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Mimicry and the Performance of State Power in the Nigerian Dictator Novel

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Abstract

Novels produced in the postcolony have continued to represent the society in which they are produced. Novels of hope that followed political independence are being replaced by those of military/civilian dictatorship which attempt to represent the current situation of the African postcolony vis a vis the relationship between the ruling class and the masses. By adopting a close reading of Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, this paper exposed the features of the autocratic regimes that have subjugated the masses by denying them of their power of agency and reducing them to the condition of prey. By adopting Homi Bhabha's ideology of mimicry, the researchers attempt to expose the unbalanced relationship between the ruler and the ruled where both are drawn into an uncanny situation which cancels the binary opposition usually found in coloniser/colonised relationships since both classes of people are engaged in a battle of supremacy. According to Bhabha, mimicry of the coloniser by the colonised by ridiculing and undermining the hegemonic power leads to double articulation, a subversive strategy which has brought about unnecessary compromise in the affairs of the postcolonial state.

Keywords: Mimicry, Uncanny, Binary Opposition, Double Articulation, Subversive

Introduction

In his perceptive study of the feature of dictatorial literature of post-independence Latin America and Africa, Kubayanda (1997) reached the conclusion that "literary works from [these] regions portray totalizing codes that pinpoint an unfinished business of decolonization" (p. 38). Kubayanda reached this grim conclusion in the 1990s. But now into the new millennium the possibility of independence as an "unfinished business" reiterates the question posed by Achille Mbembe within the context of the fiftieth anniversary of independence in Africa. Thus, he questions: "Here we are in 2010, 50 years after decolonization. Is there anything at all to commemorate or should we on the contrary start all over again?" (Cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013 p.72) In both regions [Africa and Latin America] independence became an unfinished business because rather than inaugurating freedom, "tyranny surfaced". This is the reason why Kubayanda (1997) underscored that "tyranny is an endemic social and political problem in Africa" (p.38). We can agree with him that tyranny is endemic in the social and political even cultural spheres in Africa. But it did not just surface at independence. What we witnessed at independence was not a rooting out of the tyranny that animated colonial rule. Rather it was a realignment of that tyranny in new indigenous forms. As Neil Lazarus (1990) has affirmed in the context of his study of resistance in Armah's fiction, despite the exaggerated optimism of nationalists like Kwame Nkrumah, Sekou Touré, Nnamdi Azikiwe, independence became the point of distress. Nearly sixty years after, to recall Lazarus's words, "the expectations that attended the process of decolonization have not even come close to being fulfilled." This is because "independence ... has brought neither peace nor prosperity to Africa... [and especially to Nigeria]" (Lazarus, p.3). Postcolonial Africa continues to harbour what Achille Mbembe (2001) has described as the unconditional arbitrariness manifesting in the imposition of impunity and unanimity (p.24). Mbembe's insight recalls the vision of other commentators on the colonial condition in the works of Frantz Fanon and V.Y. Mudimbe.

On the surface African nations in general and Nigeria in particular have witnessed changes in forms of governance, from civilian republican form of democracy at independence, through decades of military dictatorship and back to American styled constitutional form of democracy. These changes have not managed to root out tyranny as it has continued to thrive. Tyranny continues to thrive in multiple forms because there is a sense of inertia to dig it

out from the roots in the former colonial era. Rather than confronting the monster from its foundation, quasi-systems emerge that engage in corrective measures that get to be abandoned or that fail outright because they are not well-thought out. And in most cases, they serve the privatist tendencies of predatory and power drunk select elite. As Falola and Aderinto (2010) testify, the performance of state power is animated by “the politics of the tribe” (p. 279). As in Nigeria, this politics appropriates ties to ethnic origin as platform for the maintenance and functioning of State power.

It is one thing for tyranny to hold sway in the common experience of the Nigerian; it is yet another for literary scholars in Nigeria to exacerbate the niggling consequence of tyranny by speaking for it. In their analyses and interpretations of dictatorship in the literature the efforts of scholars can simply be summarized as a dedication to the macro-sign. This is because the scholarship is awash with a positivistic bent of interpretation that turn out to be a justification if not acknowledgement of the monstrosity at the expense of the victims of tyranny. Any keen follower and reader of the representation of dictatorship in African and Nigerian literary discourse will be amazed at the skewed and unbalanced nature of projection of the problem especially in the perception of critics. The focus in the main has remained directed at the dictator himself. The dictator is typically male, in position of leadership as a soldier or even a soldier-turned civilian ruler desiring to maintain an order akin to feudalism under the guise of one-party rule or direct regime elongation or indirect form of elongation through a calculated replacement by a brotherhood under the umbrella of religious or paternal affiliation.¹ Some present themselves as generous as they consolidate their sit-tight arrangement with a promise to hand over to a democratically elected government. What is of interest to us is that while the focus remains on the “man whom the cap fits” to recall the slogan of the late Nigerian dictator, Sani Abacha against the background of his clamour to metamorphous into a civilian leader, the people that bear the brunt of dictatorship are excluded from the scheme of things. Thus, the scholarship on the representation of the dictator is saturated with the image of the monstrosity itself to the extent that society at large is inordinately shaped with tyrannical outlook. This focus on tyranny created by the dictator excludes the dictator’s *other*, the ordinary people. In this regard, what is foregrounded is their docility and their silence. A typical example of such positivistic driven account that ends up adulating the tyranny of the dictator can be seen in the contribution by Nwachukwu-Agbada (2007) entitled “Intervention without Salvation: The Military and Society in Nigerian Literature”. It is against this need to “de-absolutize the sign” (Terdiman, 1985 p.26) of dictatorship in order to open the discourse to the voices of the voiceless that this discussion finds its own justification.

That justification is sutured by an abiding sense of sociological imagination which equips us to perceive the fact of given knowledge in relation to broader facts of history. Thus, rather than viewing an individual in his atomistic essence as independent, he is viewed in terms of his interconnected relation to other facts that define him or serve to shape his destiny. To recall C. Wright Mill’s case point with the problem of divorce. Thus, divorce is not simply an individual problem. It goes beyond individuals and connects with the broad social network. In this regard, the increase in divorce rate within the first half of the 21st century Africa, Mill would have shown, becomes an index for redefining a major social institution, the family (cited in Schaefer, p.6). From a historical and sociological perspective, military dictatorship, especially, came as a corrective regime, to correct the contradictions of an extant regime. It is that purported correction that is evoked in the title of J.O.J. Nwachukwu-Agbada’s essay cited earlier, namely “Intervention without salvation”. Back in the 1960s several scholars offered timely explanations on the factors that precipitated the intervention of the military in the democratic process in Nigeria. As we have noted, the military was conceived of as a corrective regime. According to Bernth Lindfors (1991): A military coup was not necessarily inevitable in 1964-5 but it was regarded by a number of intelligent observers as one of the few options left for a nation on the brinks of anarchy. (p. 253).

Thus, without the contradiction of the former we cannot understand the action of the later. Therefore, we need a sociological imagination to understand how military dictatorship mimics the old regime while at the same time opening up spaces for interrogating its assumed claim as a corrective to corruption. It tries to be like the old because as a corrective regime it cannot think of a revolutionary or radical alternative. But in being like the old, mimicking its style and culture, what Christopher Okigbo symbolically evokes as the “hunters talking about pumpkins” (Okigbo, “Hurrah to Thunder”), it opens itself up for interrogation. Okigbo has created an ambivalent image of the militarized subject in his poem. First, he represents the soldiers in the image of “thunder” and, in this regard, valorises the power of “thunder” as the agent that has brought about the fall of the “elephant” (the civilian, corruptive regime). In the second image, he adopts a cynical and ironic tone by presenting the soldier as “hunters talking about pumpkins”. Pumpkin as national wealth manifests as the antithesis of the objective of the military as a corrective entity. How this ambivalence crystallizes in the novel will be explored in the course of our discussion.

A key trope in this study is “Dictatorship in the Nigerian Novel”. The term dictatorship is fraught with possible ambiguity especially in the sub-Saharan African context. Ordinarily it implies a militarized pattern of governance as opposed to a democratically elected regime. Unfortunately, the distinction between the two tends to end in that normalized situation. Experience has shown that when such a transition occurs, that is from militarized form to a “democratically elected”, it tends to gravitate to a one-party state arrangement. Even in a multi-party state as in Nigeria with over twenty parties the day-to-day operation of the state apparatus appears to revolve around one dominant party. Accordingly, the multi-party arrangement is usually a notional phenomenon without an underlying strong opposition arising from it. Our adoption of “performance of state power” is not restricted only to the operation of military dictatorship as we witnessed prior to the transition in 1999. The period of 2015 to 2022 has manifested more as a militarized regime in mufti oriented to the attainment of a politics of a tribe.

For the purpose of the task before us in this paper our discussion derives impetus from the observation of Charlotte Barker and Grayson (2018) that artists and writers alike have been “preoccupied by the compelling figure of the dictator [by] placing him at the centre stage in their work” (“Introduction...”, p.1). Within the field of African literature, they suggest that such preoccupation imbues the novelistic representation with the quality of a literary genre. Going beyond the context of modern Africa to the context of Latin American Literature they pursue the case that dictatorship in the novel manifests in three waves to the extent of constituting “a subgenre of Latin American historical fiction” (p.2). With reference to the African context Baker and Grayson (2018) share the opinion of Kubayanda that “modern African dictator novels share with their Latin American counterparts the same concerns about post-independence disillusionment and new performances of tyranny...” (“Introduction...” p.2) Thus, the affinity between the novels on dictatorship and tyranny in Latin America and Africa is one of subject matter due to the forces of history. We are cautious to accept that this common ground on the basis of subject matter qualifies this kind of writing to exist as a genre of the novel. We are not unmindful of the need for a sociological imagination in order to explain the relationship between one novel or writer in Africa and the counterparts in Latin America. This is because the representation of dictatorship in the Nigerian novel or its counterparts in Latin America emerged as the effect of the aftermath of European colonialism in both regions. The Nigerian novel and the Latin American literary expression become different but interconnected reactions of the global South to the consequences of European colonialism. This is in harmony with Kubayanda’s interest on the fact that works from both regions “portray totalizing codes that pinpoint an unfinished business of decolonization” (Kubayanda in Baker and Grayson, “Introduction...” p. 2). Baker and Grayson (2018) recall the opinion of Patrice Nyanang that “dictatorship novel points to dictatorship in the postcolony as the clearest embodiment of the continent’s experience of tragedy”. Furthermore, they show that Nyanang describes dictatorship novel as texts “that lay bare the tragedy of dictatorship” (p.2) but in the same breath they acknowledge that “... the African dictator novel genre remains under discussed” (p.3). From the foregoing there is little agreement on the use of terminology and not necessarily on what the subject matter constitutes. Baker and Grayson (2018) tend to side with Kubayanda in using the term “dictator novel” even though they identify this type of writing as a genre. Nyanang, by contrast, has used the term “dictatorship novel”. As Uraizee (2015) has shown in the review essay on the volume of articles edited by Ndigirigi (2011) there is a preference for the phrase “fictional and dramatic African representations of dictatorship in Africa” (Uraizee, “Review”). This is in spite of the fact that earlier in the review Uraizee accepts that “African dictator fiction is now a sub-genre in its own right”. Yet, Ndigirigi’s caution is predicated on the fact that apart from the novel other forms of literary expressions such as Soyinka’s *A Play of Giants* and Osundare’s *The State Visit* exist. Accordingly, this discussion analyses and interprets how the Nigerian novel written in the era of military dictatorship and other forms of regime that exhibit dictatorial tendencies and serves as a counter-discourse that reconstructs the dominant power structure.

Given the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria, with each ethnic group cleaving to a “legacy of memories” rooted in the ethnic, the only possible common ground is the colonial experience and its impacts. It is also the experience of emerging out of the ashes of colonialism that can serve to define “present consent”. The contradiction in the Nigerian case is that the political and cultural context has engendered both the privatization of the public sphere and the perpetuation of tyranny in the nation as represented in these novels. By the privatization of the public sphere, we mean the systematic realignment of vestiges of power into indigenous forms originating from an ethnic root and the penchant to enforce the purview as the normal way of life even at the national level. It is within this kind of background where cleavage to ethnic memory holds sway and “present consent” to build the nation is circumscribed in the penchant to privatize the public sphere that we can understand the strategies of resistance in these novels.

Our aim will be accomplished through the study of the appropriation of the strategy of mimicry in Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah* and Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel*. Our practical discussion on how narrative in the two

novels serve to reconstruct and thereby resist dictatorial tendencies through ridicule and the grotesque will be bolstered by the postcolonial insights of Bhabha especially his theory of mimicry.

Of Mimicry and State Power in Postcolonial Nigeria

Ordinarily mimicry is derived from the word, *mimic* meaning copying or imitating something in order to ridicule. It also means someone that imitates others often satirically. Mimicry derives from the biological significance of *mimic* where it means the superficial resemblance that an organism may show to some other animate or inanimate entity and which serves as a means of concealment. Understood in this biological sense mimicry is derived from its Latin origin *mimicus*. It must be observed that two key words stand out in this basic definition of mimicry namely, ridicule and concealment. This implies that it ridicules, attacks its object but not directly but indirectly under concealment. This is achieved by first giving a sense of resemblance or a semblance of identification, even harmony with the object. Then under such cover of semblance, of identification or conformity with the other it launches its attack. Working within the context of colonialism, Bhabha (1994) has identified the consequence of mimicry as manifested in its “undermining of the colonizers” apparent stable, original identity. This is the fact that anyone could be “almost white but not quite”. In “Of Mimicry and Man”, Bhabha describes the nature, features and effect of mimicry especially within the colonial context. It is, he says, a “sign of double articulation” (p.122).

An important manifestation of this “double articulation”, Bhabha (1994) shows, manifests in what he designates as mimicry’s representation as an ironic compromise. This is because colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed recognizable *Other*, that is as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite (p.122). Huddart (2006) has explained in his account on Bhabha’s use of mimicry, colonial discourse animated by its ideology of “civilizing mission” wants the colonized to be extremely like the colonizer but by no means identical. The point is that if there is an absolute equivalence, then the ideology of the colonizer will be rendered as null and void. In other words, the colonized can become *civilized* but must never become like its *other*. Thus, this sameness “that is not quite”, Bhabha (1994) argues, unfolds in the discourse of mimicry as constructed around ambivalence. But for it to be effective it must continually produce a slippage, excess and difference. The idea of “slippage”, “excess”, and “difference” which emanate from ambivalence generates what he has described as the “authority of mimicry” which is the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. The primary significance of ambivalence is indeterminacy meaning indefiniteness, connoting indecisiveness, inconclusiveness, and contradictory. Another symptom of ambivalence is that of disavowal from disavow, meaning to deny any knowledge of, responsibility for, or association with somebody or something. It connotes denial, rejection, adjuration and renunciation. The immediate implication of this for our apprehension of mimicry is that if it is essentially a type of discourse stricken by indefiniteness and so contradictory in nature and essentially manifests in a process of disavowal and irresponsibility then its claim to authority is merely ephemeral. It is a lie that manifests in illusion of power. Its strategy lies in the ability to arrest the other’s attention and to sustain it. The ambivalence of hegemonic power replicates in the discursive process of colonialism, for instance, as almost the same, but not quite.

Our adoption of mimicry incorporates both its basic significance and effectivity in postcolonial discourse especially as enunciated by Bhabha (1994). But we go beyond the aesthetic nuance of the term to its link with the performance of state power in Nigeria and postcolonial Africa. In this regard the observation made by Mbembe (2001) becomes emblematic. Mbembe (2001) underscores that the foundation of mimicry in the performance of state power in postcolonial Africa lies in the fact that African nationalism against colonialism never contemplated or endeavoured to invent state craft on its own that can be called uniquely African. The nationalist leaders, Senghor, Toure, Nkrumah, Azikiwe etc borrowed state craft from the colonizers and did not reinvent it to become their own. This contrasts with what African intellectuals, writers and scholars have done with the foreign language, say English. In the case of language, we witness a full-scale process of appropriation. As Achebe testified: “The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use...” Such borrowed object turned out to be merely in a condition of *in-betweenness*: not authentically African in the sense of imbibing traditional customs nor clearly European. Even when there is a shift to the American executive style of democracy as in the Nigerian case, the result is a state in limbo. According to Mbembe:

... postcolonial African regimes have not invented what they know of government from scratch. Their knowledge is the product of several cultures, heritages, and traditions of which the features have become entangled overtime, to the point where something has emerged that has the look of “custom” without being reducible to it, and partakes of “modernity” without being wholly included in it. (Mbembe, 2001, p.25)

Why does this matter? It matters because the ambivalent effect of mimicry in colonial discourse can be extended in the postcolonial context in order to explain the immanent contradiction of dictatorship and the operation of state power and also to illuminate the potential agency of dominated groups. In terms of its mission, the military as we have seen earlier, presented itself as a “corrective regime” (an echo of the “civilizing mission” of the colonialist). But its actual *modus operandi* negates this vision and presents it as almost the same as it claims but not quite because its mission is one of “intervention without salvation” (Nwachukwu-Agbada); it is one of correction but, as Okigbo evokes, “it is now talking about pumpkins” thereby creating a space for a slippage and a difference. If we go back to Bhabha, we witness that the immanent lack of certainty in the colonialists attempt to make the native white renders the entire truth of whiteness as mere shibboleth. We can recall Conrad’s account on Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*, of Lessing’s account on Charles Slatter in *The Grass is Singing* or the two main white characters in Conrad’s short story “The Outpost of Progress”. Thus, as Huddart has further explained from Bhabha’s presentation, the identity of the colonizer is constantly slipping away, being undermined by effects of writing, joking, sly civility and repetition (Huddart p.51). Bhabha has reiterated the potential “menace of mimicry”. Thus, “the menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (Bhabha, 126). It is this menace that encapsulates the strategies of resistance immanent in mimicry. It is in this sense that mimicry intervenes in the colonial context to open a path for agency. The more prominent strategies of mimicry that will structure our practical analysis are appropriation, parody and Rabelasian satire. We witness a combination of these strategies at work especially in Achebe’s novel. In examining these strategies, however, our discussion will follow in the heels of the earlier description provided by Ndi, Ashcroft and Hutcheon in her *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Bakhtin and Mbembe. Appropriation focuses on the space of the dominant in terms of language, culture and modes of thinking. According to Ashcroft, it is properly used to describe the ways in which postcolonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture especially language, forms of writing that may be of use to them in their struggle to articulate their cultural identity and a sense of agency. The disruptive nature of mimicry through appropriation within the postcolonial context manifests in the “re-writing of the discourse of the dominant in order to clear a space for those at the margin. In the next section we will witness an example of appropriation at work in the encounter between an army officer and hawker at the Gelegele market in *Anthills...*

Hutcheon’s description of parody is within her account on the poetics of postmodernism. In a revised version of an earlier essay that appeared in *Cultural Critique* (1986/87) Hutcheon explains that her use of parody “is not the ridiculing imitation of the standard theories...” Rather she presents a “redefinition of parody as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity” (Hutcheon, p.22). In this sense she further explains that parody is derived from the Greek prefix *para* [which] can mean both ‘counter’ or ‘against’ or ‘near’ or ‘besides’ (p.22). The import of Hutcheon’s description of parody within the hegemonic performance of the state in the postcolony is that it underscores that “meaning is ... a relation of signifier to signifier, not signifier to signified” (Birch, p.2). Therefore, the closure of discourse is impossible because “reality is a question of perspective...” (Birch, p.2). Mbembe’s adoption of Rabelaisian satire is foregrounded in his account on the “banality of power”, a term that derives from the work of Hannah Arendt. It connects with Bakhtin’s “gross exaggeration and hyperbole in the evocation of the obscene and the grotesque. We will provide a more detailed account on this connection in the discussion in the next section.

Significance: The significance of our study can be gauged from two related perspectives. The first is the concrete historical context of Nigeria ravaged by insecurity, poverty and a widening gap between the few political elite and the mass of the people and the concerted efforts of the regime of the day to clamp down on any form of agitation even in the face of worsening human condition. This is followed by the more direct literary significance which unfolds how the narrative form of representation such as the novel can dramatize how through its representational potential the Nigerian novel contests the dominant macro-sign and its underlying power structure. In a society that is in need for change, literary discourse can serve as potent instrument by adopting, as Gilbert Ndi has described it, “a barrage of textual strategies” (Ndi, 2017, p.96). A related literary significance of this discussion stems from the omission of the Nigerian literary response to the monster of dictatorship and abuse of power in the important study carried out by Charlotte Baker (2018) in her article “Angry laughter: Postcolonial representations of dictatorial masculinities”. Although Baker’s study is focused on the novels by Cheik Aliou Ndao from Senegal and Baba Galleh Jallow from The Gambia she equally identifies other works in this mode of representation such as Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow*, the novels by Sony Labou Tansi but without a reference to at least either Achebe’s or Habila’s novelistic response. Perhaps it can be affirmed that the two novels that form the focus of our study are not only typical of the literary representation of dictatorship but also of the challenge of postcoloniality. In short, the subject of dictatorship has remained a fact of life in postcolonial experience and a major intellectual preoccupation in the scholarship on Nigerian Literature in English. Yet there has been little work done to foreground the resistance of the ordinary people against its tyranny.

This essay is one contribution to this project of articulating the voice of the voiceless in the face of tyranny. A guiding thread of this study is to affirm to the famous question by Gayatri Spivak that yes, indeed, the subaltern can speak. It is inevitably so because as Wole Soyinka asserts the man dies in all who keeps silent in the face of tyranny.

Anthills...

The narrative of *Anthills of the Savannah* is set in the context of military dictatorship in Nigeria in the late 1980s. It has been argued that Achebe's focus on military dictatorship began with the account of the coup *d'etat* in *A Man of the People*. By the time we get to *Anthills...*, the military has been in power for about twenty years. Thus, while the military is celebrated in the earlier novel as a corrective regime, the account of *Anthills...* becomes a critical interrogation of military dictatorship as representative of the "unfinished business of decolonization" (Kubayanda, 1997 p.38). It has become an unfinished business on account of the imposition of unanimity and the reconstruction of the state as instrument for the creation of a private sphere for the authoritarian leader. The third person narrator encapsulates this unfinished business as "...the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and the dispossessed of this country, with the bruised hearts that throb painfully at the core of the nation's being" (*Anthills...*, p.141). The relevance of *Anthills...* can be seen also in Achebe's adoption of an alternative viewpoint both in terms of manner of presentation and equally in the overall content of this novel. Thus, the unanimity and privatization of the public sphere in their banality and the failure of the leaders to re-establish contact with the "bruised hearts of the nation" have, nevertheless, elicited a counter discourse from the subaltern groups in society. It is this dialectic between the corruption of authoritarian rule and the counter-discursive fervour of the oppressed that propel the action of *Anthills...* Our rereading of the novel will be guided by this inner dialectic.

Mimicry manifests in a minor *recit* that is inserted into the narrative. Thus, in Chapter nine of *Anthills...* we witness a minor *recit* retold by the Elder from Abazon. The account is derived from an Igbo folktale and it is about how the leopard chanced upon the tortoise on a lonely path after a long period of searching. On seeing the other, the leopard exclaims "Aha, at long last!" He goes on to add "Prepare to die!" (*Anthills ...*, p.128) At this the tortoise responds, "Can I ask one favour before you kill me?" The leopard, we are further told, agrees to the request. Then the tortoise requests to be allowed to prepare himself. The leopard again sees no harm in this proposal and of course assents to it. But rather than standing to meditate or at least engage in some solemn act as the leopard had expected, the tortoise goes into wild action on the footpath, by scratching and furiously throwing the earth in all directions. Amazed at the unexpected turn of events from the tortoise, the leopard asks, "Why are you doing that?" To this the tortoise responds that "Because after I am dead, I would want anyone passing by this spot to say, yes, a fellow and his match struggled here." Immanent in this account is the traditional binary between the powerful subject represented by the leopard that can unleash death at will; and the wily object, the tortoise, without power but who must survive by its wit. Beyond this traditional binary we witness the opening up of the public space, a footpath, for the marginal object, the tortoise, to self-expression and to engage in action. By expressing itself and through its action the marginal voice here literally corrupts the certainty and capacious self-assurance of the other, the leopard and refuses to be trapped within it. Accordingly, the tortoise's act of corrupting the dominant becomes as Benita Parry has underscored "a mode of refusal against the dominant" (Parry, 2004, p.20) and a strategy of resistance.

In addition to these, the tale illuminates an underlying problem of dictatorship in Nigeria. Military dictatorship is not merely an abuse of the social contract. It is more fundamentally an instrument of centring by cancelling out the expressive potential that underwrites the people's culture and their sense of being. This pull to centre spawned the crisis of leadership and its attendant abuse of power. It is moored in what Falola and Aderinto (2010) have described as "the politics of the tribe" (p.279). This "politics of the tribe" is predicated on a self-consciousness of one's identity as different; and an eagerness to use that sense of identity to one's advantage at the exclusion of others. In the story of the leopard and the tortoise the leopard's consciousness of itself as a member of the cat family, and as such its carnivorous nature underwrites its ability to kill at will. Beyond the metaphor, however, Falola and Aderinto further explain that "the politics of the tribe" serves to illuminate the "possible force of the pre-modern era on the modern, neo-capitalist state in Nigeria". They refer to the onset of colonization in order to show how little was done by the colonizing nation to reconcile the ethnic groups into a common unity. Ironically, too, the postcolonial state has continued to exacerbate the division and differences between the ethnic groups. Most times the differences between the groups are used to gain political control. The consequence is the existence of a fragile state structure constituted by ethnic groups whose sense of identity and solidarity derive not from the state but from the ethnic.

In the tale from *Anthills...* the tortoise emerges as the marginal *Other* and represents how the margin can corrupt the dominant and its vision of centre by scratching the earth and thereby setting up a memorial before his presumed death. By “scratching the earth” which is a type of writing he vilifies the high expectation of the leopard by foregrounding a comic vision in the entire incident. The comic vision at work here is that of the grotesque. Against the background of his discussion on the “banality of power” Achille Mbembe (2001) has described how the grotesque and the obscene are two essential characteristics that identify postcolonial regimes of domination (p.104). What is revealed from the leopard’s perspective is the grotesque and the “hyperbole of everyday life” in dictatorial contexts in postcolonial Africa such as Nigeria under military rule and even afterwards. Hyperbole is understood as a figure, a sign that exaggerates the truth because it is in excess. What is presented as true objectivity is in excess to the extent that rather than affirming or illuminating the real in a positive sense its excess projects it as gaudy especially showy in an offensive way and therefore superfluous. Besides, its excess presents it not only as banal which according to Mbembe renders it as “predictable routine” (Mbembe, p.102) and a source of boredom and inertia. Consequently, our use of the notion of hyperbole of everyday life as experienced in the Nigerian dictatorship novel privileges in the first instance, Mbembe’s concept of banality of power in the postcolony, but, in addition, it derives impetus from the elements of the obscene and the grotesque in Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Rabelais and his World*. The functionality of the obscene and the grotesque in both Mbembe and Bakhtin is that they are targeted at officialdom in order to resist it and therefore, turn its dominant code of common sense, what Ndi (2017) has called “the macro-sign” (p. 96) into an object of ridicule (Mbembe, p.104). This is in spite of the fact that the obscene and the ridiculous originate with the marginal and subordinate groups in society as in the case of the tortoise in the incident from *Anthills...* It originates with members of this social group; it entertains and edifies, but its ultimate purpose of resistance is attained by guile.

Mbembe (2001) describes the sly tactic of the subaltern group which deviously inserts itself into the common sense of the dominant discourse, creating a sense of acquiescence while at the same time revealing the contradiction within the dominant. Our discussion here shares affinity with the case made by Simon Gikandi on how Ngugi wa Thiong’O’s “writing [turns the] state itself into a subject of ridicule [by] undermining the representational authority of the postcolony” (cited in Ndigirigi, 2014, p.56). Ndigirigi further shows how Ngugi’s *Wizard of the Crow* “deconstructs the spectacles of power and valorises subversive laughter in undermining the representational authority of the Aburirian state and ruler” (Ndigirigi, p.56). In *Anthills ...* the tortoise achieves this “subversive laughter” by beginning with the request, “Can I ask a favour before you kill me?” By asking, he deviously acquiesces to the leopard’s subject position, a trick that the other fails to recognize because blinded by the certainty of its power, he sees no harm in the request. The leopard is even blinded by the presumed sense of his power as subject in a position to grant or reject the request. Meanwhile the voluble tortoise’s goal is not to express civility. Rather he has yielded to the subject in order to unbundle the essence of the other’s power as he turns mere request into an instance of struggle. Thus, he underscores, one may die in the course of struggle. But by dying, a story and its narration is left after the event for those that will survive and for future generation. And the tortoise is both a trickster and a victim. But he is a victim who even in impending death provokes narration. In relation to this story, therefore, we can identify the looming subject of death in the encounter between the leopard and the tortoise. Interestingly, also, one agent, the leopard, takes for granted and presents himself as the one that has authority to proclaim and bring to pass the death of the other. On the other hand, we notice that the tortoise, it is assumed by the leopard, is the *de facto* victim to die. Beyond the story, however, death can mean a historical experience; the specific experience in question here is the condition of tyranny that has become the reality of dictatorship in Nigeria and in Africa after independence. By privatizing the public sphere in the nation and encapsulating the citizens in their reign of death perpetuated through a systematic culture of fear and militarized pattern of ideological interpellation dictatorial regimes, even under the guise of one-party system, presume themselves as the agents of death.

It is this kind of atrophied condition or “banality of power” to recall Mbembe (2001) again, that provokes narration which stimulates the culture of resistance rather than acquiescence and silence. By telling and doing, the tortoise as in the story above creates a puzzling situation that confounds the agent of tyranny. In the same way by narrating their condition of containment through struggle the victims of dictatorship can manage to interrogate anarchy. As Ndi has argued, the interrogation initiated by the marginal group is never executed frontally at the “discursive technologies” that suture the dominant power but rather it is actualized through the “slender narratives” of the marginalized. By “slender narratives” Ndi (2017) refers to “forms of discourse that do not lay claim to a stable core [and] internal cohesion” (p. 94). It is in such interrogation that freedom can crystallize.

The obscene and the grotesque are not only intrinsic in non-official cultures, the subaltern groups, but in all system of dominations. Thus, if we take the Executive Council meeting scene, as we hinted earlier in the last section, not only as the opening scene but also as an example of Mbembe’s “living space” occupied, in this instance, by

members of the dominant group, we witness acts of the obscene and the grotesque in the interaction of the characters. We see the following: (1) Sam's adamant refusal to go to Abazon even in his capacity as the Head of State. The Head of State is primarily answerable to the people, the subaltern group represented here as Abazon. His refusal is a negation of his position and his emphasis repeated in the two words "*Kabisa!* Finish!" rendered with such curt icy finality followed by the question "Any other business?" uttered to imply any other item for consideration, does not only imply a closure on discourse, but also reveals a void. Although he is the chair of the meeting, by asking the question "Any other business?" he reveals an absurd situation that points to the grotesque. This is because he has apparently gone to the meeting without any issue for discussion. (2) Sam's attempt at closure at the same time opens a space for interrogation which Christopher Oriko fills with the use of the contrastive conjunction "But ..." followed with the anacoluthon (...) indicating silence. "But" in this instance creates room for an alternative while the use of the anacoluthon as punctuation mark after "But" gives room for the creation of silence, the unsaid. In other words, Sam's lack of agenda or sense of direction in such important meeting of the ruling class in the land is not just obscene but an offence not only to the humanity of other members of the executive council but an insult to the entire population of the nation. It is also a reiteration of the "banality of power" especially understood as the regularity of routine. In other words, it seems that for Sam the meeting is mere routine and not an occasion to address any serious issue of State. As the focus shifts from the Head of State to other members of the cabinet, we witness instances of the obscene and grotesque in their behaviour. Chris reports this by using animal imagery. Thus, we see this in the presentation of the Commissioner for Education. We are told:

On my right sat the Honourable Commissioner for Education. He is by far the most frightened of the lot. As soon as he had sniffed peril in the air he had begun to disappear into his hole ... (p. 3)

At work here is the combination of what Bakhtin has called "gross exaggeration and hyperbole" (*Rabelais and His World*, 303). Bakhtin points to how the body and its motions are foregrounded in order to evoke a sense of the obscene and the grotesque in members of the dominant class. This foregrounding of the body in the incident from *Anthills...* is achieved through representation in animal imagery. Thus, of the Commissioner for Education we are told that "he is... frightened", and that he "sniffed peril in the air". Also, "he began to disappear into his hole, as some animals do..." (*Anthills...*, p.3)

Valid as the foregoing is, we equally need to apprehend the inner pattern of relationship dramatized here between Sam and members of his Executive Council. What crystallizes here is the obsession to maintain his fetishism of himself over every other character in that "public space". In fact, the opening chapters should be rightly entitled "The fetishism of Sam's legitimacy and hegemony". This fetishism is dramatized through the following features: (1) his choice of words; (2) his mannerism; (3) his measured response to the utterances and banter of members of his cabinet; (4) his evaluation and disdain at their worth. All these are guided by his inner desire to achieve his legitimacy and hegemony as a fetish to be accepted by all. On the basis of his choice of words, we see this in the opening sentences of the narrative especially in his use of one-word sentences mixed with a foreign word, "*Kabisa*" and accompanied with exclamation marks. In terms of his mannerism, we witness his penchant to demand reverence and submission to his self-perceived authority. This manifests not only in words but also in his gestures. Chris reports: "I lowered mine [eyes] to the shiny table-tops in ceremonial capitulation. This is followed with a moment of silence in order to allow Sam to ascertain the genuineness of Chris's submission. In utter consternation Sam wonders: "Why do you find it so difficult to swallow my ruling. On anything?" (*Anthills...*, p.1). The "anything" here is the fetish that Sam has conceived for himself. We witness this as Sam sits while the Secretary quietly arranges his pair of shoes under the table as everyone else is momentarily frozen in hushed wait for Sam to be shod. Then there is his calculated manner of turning conversation with the members of his cabinet into a duel to be won by him. The others become like ping pong balls to be thrown around the table at will. As Chris also notes "Days are good or bad for us now according to how His Excellency gets out of bed in the morning... On a bad day... there is nothing for it but to lie close to your hole, ready to scramble in. And particularly to keep your mouth shut, for nothing is safe..." (*Anthills...*, p.2) It is in this kind of banal exercise of power that as Mbembe has underscored, Sam as a typical "*commandement* can ratify [his own] institutionalization as a fetish to which [every member of his cabinet and in fact all citizens are bound] (Mbembe, p.104).

In his account on the spectacle and subversive laughter in Ngugi wa Thiong'O, Ndigirigi describes Ngugi's dramatization of "the performance of state power". The state he shows is an enclosure with manned entries and exits stationed to keep away invaders while at the same time confining the inhabitants within its limit. While these points of entrance and exit secure the performance of state power, that performance and the immanent power within is dramatized by the presence and vigilance of personnel that dramatize the spectacle (p. 55). The pertinence of this insight from Ngugi is that it serves to illuminate the immanent relation of power in the opening scene and other significant moments in the narrative of *Anthills...* The cabinet room is an enclosure that is shut out from the outside world and manned by armed soldiers. Sam storms out of the cabinet room as the narrator, Chris, describes

the moments of his exit. Thus, “As he left his seat an orderly gathered up his papers quickly and followed him out. Another orderly, more stern-faced, opened the heavy doors of carved panels, stood aside and gave a long, hand-quivering salute” (*Anthills...*, p.8). The spectacle of state is embodied in this “orderly of the quivering hand. The motions of his body embody the representation of state spectacle. We should also note the bevy of orderlies engaged in menial tasks at the behest of his Excellency. We see it also in the efforts of the Secretary to arrange Sam’s pair of shoes under the table while other members of the Executive Cabinets are stuck in their chairs as they wait on His Excellency. The essence of the dimensions of the spectacle is to underscore the fetish that Sam has erected around himself. He is the “Lord of the Manor” and must thus be venerated.

As we move away from the “living space” of the dominant in the cabinet meeting scene we are taken to an incident that engages a member of the dominant group, a soldier, in an exchange with the members of the subaltern group within the context of a market scene, a public space. We witness what Linda Hutcheon will call the “textualizations of the social public space” (p.129). The space in question is a market, Gelegele Market. The incident reveals how mimicry functions to interrogate the performance of state power in the text. In his use of language, the power-wielder invariably expels freedom from the world. The literary text intervenes in this lack of freedom in order to restore freedom by chasing the authoritarian leader out of office. This annulment of the power-wielder’s control of language is projected through a main character in the novel, viz: Ikem. Thus, in chapter four Ikem tells us about two related incidents at the Motor Park adjacent to the Gelegele Market. The market as a context in this instance is important because it serves as a metaphor of the nation. Thus, Achebe reiterates that no individual can buy all that is on display in a market no matter how powerful or wealthy. Every one buys what he needs and leaves and the market continues. The market then becomes a sign of the nation because it is a frame Achebe has used to affirm that the subject needs to be responsible. In the first incident we see a pugnacious drunkard taunting another character who turns out to be the champion wrestler of Kangan. In spite of his towering strength and the obvious mismatch the wrestler struggles to slip away from view. Apart from these two characters there are witnesses to the scene described as “everyone in the market”. The drunkard lays claim to the stranger’s portmanteau. The witnesses having recognized the drunkard expects and urges the stranger to treat the other more firmly and harshly. Rather than responding, the stranger slips away out of view. Then one of the witnesses recognizes him as the champion wrestler.

The relevance of this account is that the stranger is powerful but refrains from a public display of that power especially when his tormentor lacks power. In this instance the stranger is used as metaphor of the truly strong soldier “who also makes magnificent [soldier] and remain [a] good [person] hardly ever showing let alone flaunting [his] strength” (p. 46). This contrasts with another group of soldiers, “who would be strong”. Unlike the first group, this second group “is there for the swank”. The difference between power and powerlessness demonstrates that power must be responsible. This account connects with the second occasion that we see Ikem within the context of Gelegele Market. In this instance, we witness an interaction between power and powerlessness, between a soldier and a marginal character, a trader. Thus, Ikem sits in the car reading and waiting for a friend. All around the parked cars young sellers of second-hand clothes displayed their articles on wooden clothes-horses. Shortly, a soldier drives up furiously. He quickly goes into reverse and backs at a high-speed crashing into a young man and his articles of used clothes. The young man scrambles out of the car’s path and asks the driver who climbs out of his unruffled:

“Oga, you want kill me?”

“If I kill you I kill dog”

As the soldier walks away a dialogue ensues between the young man and his colleagues:

“Does he mean that after killing me he will go and kill a dog?”

“No, he means that to kill you is like to kill a dog: so therefore you na dog- na dog born you”.

“No “he [young man] said again, “if I kill you I kill dog means that after he kill me he will go home and kill his dog. (pp.47-48)

The soldier’s statement “If I kill you I kill dog” has provoked two levels of reaction. The first level is the attempts to interpret the original statement by the other traders. This is followed by the young trader’s insistence on what constitutes the truth of the situation.

As a direct speech, the soldier’s statement contains a conditional clause: “If I kill you” and a declarative clause “I kill dog”. But beyond this surface pattern there are different underlying semantic field relationships in the utterance. In standard usage, the relationship between a clause introduced by such a marker as “if” to another is that of subordination. So “if I kill you” is subordinate to “I kill dog”. The soldier’s statement acts as a warning. In other words, the young man’s colleagues understand soldier’s statement primarily as a warning. It is also conditional because it expresses something that might happen. But there is also a shift in emphasis and status in the statement at another semantic level. In this connection, there is just one clause with two structural parts, viz.:

a head and a modifier. So “I kill dog” becomes an appendage of “if I kill you”. At this level the soldier’s statement crystallizes as mere information. This is basically the understanding of the young trader. This implies that he understands the statement to mean primarily as an information or an expression of a fixed intent. As he states:

“No . . . If I kill you I kill dog means that after he kills me he will go home and kill his dog”.

Therefore, the young trader reveals in his understanding of the original statement of its absurdity and futility. Whereas his colleagues, focuses the emphasis on him by using “you” the young man diverts the attention back to the soldier by using “he”. The use of mimicry in the utterance of the young trader reveals not only the performance of state power but also, the exhibition of irresponsibility by the powerful.

Another way of interpreting the soldier’s utterance is to read it as a declarative form of discourse. A declarative imparts knowledge. Unlike other forms of illocutionary acts, such as expressive or imperatives, it does not harmonize interpersonal relations. Therefore, the hearer’s interaction is not required. The use of the declarative by the soldier can be properly understood within the context of ideology in its relations with power. This is because the soldier engages in a reconstruction of the young man as object, “a dog”, that can be run over by a subject. This reminds us of a case in *No Longer at Ease* where the new elite class of car owners deems it fashionable to run into dogs as a sign of good luck. In *No Longer at Ease* the elite’s relationship to the object, “dog”, is a sign to the central trial in the novel. This is because it is not only Obi Okonkwo, a naïve young man who is on trial. It is the whole members of the new elite who are on trial. The new elite’s relation to the object dog crystallizes within the ambit of the world. World here refers to specific environment within which a subject makes himself known. Thus, in *Anthills* ... the soldier’s reference to dog has to be understood within the context of the nation state. But as we will perceive, each of the characters enters into the world of the nation state differently by using the common equipment of language. Consequently, the soldier’s declarative acquires its timbre within his specific mode of insertion into the nation state. This mode of insertion hardens as a result of military leadership in Nigeria. In this regard Achebe’s novel serves to highlight the insensate nature of that regime and its performance of state power. This encounter between the young man and the soldier seems, therefore, to be the strongest attack Achebe has launched at the military and military leadership in his novels. Achebe is bitter that the military lacks the respect for human life and human dignity as made apparent in the relationship between the soldier and the young man. It is equally significant that although Ikem a major character reports this incident, he is only a mere observer who momentarily dissolves against the background of the unfolding action.

These incidents will be considered minor since they do not directly involve any of the major characters. Yet they intersect with a major concern of the novel itself. This is the re-evaluation of the military regimes and the performance of state power in Nigeria. The two occasions represent the two stages through which the military vocation has metamorphosed. The first occasion involving the champion wrestler and the pugnacious drunkard, points to the initial perception of the military as a corrective regime. This is a position articulated toward the end of *A Man* The second account involving the soldier and the trader is symptomatic of the later stage of the military in African politics. At this stage the military has turned away from its role as a corrective regime, they are, as Ikem puts it, out for the “the swank”. Power is no longer directed to social responsibility. Power exists for its own its sake. We now come to the insertion of a minor story. The space of the story is the Harmony Hotel, “a sleazy establishment in the northern slums of the capital... a popular resort in the neighbourhood.” (*Anthills*..., 120) The context to the overall opening up of this space is the visit of the Abazon delegation to Bassa. The main subject here is the Elder from Abazon. Now, Ikem Osodi has gone to Harmony Hotel in order to meet with the delegation. The occasion of that meeting connects with the story.

The Elder begins by discountenancing the charge made by the MC against Ikem. The MC has complained about Ikem’s failure to attend the monthly meetings of Abazon community in Bassa. The Elder says:

I have heard what you said about the young man, Osodi... But leave this young man alone to do what he is doing for Abazon and for Kangan...

He goes on to affirm:

To some of us the owner of the World has apportioned the gift to tell their fellows that the time to get up has finally come.

He distinguishes between the action and the telling of the action. As he puts it the man of action and the teller of the story have their due responsibility to society. Therefore, he says: “To everyone his due”. The thrust of his account is to highlight that telling a story supersedes action. This is because:

It is the story that outlives sound of war-drums and exploits of brave fighters. ... The story is our escort, without it we are blind. (p., 124)

Implicit in the dialectic between story and action, story and “the sound of war drums and exploits of brave fighters” is a semiotic concern that unites with the overall concern of this study. The story is not simply a mimetic record of a referent. In being our “escort”, it illuminates the shades of meaning and truth conditions. It opens that which

is unthought-of. It is on this pedestal that we can appreciate the hope in *Anthills*... This is because the vision of the story projects not only to the present in its fixity and numbness. The import of the story is that of becoming. Consequently, the message of the Elder's meditations is that of becoming. It is not what we are that is prominent. It is what we are becoming and how the story becomes the channel to that becoming. The two scenes and their accompanying incidents at the Gelegele market and Harmony hotel, on the one hand, and at the Cabinet meeting scene serve as "intentional landscapes". They merge with the expression of intentions in the text. The common feature of both scenes is that of gathering of the powerful and the gathering of the powerless. The intersection between these landscapes is formed by the inability of the powerful to act, and so we witness the failure of power to be truly representative. The Cabinet meeting dramatizes the failure of Sam as the head of state to attend to the needs of the governed represented here by the Abazon province. He does this through his negative kind of performance. Also, the meeting at the Harmony Hotel is occasioned by this failure of political power to be fully responsible.

Yet the meeting at the hotel is under the spell of another type of power. The third person narrator presents it thus:

The silence was so complete that one could hear him [the Elder] gnashing his teeth. Ikem realized that other people... had ... fallen under this old man's spell... (*Anthills*, p.126)

The power here is captured in the expression, "the oldman's spell". Yet it is a power that is not dictatorial. What arrests attention is the force or the performance of the wisdom encapsulated in his parabolic utterance. The lesson that emerges in his parable is the imperative of struggle against all forms of tyranny. Thus, he concludes by saying: "My people, that is all we are doing. (p.128)

The Elders' parable, therefore, acquires significance in the desire for change in Africa. While hegemonic power epitomized in the actions and words of Sam insists on silence, the power to be free is epitomized in storytelling. This is in line with the views of Walter Benjamin (19) on the nature of the storyteller. Benjamin underscores that "the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers"

(p.86) This counsel (wisdom) demands interpretation which generates change in its entire ramification. The interpretation here comes out of deep reflection. The silence that follows his words is meant not to muzzle thought, but it generates reflective thinking. Tyranny as we see in Sam demands information. Sam asks his Chief Secretary: "Any other business?" (p.6) As he summons Okong, he begins by filling [him] on whom [the delegation] they are and what they are doing here". (15) Also, he insists: "you know I've never really relied on you fellows for information on anything or anybody". (15) Again, his summons to the Attorney-General is predicated on the need for information. He says: "I have received intelligence [information] from various sources indicating that the Commissioner for Information is perhaps not as loyal to me ..." (p.21)

There are other incidents in the novel in which we meet Ikem in his struggle to reconstitute the language of the dominant power. However, the incident we have been discussing so far is central to the novel because it is linked with the text's preoccupation with the need for leaders to re-establish the necessary contact with the ordinary people. We are told that:

The primary failure of [the] government . . . is the failure of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country... (p.141)

In other words, the performance of state power under military dictatorship alienates the leader from the people.

Waiting for an Angel

Habila's *Waiting*... shares common features with *Anthills*... Like Achebe's novel it is presented through the use of multiple narrators as we witness the combination of third person point of narration with different first-person narrators. The account moves in cyclical form, interweaving between the past and the present through the use of extended forms of prolepsis. Its account begins at the point when the major character, Lomba, has spent two years in prison awaiting trial. In this we witness the abuse of the penal system. It detains people and then bungles them into interminable term of imprisonment without trial. We learn that even though Lomba has spent two years in waiting, some inmates have spent longer time while others even die in prison while waiting. The story is arranged in seven chapters. Each chapter is named after a major character through whose perspective or experience the account is presented. Chapter five, for instance, is captioned "Lomba" but it represents the two years between his dropping from school, Alice's graduation from the university, and Lomba's work as a journalist at the *Dial*. Besides, the chapter introduces Morgan Street also called Poverty Street.

Lomba has spent two years in prison awaiting trial. Before his arrest and imprisonment, he is a student at the university under military rule. Through his perspective we are presented with the impact of that regime on students and their rights. The students organize a demonstration which is ruthlessly crushed by the security agents. The aftermath of the crackdown and the repression bear on Bola and members of his family. Bola loses his two parents and a sibling as their car crashes into a military truck abandoned on the highway. We are told: "There had been an accident. Bola's family--father, mother, and two sisters--had been in a car crash" (p.45). Bola loses his mind,

stages a public speech and is arrested by the police. The military truck into which the car carrying Bola's family crashes in addition to the pathetic condition of the roads are pointers to the state of public infrastructure under the military rule in Nigeria. The military truck that has been abandoned on the road symbolically represents the presence of the dictatorship imposed on the people that impedes the social, economic and political progress of the masses. The same is applicable to the boot marks on paper that Lomba finds on his return to his hostel room. He narrates: "... boots had marched upon them, covering the writing with thick brown mud. I felt the imprint of the boots on my mind; I felt the rifling, tearing hands ripping through my very soul." (p.59) The narrator has to abandon the writings that has taken him years to accomplish because of the condition in which the soldiers had left them. The invasion of the police officers into the students' halls of residence is one characteristic of the dictatorial regime. The government and its agents have no respect for the common citizens.

On his part, Lomba drops out of school with the rational that school is like a prison so he decides to stay out. Having dropped out of school Lomba tenants at Morgan Street, begins to write a novel while engaging in a secondary level preparatory class. Later he goes to work with the *Dial*, a political magazine. He is assigned to cover a planned demonstration by residents at Morgan Street. He is arrested and accused of leading the demonstration. He is kept in prison without trial. He begins to write poems and letters, gets into trouble with the superintendent of prison after he is betrayed by an informer, spends days in solitary detention before the superintendent comes to release him. He composes poems for the superintendent addressed to the latter's lover called Janice. On his way to solitary confinement, Lomba is handcuffed and blindfolded by the warders but still scolded when he bumps into the warder who shouts at him, "What? You no de see? Idiot!" (p.16). One wonders how a prisoner in blindfolds would see where he is going. All the torture of taking Lomba away from the common cell through the rigorous route into a solitary cell is only meant to make him divulge information which he had decided not to. Moreover, the superintendent confesses to Janice that an opportunity had been presented to him to help free Lomba but because he was using him to craft letters and love notes to his lover, he did not give his name to the Amnesty International who had asked for the names of political detainees in the correctional facility. This attitude mimics the colonial tendency to enslave and abuse the native whose relevance is only determined by what the ruler could benefit from him.

Lomba's dream of writing, completing and publishing a novel is laid to rest by the strictness of the military junta who, according to James Fiki the editor of the *Dial*, have made the citizens so mentally and economically impoverished that they can no longer afford the luxury of buying books which have gone out of the reach of the ordinary citizen because of the economic sanctions placed on the country. In addition to that, the citizens "are too busy trying to stay out of the way of the police and the army to read..." (p.147). James Fiki's observation is true because under a repressive regime, individuals are often more concerned about daily survival strategy than in leisure or educational pursuit. The narrator in the second chapter of the novel that patiently waits for Israfael, the Angel of death could be said to be a representative of individuals under a repressive regime. An illegitimate regime is usually a deathscape from which individuals either struggle to escape or helplessly succumb to the embracing arms of the death spirit. It's surprising that this unnamed character who had been warned of his impending death had quietly accepted the verdict without raising a finger to save himself. Thus:

"His gun is unslung, the barrel points casually in my direction.

'Get out, he says....'

'I am waiting for someone, and it may be you,' (p.38)

As this character welcomes the armed soldiers and refuses to rush out of the bar after the dusk to dawn curfew was announced, many individuals living under dictatorial rulers and who refuse to overtly or covertly resist surrender themselves as scapegoats for sacrifice. Waiting is adopted as a symbol of resistance by the unnamed character who, according to Akingbe (2016) resists the powerful order of the soldiers by not leaving the bar immediately. Lomba also adopts the strategy of waiting when he makes the prison superintendent wait for his appraisal of the love poem he has written for his lover. Thus:

"I sensed his waiting. He was hardly breathing. I let him wait. Lord, I can't remember another time when I felt so good. So powerful...." (p. 19). The poor, helpless prisoner exercises his power over his jailor and derives great satisfaction from it.

The action moves in a cyclical order. The only constant is the anticipated answer to the implied question towards the end of the first chapter: why is Lomba held in prison for over two years without trial? As we search for answer to this implied question it becomes obvious that Lomba's story opens a window to perceive the performance of the state under a military regime as individuals are incarcerated for years without trial thereby denying individual citizens the right to freedom of movement and free expression and creating untold overcrowding in the correctional facility.

A compelling sense that emerges from this pattern of narration in *Waiting...* is the shibboleth of military dictatorship as a corrective regime. Rather than serving as a corrective regime the novel presents the military as ultimately imbricated in the “banality of power” to recall Mbembe (2001). The idea of the military as a corrective regime, not only promotes the proliferation of such regimes, it serves to perpetuate new form of mimic condition of colonialism. The obvious performance of this in *Waiting* is the imprisonment of citizens without trial in order to pacify them into fear and submission. So rather than correcting the contradictions of their lives, the military perpetuate a new form of thralldom. As in the European form of colonialism the military divides the population by the use of force, into the submissive and passive group, the “good citizens” and the troublemakers that must be subdued and pacified through years of imprisonment without trial. Through their pacification and suppression, the rest of the population is cowed into equal submission. What we have seen in Achebe’s *Anthills..* and Habila’s *Waiting...* is an attempt by these concerned creative writers to light the flame of resistance among their audience and by so doing demystify the military whose constant intervention in Nigerian/African politics albeit often lauded by the ignorant masses, is nothing but an aberration. This aberration and abuse of power should never be encouraged as it unapologetically replicates the colonial situation from which most African nations are still trying to extricate themselves.

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