in the land, with a view to exploiting the natural resources of the land. Olókòtó, the leader of the group, asks the secretary who followed them to bring out the gifts meant for the king so that he can give his blessings on their illicit activities of cutting timber trees and destroying farmlands (69). This is a form of anticipatory corrupt practice, where a bribe or presentation of gifts is done in anticipation of a favorable action on the part of the recipient of the gift.

Balógún acquiesced and put their minds at ease, assuring them that he knew exactly how they could maneuver Lapite. They all laughed as they left the room. Olokoto hastily poked his head outside the door and instructed a young clerk who had accompanied them to go to the car and carry up the two gifts that they had brought along with them. The containers carrying the gifts were quite heavy; they were shaped like stools, neatly gift-wrapped in fabric, and gorgeously tied with gold bows. Since there were two of such gifts, Balogun assumed one of them must be intended for him. Perhaps the plan was to present each one of them with the gifts in the king’s presence. (69)

Isola, in line with the Marxist ideological point of view that organized struggles by the masses, could be used as a weapon of war to fight the ruling and oppressive leadership, projects the characters of Fadiya, Amawomaro, Ayangalu, Ageku, Emeya, and other members of Youth-Brigade who fought for the freedom of Jogbo. The freedom fighters struggled twice to get freedom for Jogbo. The first attempt is voided by Lagata when he confronts them with force. The novelist stresses the fact that the masses should not be deterred by

failure, as illustrated in the trip to visit Ayangalu in the bush where he is taking refuge. Amawomaro speaks on their intention:

“Well, well, well, Lagata has hoodwinked the nation, pulled the wool over our eyes, indeed tried to blind us. Consequently, the nation’s younger generation has mobilized and is seeking to unseat him. Then, he himself would announce publicly his intention to wear the brass crown and sit on the throne! And after we learn of his date of choice, the youth pleads fervently that you come into town to beat the brass bells drum, letting it resound nationwide. (230)

The effort of the youth in the excerpt above attests to the fact that a concerted and organized struggle needed by the masses in order to regain freedom. The combined effort of the younger generation and the older generation is needed to combat the oppressors and to deliver the nation from the claws of corruption and its attendant problems. In recent times, the ENDSARS protest by the youth in Nigeria is the concretization of Isola’s projection. The place of unity and collectiveness in the fight for freedom is further emphasized in the novel by the assignment handed over to the chiefs by Kanjuko:

“...the Youth-Brigade that waged war against Lapite not too long ago was at it again and was now intent on waging a similar all-out war against Lagata? They have all escaped, run away, gone underground but were still meeting clandestinely. ‘Find a way to infiltrate their collective! (235)

The victory that the combined efforts of the youth and the elderly have over Lagata and the restoration of peace, progress, and development at the end attests to the novelist’s opinion that the deliverance of the nation and the masses from the oppressive rule of the political class lies in the hands of the masses.

Conclusion

In this paper, the neo-colonial woes that have bedeviled many of the African nations are highlighted. The gross abuse of power by political leaders is itemized. Graphically, Isola establishes the fact that corruption is the bane of development in Nigeria. The spate of poverty and underdevelopment in the nation is equally traced to the high level of corruption that is ravaging the nation. The study revealed that the political class could not single-handedly oppress the masses without conniving with the proletariat and a few members of the masses. Two levels of oppression are projected in the novel namely intra-class and inter-class oppression. The research further affirmed that the

attainment of freedom from oppression and harassment by the political class is visible. Some of the weapons of warfare of revolution highlighted are the emancipation of the masses, collectivism, oneness, determination focus, and team spirit. Above all, it is affirmed in the paper that literary work is a weapon of ideological struggle.

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