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**Satire as a Parable of an Ailing Nation: Lessons from Niyi  
Osundare's *The State Visit***

**Imo, Edward Egbo**

Department of Theatre and Film Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

E-mail: [eddygoron@yahoo.com](mailto:eddygoron@yahoo.com),

Phone: +2348037321863; +2347018198952.

**Abstract**

The paper examines the satirical treatment of dictatorial and authoritarian leadership in Nigeria as portrayed in Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*. It documents Osundare's protest towards the high spate of political chicanery amongst Nigerian leaders and its attendant effect of squalor and poverty amongst the citizens. The research adopts the content analysis methodology as well as the qualitative approach as it uses Osundare's *The State Visit* as paradigm for the handful of political satires within the Nigerian dramatic landscape. Amongst others, the paper observes that tyrannical leadership constitutes a huge factor that militates against the growth and development of most African countries especially Nigeria. The study also brandishes satire as a unique art form that sets out to occasion positive change through the mechanism of corrective laughter and ridicule. It is for the foregoing that the paper advocates the dire need for the enthronement of purposeful and effective democratic leadership in Nigeria. Ideological commitment amongst Nigerian playwrights is strongly canvassed also in the study-a commitment towards crafting plays that harp on national bonding, solidarity, security and development.

## Introduction

Oral and written historical sources attest to the fact that since the beginning of civilization amongst the pocket tribes down to the colonial and then to the post-colonial times, Nigeria as a nation, has always been blessed with rich and abundant mineral resources and deposits that translate beautifully in huge foreign exchange and earnings. Ironically, the economic worth of these massive mineral resources is yet to reflect on the living conditions of the average Nigerian. The reason for this paradoxical economic misfortune in Nigeria where there is “scarcity in abundance,” is not far-fetched. The country has been in severe and protracted leadership quagmire since her independence. From the inception of leadership in the provinces, down to the rise of the military and then the institutionalization of civil rule and democratic leadership, the Nigerian nation has consistently grappled with one form of leadership imbroglio or the other.

The military system of government that reigned supreme in Nigeria for three decades and more is being accused as the cradle of corruption in the country. This accusation is largely as a result of the autocratic nature of the military leadership style which gave them the leeway to plunder and reap Nigeria of its abundant natural resources with impunity.

The agitation for democratic rule came to reality on May 29, 1999 but not with the dividends attached to democratic governance. Rather than eschew the spirit of freedom which is characteristic of global democracy, the democratic governance in Nigeria is more of window dressing as corruption keeps soaring higher than was experienced during the military era. Apart from the recurring spate of insecurity in Northern Nigeria as evident in Boko Haram insurgency and the herdsmen’s holocaust raids and then the militant activities in the Niger Delta region, the Nigerian nation is enraptured in a variety of socio-political and socio-economic crisis such that threaten national peace and unity. Long before the infiltration of economic recession, Nigeria was already nursing the pandemics of protracted unemployment amongst the teeming population of the youths, collapsed healthcare system, inadequate and obsolete educational curricula, dilapidated road network and a distorted judicial system among others. The collapse of the nation’s social structure, as enumerated above, is traceable to political instability as evident in the insensitivity of past and present leaders.

It is in the midst of such socio-economic and socio-political quagmire that the playwright is brought to the fore as the conscience of the nation. Right from Classical Antiquity when Aristophanes lampooned the political demagogues and the Athenian citizens of his time in his comedies, the playwright has always been brandished as the still small voice who communicates the fears, visions, worldviews, idiosyncrasies, worries, plights and hopes of the common masses. It is against this background that the paper would examine the satirical concerns and content in Niyi Osundare’s *The State Visit*.

## Satire as a Social Art

Since its integration as a dramatic genre outside the broad divisions of tragedy and comedy, satire has been subjected to a handful of definitions by various scholars of drama. The multiple

definitions ascribed to satire are offshoots of the roles which society expects satire to play in human society. Interestingly, irrespective of the form in which it appears, the term satire has been attributed largely to any form of writing that tends to unleash scorn (i.e. derision) on individuals or institutions who are found guilty of moral failings (Franklyns 4). For Wilson, satire entails "...making fun of either the 'flamboyant or excessive' or 'more inclusive' shortfall in the behavior of people vis-a vis the socially recommended standards of decorum" (214). Satire has also been defined as the "...literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation" (Abrams 284). The deduction to make from Abrams' definition is that satire, unlike comedy, aims at mocking and deriding on a particular character or subject and also that while comedy aims at eliciting laughter from the audience, satire "...uses laughter as weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself" (Abrams 285). Similarly, Worthen christens satire as a "rugged farce" (14). Worthen's attachment of the rugged to satire must have been drawn from the latter's characteristic feature of mercilessly throwing verbal missiles on mankind in order to occasion social change.

Holdcroft states that in terms of form, satire has a broad spectrum such that can include a wide range of human experiences. It has been established earlier in this review that satire can be created from any human experience of the creator's choice. For instance, a lullaby can be converted to a weapon to mock an older person who refuses to admit that he or she is a grown up. Similarly, Thorn asserts that "...images in general and cartoons in particular can be considered one of the strongest tools of scorn" (2). He adds that cartoons are often used to mock or attack the government and also that "satirical cartoons have high political colouration" (5). Thorn goes further to add more historical flesh to the background of political satire when he informs that caricature is, undoubtedly, one of the main arts used in political cartoons and that it is described as "...a parody of an individual, an allusion, which creates the situation or context into which the individual is placed" (6). For Khan, satire can be classified according to the object it addresses, political satire, satire of everyday and philosophical satire (19). According to Khan:

Satire of everyday criticizes mode of life of common people; political satire aims at behavior, manners of politicians, and vices of political systems; philosophical satire has as its object, global vices inherent to mankind (19)

Against this backdrop, Khan argues that the state of political satire in a given country reflects the state of civil liberties and human rights. He further authenticates his argument by stating that "under totalitarian regimes, any criticism of a political system, including satire, suppressed" (12). He buttresses his argument, thus:

A typical example is the "Soviet Union where the dissidents, such as Aleksander Solzhenitsyn and Andrei Sakharov were under strong pressure from the government. While the satire of everyday life in the (USSR) was allowed, the most prominent, being the political satire was not allowed, even though it existed in the form of anecdotes that made fun of Soviet political

leaders, especially Brezhnev famous for his narrow-mindedness and love for awards and decorations (12)

Importantly also, satirical literature can be categorized into two broad approaches namely: Horatian and Juvenalian. Horatian satire is derived from the name Horace, the Roman satirist. This brand of satire criticizes some social vices through gentle, mild, and light-hearted humour. It directs wit, exaggeration, and self-deprecating humour toward what it identifies as folly, rather than evil. Horatian satire's sympathetic tone is common in modern society (*Microsoft Encarta* 9). Unlike the Horatian, Juvenalian satire is named after the Roman satirist, Juvenal. It is more contemptuous and abrasive than the Horatian. Juvenalian satire addresses social evil through scorn, outrage, and savage ridicule. It is often pessimistic in tonality and characterized by irony, sarcasm, moral indignation and personal invective, with less emphasis on humour. It has been argued also that every strongly polarized political satire is Juvenalian (*Microsoft Encarta* 10).

The deduction to make from the review is that satire is a dynamic literary genre that subjects itself to the manipulations of the satirist such that he or she can approach a satirical experience from either the Horatian or Juvenalian perspective just as he is at liberty to undertake the satirical swipe either directly or from the mask of the characters which he creates in his fictional works.

### **Satire and the Nigerian Playwright: A Panoramic Statement**

Since the inception of the literary tradition in the evolution of Nigerian theatre and drama, playwrights of the various generations have had cause to lampoon or ridicule the social excesses of the Nigerian country especially as made manifest in the leadership sphere. It is stating the obvious that notable Nigerian playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, James Ene Henshaw, Zulu Sofola, J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Esiaba Irobi, Ahmed Yerima, Bakare Ojo Rasaki, Julie Okoh, Henry Bell-Gam, Emeka Nwabueze, Barclays Ayakoroma, Alex Asigbo and Tracy Utoh-Ezeajugh among others have been unrelenting in their ridicule of the progressive decay in the nation's social structure as a result of accumulated leadership crisis and non-conformity in behaviour amongst the citizens. Right from his formative stage in dramaturgy, Soyinka had demonstrated his dramaturgical dexterity in the delicate genre of satire. In his *The Swamp Dwellers*, Soyinka puts the Nigerian country in some form of socio-political and socio-economic pillory as a result of the communication disconnect between the old and the young, the rich and the poor and the past and the present leaders. His *The Trials of Brother Jero* still harps on the pandemic of leadership but from a religious dimension (the Christian faith) where spiritual leaders, in the guise of prophets, play God by demanding total and blind submissiveness from their worshippers even when such submissiveness takes a deep toll on the political and economic lives of their worshippers. Brother Jero blackmails his servant, Chume by evoking some Biblical passages in order to dissuade him (Chume) from beating his wife, Amope even when the latter habitually nags and reigns abuses on her husband. In the play, Soyinka makes a caricature of the high level of religious charlatanry, hypocrisy and zealotry amongst the teeming population of Nigerians. The ridicule of the Nigerian leadership

class is also prominent in Ola Rotimi's *Our Wives Has Gone Mad Again* where the hero of the play, Lejoka Brown, is subjected to public pillory for his inability to distinguish between military dictatorship and democratic governance. Similarly, Femi Osofisan's *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* attempts a dramatic caricature of the corrupt, immoral and greedy dispositions of public office holders in Nigeria who, in a bid to conceal their corrupt practices from the knowledge of the Public Complaint Commissioner, engage in series of buffoonery and absurd actions. In Henry Gell-Gam's *Ube Republic*, a more recent political satire, we are faced with the desperations, callousness and insensitivity of Nigerian senators towards the plight of their constituencies. Prince Eremadu conceals the death of his father so he could siphon his father's entitlement as an influential traditional ruler. In a parallel vein, Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures* makes a public pillory of the insipid and mercantilist attitude of the nation's senators over issues that demand civility, transparency, selflessness and patriotism.

The satirical muse is also evident in the works of Elechi Amadi. His *The Woman of Calabar* takes a swipe at the high level of tribalism and superstition amongst both literate and illiterate crops of Nigerians. Mrs Akrika fights tooth and nail to dissuade her son, Emenike from marrying Adia because of her erroneous impression of Calabar ladies as husband killers. However, she succumbs to her son's choice in the end upon her discovery that Adia is the adorable daughter of a long-lost friend. The same subject of tribalism permeates Okoh's satirical piece titled *Aisha* where Mrs Adesua is tricked into approving her son's (Ehimare) marriage to Aisha, a Kanuri after her protracted and vehement resistance ab initio on the ground that Ehimare must be married from within his Esan tribe. Our overview so far points to the fact that at every dramaturgical epoch in Nigeria, playwrights have often relied on satire as an aggressive weapon in ridiculing social anomalies and vices that threaten the very fabric of the Nigerian state.

### Synopses of *The State Visit*

Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit* was first performed in 1997 by the Creativity Workshop hosted in the Arts Theatre of the University of Ibadan and consequently, published in 2002. It is a biting satire on political chicanery, power drunkenness and corruption within the rank and file of the leadership class in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. It is set in Yankee Land, an imaginary African country purported to be geographically synonymous with Nigeria where the leaders, like hungry lions, prey on the poor helpless masses. The play makes mockery of the high level of political dictatorship and authoritarianism by Nigerian politicians in their attempt to plunder and amass the wealth accrued from the rich natural resources in the Nigerian soil. The play opens with a Narrator who furnishes the audience with exhaustive background information on Yanke Land. Through the Narrator's lines, we are abreast of the topography, geography, political dynamics and the socio-economic conditions of Yanke country, thus:

There is a Land of Two Rivers, a land blessed with milk and honey, the softest of soil and the healthiest of sunshine. But a few men fouled up the milk, and mixed the honey with cow-dung. Men who have the power to act and not be

questioned: men who measure their own height by the genuflection of others (9).

The Narrator's expository lines are followed up with the opening scene where the Head of Yanke Land is in a closed-door meeting with his council of ministers in preparation for the impending visit of the President of Wilama. The crux of this meeting is the squabbles between the Head of Yanke and his ministers over the budget and source of funding for the hosting of the President of Wilama. In the end, the Head of Yanke, in his characteristic dictatorial and megalomaniac dispositions, muscles his ministers into accepting to divert the money earmarked for Agricultural project for the hosting in spite of the solo resistance from the Minister of Finance. However, the plot of the play takes another twist when Painter, a revolutionary character in the play uses his artistic works to disguise his mockery of the politicians as tyrants and vampires. At first the Head of Yanke prides in arrogance and pompous ego as he takes in the air of the Painter's creativity since he does not have a grasp of the artistic interpretation but when he begins to gather some meanings and undertones in the Painter's creative works, he orders Painter's execution without bathing an eye lid.

The play progresses to a climactic end with a protest staged by workers, women, beggars, students, the young and old calling for social change through transparent leadership, accountability, freedom and enthronement of democratic governance. Expectedly, the protesters are intercepted by armed police men and this translates in fierce physical confrontation that leaves some protesters and police men dead. The play ends on this tensed and unresolved dramatic atmosphere.

#### **The Satiric Engagement in Osundare's *The State Visit***

The satiric concerns in Osundare's *The State Visit* begin with the play title. The playwright arrogates so much sarcasm and dramatic innuendos with the title of the play. A reasonable dose of the dramatic actions in the play revolve around the subterfuges and hocus pocus portrayed by the Head of Yanke land and his council of ministers in their cosmetic preparation to receive the President of Wilama in a grand reception as part of the latter's 'state visit'. The playwright uses the proposed state visit of the President of Wilama to expose as well as ridicule the political buffoonery of The Head of Yanke land and his ministers. Rather than brainstorm on how best to save cost for Yanke land, the ministers prefer to embark on extravagant spending which translate into lavishing the nation's treasury just for the trivial purpose of host a visiting president. Ironically, it is the Minister of Public Morality that triggers the need for huge spending by emphasizing the magnitude of the visit, thus: "...money says: "let nobody make any plans without me". How much are we budgeting for this great visit? (14). It is indeed ironical that the Minister of Public Morality that is supposed to guide against extravagance with public funds is the very person encouraging lavish spending by exaggerating the visit to be a 'great' visit.

The satirical engagement in the play is also visible in the lines of the Narrator. Through, the Narrator's monologue, the playwright exposes the Nigerian nation as being bereft of purposeful

leadership since independence. Through the use of oxymoron and irony, the playwright informs us that the crisis in Nigeria is more of leadership crisis thus corroborating the evergreen position of Chinua Achebe that the trouble with Nigeria is squarely that of leadership since there is nothing wrong with the Nigerian vegetation, terrain and topography. In the play, the playwright refers to Nigerian leaders as "...Men who have power to act and not be questioned: men who measure their own height by the genuflection of others" (9). Through the Narrator also, the playwright exposes the thorny issue of social stratification which has brought about a major economic divide between the rich and the poor in Nigeria. As he puts it:

...this land is rich in everything. But the wealth is in the hands of a few kings and queens. The only possession the people have in abundance is poverty. When asked to abolish it, the kings say that p-o-v-e-r-t-y is a seven-leeter word, a sacred number that no God-fearing nation can afford to miss. So, the wealthy fester in opulence, the poor squirm in their poverty (10).

The Narrator's monologue serves huge expository purposes as it undertakes a satirical overview of the factors militating against the growth and development of the Nigerian nation. Here, he x-rays the decay in all the social structures in the Nigerian nation, thus:

...everybody plucks a feather off the eagle, then wonders why the national bird has failed to fly. Governments award emergency contracts for bridges which collapse under the first bicycle. You and I may complain about a broken bridge: as for the kings-and queens- no problems: no broken bridge hinders their helicopters in the sky...well, unless it is the one between here and Switzerland. The doctor takes egg bribes from Kwashiorkor patients, his stethoscope placed on the pulse of his bank account: the magistrate counts justice in notes and coins; the guilty buy innocence from the courts as tender for public office...The journalist turns a mere minion for looting- oh did I say "loot"? - I mean ruling powers. He dips his pen in the slime of falsehood and his vision trips on the plane of History. His throat cleared by constant inducement, he bombards the public's ears with official lies. And the middlemen of business who stand between us and progress...habitual slavers who haggle away our freedom just like their fathers, their father's fathers, their father's father's fathers...The policeman who flogs bribes out of mere suspects; the port worker who makes cargo disappear through the talisman tricks: the clergy who breaks into holy sweat after swallowing the widow's mite: the university don who pawns his wife for a chair...(11)

As evident in the monologue above, the playwright, through the character of Narrator, x-rays the different shades of corruption and fraudulence amongst drivers of the major institutions in Nigeria. Here, the playwright, with a high sense of pessimism, portrays Nigeria as a failed state where nothing works except the celebration of corruption and immorality. He is quite and particularly unsparing of religious leaders who hide under the mask of spiritual mentorship to exploit the already suffering and consequently, economically -vulnerable Nigerians in their

desperation for miracles and material prosperity. This is reflective of the sorry state of the Nigerian religious industry especially the Christian church where pastors pride under the intimidating title of “General Overseer” (GO) to impoverish their worshippers by cajoling them into remitting all their wealth to ‘God’ while they luxuriate in posh apartments, exotic cars and air crafts. It is the same subject of religious hypocrisy and charlatanry that Wole Soyinka portrays in one of his earlier masterpieces titled *The Trials of Brother Jero* where Prophet Jero disguises as a spiritual mentor in order to swindle his worshippers especially his mentee, Brother Chume, whom he counsels wrongly on how to run his family even after engaging in extra marital affairs with Amope, Chume’s wife.

The height of the satirical engagement in the play is in the meeting between the Head of Yanke land and his council of ministers where they brainstorm on how best to occasion a befitting hosting of the President of Wilama during his state visit. The ridiculous is evident in the mechanical rigidity of the Head of Yanke and his ministers in the deployment of their rational faculties. It is their insensitivity towards the plight of their subjects and the godly status that they have ascribed to themselves that sum up the raw material for the satirical swipe deployed in the play. The seed of ridicule is visible right from the first monologue of the Head of Yanke where he advances reasons to his ministers why the President of Wilama should be given a lavish reception, thus:

...as a true son of his father, the President of Wilama has steered the ship of state along the turbulent seas of our time. As a benevolent leader of his people, he banned parliament, preferring the direct rule of his family to the endless bickerings of that house of words where the only thing that gets done is nothing. Believing as we here do that opposition is injurious to good governance, he burnt down unfriendly media houses and dumped vocal critics in some safe prison behind the hills where they receive a real royal treatment!... (13).

The reasons put forward by the Head of Yanke above portray the President of Wilama as an incorrigible dictator who should be squashed rather than be celebrated. So, it strikes an ironic note that a leader whose leadership legacies are characterized by brutality, intimidation, oppression and suppression of his subjects should be given such a grand reception just as the Head of Yanke would desire it. As he puts it “...we must do everything to give this august visitor the fitting welcome he deserves.” (14). The Head of Yanke’s reference to doing “everything” just to host the visiting president includes diverting funds earmarked for the Agricultural sector for the execution of a maize project. The resolve to divert the agricultural funds for such frivolous project as hosting a visiting president is indeed absurd, ridiculous and incongruous especially when viewed against the backdrop that the Yanke country is already in a terrible economic mess as a result of her collapsed agricultural sector. In an attempt to caution against frivolous spending, the Minister of Finance bemoans the sorry state of the nation’s economy, thus:



You should be asking how much altogether we have in the treasury. The decline in the production of cocoa, coffee, and tea has depleted our national earnings. Add to these the drought and famine of recent months...we are barely managing... (14).

Rather than ponder over the genuine concerns of the Minister of Finance, the Head of Yanke alongside other ministers including the Minister of Agriculture dismiss the worries of the Minister of Finance by attributing the collapse of the Agricultural sector on the inefficiencies of the local farmers. Their weak defense triggers yet another round of thought-provoking argument from the Minister of Finance, thus:

Ooooooh! So, five years ago when locusts devas-tated the land, the farmers caused it? And last year's prolonged drought, did not farmers cause it too? When things were so bad that not a single speck of green was left on the field, and even the farmers and their families starved for months. And, of course, the relief materials, the fertilisers earmarked for the farmers, where did they go? (15)

The response from the Minister of Finance above appears to have pricked the consciences of the Head of Yanke and his other ministers but rather than own up to the lapses in his administration, the Head shoves the minister's revelation off, thus: "Yes, yes. Let us not dig up useless old quarrels when we have a pressing job in hand..." (15). The response of the Head of Yanke above is a pointer to the fact that he places premium on frivolities other than the welfare of his subjects. The callousness and dictatorial tendencies of the Head of Yanke is further portrayed in his flagrant abuse of due process. Upon the revelation by the Minister of Finance that the Head of Yanke withdrew Three Hundred Million "Arina" from the nation's treasury without the former's consent and signature, the Head of Yanke owns up with a tonality of indifference, thus: "Yes, yes, yes...it is true. We used it to buy a jet fighter from a friendly country" (15). At first, his response seem not to go down well with some ministers since they feel that they are not at war with any nation so as to warrant the procurement of a jet fighter but when he presses his argument a little further on the need to maintain peace through weapons of war, all the ministers, except the Minister of Finance, quickly bow in approval of his decision of unilaterally withdrawing a huge amount from the nation's treasury to procure a jet fighter. The scenario portrayed here sums the dictatorial attributes of most African leaders who see political power as their personal property that should be used to their selfish interest and aggrandizement. Without recourse to the Minister of Finance, a man charged with the responsibility to manage the nation's finances and economy, the Head withdraws a huge amount of money from the nation's treasury and still plans to empty the treasury and even borrow from sister nations just to guarantee lavish hosting of a visiting president. The Head of Yanke's negligence of the professional advice of the Minister of Finance aptly demonstrates the former's leadership flaws of the abuse of office, disrespect for division of labour and team spirit and power drunkenness. This is synonymous with the character traits of President Idi Amin of Uganda as portrayed in the character of Kamini in Wole Soyinka's *A Play of Giants*,

a political satire on the dictatorial and authoritarian leadership styles of most African leaders. In this dramatic piece, Kamini is portrayed as the prototype of the Ugandan military dictator and leader, General Idi Amin who subjected his Minister of Finance to drink toilet water just because the latter referred to Ugandan currency as “shit paper”.

The height of political buffoonery is experienced when the Head of Yanke and his ministers arrive at diverting the funds for the Maize project to the hosting of the visiting president of Wilama. Ironically, it is the Minister of Agriculture, a man that is supposed to protect the Maize funds against diversion that champions the course for the diversion. He draws his cue from history, thus:

...What is but there? It Has happened before. Remember that the money for our Water Dam project was diverted to the funeral of our leader’s grandfather. Afterall, it was the people who ate the food and drank the wine (19).

Again, this decision meets stiff and sincere opposition from the Minister of Finance. The reasons for the Minister’s rejection of the diversion of the funds for the maize project include that the fund was raised by sister nations to avert an impending famine that would occasion hunger and poverty in Yanke land and also that he has informed the citizens of the availability of such funds in a national broadcast. Rather than see administrative wisdom and professional admonition in the position of the Minister of Finance, the Head of Yanke punctures the former’s argument by quickly inviting a journalist who would facilitate the reversion of the Minister’s initial broadcast. As he puts it “Oh, is that the problem? What is *keresi* about that? We can always unsay what we have already said...Sergeant...call in the journalist.” (19). In his response, the Minister of Finance declines from such a rebroadcast since he feels that it would put a clause on his integrity. Instead, he presents a minority opinion aimed at discouraging the Head of Yanke and his ministers from diverting the funds for the Maize Project, thus:

What is there to say when rulers have turned liars like prophets of the Bar Beach; when those pretending to be statesmen say one thing while they mean another? What am I to tell the poor people of Yanke? That their long and painful suffering and starvation have to continue because their Hunger Relief Funds have been diverted to hosting spree of overfed dicattors and their followers? Last year thousands of our country men and women perished: parents buried their own children; there were so many corpses that we didn’t have enough hands to bury them. Our northern district was reduced to ribs and skulls. Hunger devastated our country like an epidemic. The entire world came to our aid and provided Maize Funds to see us through the present travail and secure us against future disasters. Last year was terrible... (27).

In a country where human life and the welfare of the citizens matter, the position of the Minister of Finance above would have served as a tonic to discourage the Head and his cabinet from diverting the Maize Funds for the frivolous reason of hosting a visiting president but unfortunately, the Yanke land is bequeathed with leaders who care less about the welfare of

their subjects; leaders who are allergic to criticism and corrections; leaders who do not think twice in eliminating any perceived obstacle or opposition. It is therefore not surprising to note that the Minister of Finance's protest against the diversion of the Maize Funds costs him his life even after putting up a verbal resignation from his ministerial position. The reason for the elimination of the Minister of Finance is avert the fear of his revealing the shady and dirty secrets of the leaders to the general public and also to underscore the selfish vision of the Head of Yanke, thus:

...That bastard has the boldness to challenge our authority. We shall tell him that it is not for nothing that ours is called *The Land of the Prowling Lion*.... This throne is ours and so shall it remain until we die and pass it on to our children and children's children. We are living in an era of life presidents and presidents-for-life, and we have to move with the time. As for me., I will not live to be called ex-president, ex-this, ex-that (29).

The monologue of the Head of Yanke above best summarizes the driving vision and mission of most African leaders. The most recent experience in Africa is that of Zimbabwe, where President Robert Mugabe was ousted out of office having lingered in office for thirty-nine (39) years and still plans to plant his wife as his successor. The idea of holding unto power is common amongst African leaders and so the power of incumbency remains a political principality to contend with in African democracy. In the play *The State Visit*, the playwright does not only present African leaders as despots and dictators, but also as political buffoons and nincompoops who cower in fear at the slightest suspicion. Having succeeded in hatching the plans to rebroadcast the diversion of the Maize Funds with the Journalist, the Head of Yanke and his ministers express joy as they heave sighs of relief but their joy is truncated by the slightest noise from a soldier's rifle, thus:

...The bang caused by the falling rifle throws the Cabinet into tantrums: the HEAD leaps off his chair and dashes for cover under the table; EXT.AFFAIRS makes for the door; while AGRIC and PUBLIC MORALITY collapse on their knees, hands stretched forward in prayerful frenzy mumbling incoherently, one shouting "Jehofa", the other "Allah"; sweating and shaking. FINANCE, who never rises from his seat, watches all the circus with perplexed equanimity...After a long, anxious while, the HEAD, seemingly recovering his wits, bellows "Guard!" The Guard bellowing back "Yesso!" picks up his rifle and resumes his former position. "Normal" life gradually comes back to the group. EXT. AFFAIRS adjusts his cap..., AGRIC and PUB.MORALITY wipe their knees and sweaty faces, and adjust their robes. A feverish shake of the right leg indicates that the Guard is really not a ease...A long, awkward pause, then the HEAD braves himself back to life (25).

The scenario above portrays the Head of Yanke and his cabinet as bunch of cowards and selfish leaders who are hunted by their guilty consciences for their habitual misappropriation and siphoning of public funds and consequently, impoverishing their subjects. Their resort to

various ridiculous body positions at the mere sound of a fallen rifle indicates that they are conscious of their poor leadership integrity and so envisage mob attack from the suffering masses. However, the Minister of Finance seem not to be moved by the cowardly and degrading mannerisms of his fellow leaders because he is confident with a clear conscience that he is transparent in his dealings with his subjects. The subjection of the Head of Yanke and his cabinet to some form of automatism is a deliberate attempt by the playwright to ridicule them for being straightjacketed and irrational in their thinking and vision.

The Head of Yanke and his cabinet receive yet another round of satirical swipe through the character of the Painter who torments them with his refusal to paint the Head and the visiting president on request. The reason for the Painter's refusal to paint the Head and his visitor is embedded in his strong position, thus: "I am not a public painter: my brush wrinkles the face of tyrants". Expectedly, the Head of Yanke makes effort to buy the Painter over for any amount but the Painter declines and so his decline provokes the ministers including the newly introduced Minister of Finance. With a tone of fierce anger, the Minister of Public Morality chides Painter and reminds him that "Nobody ever does this and keeps his head on his neck afterwards. You have violated your allegiance to your leader, and that is treason. At this point tempers rise and Painter cashes in on the situation to reaffirm his unwavering stand, thus:

*(Charging at the Cabinet, going from one to the other as he speaks, with the Head now edged to a corner; watching, mouth agape)* My allegiance is not to those who order massacres and bathe their lust in blood; not to them who eat the poor for lunch and their children for supper: not to bloated despots maggoting in the decay of affluence. My allegiance is to *truth*, balm of conscience, one straight path through the universe, enemy of the serpent of deceit. *(Turning to the audience)* My allegiance is to the suffering legion with no roofs over their heads and no food in their stomachs. My allegiance is to those lean bones which fatten the paunch of the rich (54).

Painter's communist monologue above provokes The Head of Yanke to the point that he orders his soldiers to lead him away and execute him but rather than express fear, Painter braves up as well as assures the Head of Yanke, thus:

You murderer of the body, can you ever kill the soul? You are a passing cloud. After you the rainbow shall come, and Erath's children shall see the light again. Shall see the light again. Shall see the light again. The children of light shall see the l-i-g-h-t a-g-a-i-n! *(His voice echoes and reverberates from outside and beyond the stage)* (55).

The Painter's sense of brevity and offer of hope even at the point of death clearly establishes him as the authorial voice- the voice through which Osundare speaks to his audience. Though, he paints a gory and bizarre picture of the leadership class in Nigeria and Africa at large, Osundare, through the end lines of the Narrator, assures us that, someday, the suffering masses shall be liberated from the shackles of oppressive leadership and the children shall see the light.

It is in these lines of the Painter that the hope of a better Nigeria is raised-, the Nigeria of our dreams, the Nigeria devoid of despotic and dictatorial leadership and a Nigeria where the freedom of every citizen is guaranteed.

In the end of the play, Osundare artistically leads us to the path of revolution where students, workers, old men and women embark on a demonstration that culminates in the loss of lives as men of the Police Force, in their usual ferocious attempt to clamp on the demonstrator, release series of gun shot. At first, the littering of corpses on stage evokes some form of tragic feelings but the entrance of the Narrator raises another round of revolutionary excitement as he declares with a tonality of solemnity and confidence, thus:

What you have just seen is a short chapter in a l-o-n-g dream. The people have shown their anger; the guns have answered. (*Pointing behind him*) The outcome is so dramatically obvious. (*Pause*) But Yankeland will never be the same again. In every village, every hamlet, the questions raised here are fledgeling into birds which perch on every roof. Questions too many for the steel muzzle of the gun. The days of the Lion are severely numbered. (*With all emphasis*) There is something in the human spirit that guns *cannot* kill... (64).

Against the backdrop of the monologue above, it becomes glaring that the playwright advocates revolution as the panacea for the protracted dictatorial and tyrannical leadership that held sway in Nigeria since independence until the institutionalization of democracy in May 29, 1999. It also becomes imperative at this juncture to label Osundare's *The State Visit* as a derisive statement on the absurdities and administrative malapropisms that characterized military leadership in Nigeria.

### Conclusion

The study has driven home the fact that satire remains a unique art form that sets out to occasion social change through the vehicle of ridicule and lampoon. The findings in the paper portend that dictatorial and authoritarian leadership constitute huge cogs in the wheel of progress in most African countries especially Nigeria. The paper also adduces that lack of formidable machineries for accountability amongst the leaders make up factors that encourage them to soar in corrupt practices. Through the artistic weaponry of satire as evident in Osundare's *The State Visit*, it has been brought to the fore that Nigeria, as a nation, is blessed with abundance of natural resources that translate beautiful into huge foreign earnings but has been thrown into untold hardship and poverty since independence as a result of the obvious lack of purposeful and selfless leadership. The paper, in the end, canvasses for a practicable way forward for the Nigerian nation which is the installation of detribalized, patriotic, transparent and visionary leaders who would steer the ship of state to the land where the Nigerian dream can be actualized. The paper also recommends sustained ideological commitment amongst Nigerian playwrights in crafting plays that propagate and advocate national security and development.

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