

## Laughing to Keep from Crying: Postcolonial Satire in Igoni Barrett's *Blackass*

**Steve Ushie Omagu & Stella Agu Chinedu**

Department of English and Literature  
Nasarawa State University, Keffi-Nigeria

[steviedearie@gmail.com](mailto:steviedearie@gmail.com)

08035694785; 08023131206

### **Abstract**

Nigeria is fast degenerating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century into a sort of socio-political wasteland. This paper portrays the disdain and subsequent indictment of the Nigerian government which constantly exploits its citizenry. The paper attempts to examine postcolonial satire in Igoni Barrett's debut novel, *Blackass* (2015). Postcolonial satire apart from inducing readers with laughter at colonial histories, seemingly uncrown legacies of imperialism. Hence, the essay aims at showing how Barrett handles postcolonial satire to deconstruct variegated concepts like race, class, gender, power, ambivalence, culture, language, hybridity, and diaspora in the concourse of this paper. The meanings and features of satire and Postcolonialism as concepts are explicated. The paper also demonstrates Barrett's dynamic handling of identity, sexuality, white/ racial privileging in 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian situation. The novel uses satiric modes to re-view the concepts of whiteness and foreignness and ultimately interrogating 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian society that still bears the burdens of colonial hangovers while being servitude to imperialism. This literary investigation proves that even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary Nigerian society, the colonial white skin means privilege and opportunities; while, the colonized black skin still means denial and denigration. It further mocks; yet, appeals for Nigerians to shun the excessive crave for all things west above what is found in the homeland.

**Keywords:** Satire, Postcolonialism, Igoni Barrett, Nigerian Literature,  
*Blackass*

### **Introduction**

Nigerian literature has always been modeled or made eclectically proactive and its artist are not expected to “fool around” producing banal literatures. The Nigerian writer has never failed on such functions. Hence, most 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerian writers write back to checkered colonial past, to reflect postcolonial experiences, simply because of the seeming colonial hangovers. In the hands of Igoni Barrett, the postcolonial Nigerian novel is a veritable weapon to decolonize the mind from warp assertions; to chart new frontiers of thoughts and actions, and to act as roadmap that is expected to guide the colonized from the matrix of past and present colonial shackles. Also, for Barrett, literature is to ridicule orthodoxies, the harshness of daily living in Nigeria, deprivation, misery and several wounds meted on the citizenry by the government. Barrett in *Blackass* uses the novel as a quiet criticism to satirize the Nigerian society yet dismantling blurring the powerful binaries of colonizer/colonized, white/blacks, Us/them, First world/Third world, West/ the Rest and Centre/Margin or Periphery.

The means by which the above binarisms can disseminate the “sufferings” birthed by long histories of colonialism is through satiric dialectics, meta-narratives, ideologies and other genuine preoccupations with postcolonial literatures foregrounding what is and what is expected. Thus, R.S. Sugirtharajah proclaims, “postcolonial studies emerged as a way of engaging with the textual, historical and cultural articulations of societies disturbed and transformed by the historical reality of colonial presence” (11). This makes postcolonial literatures fighting literature and Edward Said believes that this fight should be geared towards the West. In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Said has been able to establish that European literary creation only represents and projects the ideals of the writer than those written about. It is then apt to stress that, gradually and copiously, African novelists, Nigerians to be precise, have become wittier, bolder, and have topically decried the colonization of the mind, the body as well as the space. The Nigerian writer grows more reactionary, more socially conscious by portraying the experiences of the oppressed and hence blurring the supremacy of the oppressor especially as situations in the country worsens. In all

these, they are a coterie of writers who by social consensus still believe that it is better to make the reader laugh to keep the reader from crying.

Therefore, Postcolonial satire, according to Nerissa S Balce, is a humourous narrative which produces new histories or new ways of interpreting and understanding the colonial past and| or the neocolonial present. Balce argues that postcolonial satire is an aesthetic response to colonial amnesia by examining the wounds of its past histories (46). Therefore, typologically, these works portray the aftermath and legacies of imperial conquest. Gina Apostol in addition refers to this postcolonial act as “picking at our historical scab” (quoted in Balce, 46). In recent times, Nigerian writers like Igoni Barrett has presented troubling yet pleasurable fiction of sexuality, identity, white privileging and even transgenderism through satirical lens. This is made more plausible because the mode is saddled with the role of speaking the truth of power structures cocoon in humour. After all, Mikhail Bakhtin argues, comedy [satire] is one of the essential forms of truth in the medial period. Because Nigeria has decided to shuffle retrogressively towards the mediaeval, it is only apt to employ satiric narrative in|advertently to carry on with the great tradition of ridiculing the powerful.

It is on the basis of the foregoing that this paper proposes the use of postcolonial satire and Postcolonial theory as a mode of demystifying literature to view postcolonial satiric sensibilities in Igoni Barrett’s *Blackass*. The paper also looks at several discursive vistas but looks closely on how Barrett satirizes the promotion of whiteness against blackness, portraying race, the privilege of whiteness, the fluidity of sexuality, the perversion of the black female body, and the discussion of poverty, and survival in Nigeria

## **II Satire and Postcolonialism**

### **(a) Satire**

Satire as mode and genre of literature has its roots in society and ultimately strives towards exposing, denouncing, deriding vice or follies, and above all persuading reformation. The Nigerian writers in all eras have equivocally expressed their dissension and disillusionment through diverse medium and satire has been a

***Laughing to Keep from Crying: Postcolonial Satire in.....***

peculiar mode of rendering their dissatisfaction. The term satire is a notoriously difficult term to define as a literary “genus’ and as a dramatic and novelistic modes. Satire could be the following amongst other understandings. Satire is:

- A. Literary or dramatic work that ridicules human or social pretension. Here the intention or tone is attack on indecency and the despair that goes with it.
- B. The use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose or criticize people’s stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues; yet not all satires are humorous, some are bleak.
- C. Characterized by the excessive use of caricature, burlesque irony, paradox, exaggeration, colloquialism, anticlimax, wit, antithesis, vividness and sometimes obscenities in unearthing societal flaws. Therefore, certain awareness on the part of the reader is required to understand hidden meanings as the satirist strives to bury issues of the society for the reader to reveal.
- D. A work or manner that blends a censorious attitude with humor and wit for improving institutions or humanity (Harmon and Holman 461). Here, satire goes beyond the superficial meaning of the story but touches the layered core that lies beneath the story.
- E.

A generally acceptable notion of the aesthetics of satire is in its ability to combine and contrast thoughts in portraying distasteful notions or institution addressed. In the process of striving to achieve this, the writer can employ formal or indirect modes of satire. In formal satire, the author uses a character that approaches the issues under review by engaging the reader or the characters in the text. Also, satire could be Juvenalian- a bitter, ferocious attack or portrayal of situations that the writer finds distasteful or intolerable. Another type of satire is Horatian which is the direct opposite of the Juvenalian; it is a mild mode, using laughter towards addressing situations. On the other hand indirect satires deal with several forms which do not use conventional characters to project ideas rather use mental attitudes to offer insights into perceived dislocations as seen in Menippean satires.

Hence, a satirist is one who finds a circumstance deplorable and therefore uses his art to proffer solutions. The satirist is wholly and cogently aware of the distancing between what is and what is to be. Usually, an essential ingredient of a successful satire is if its thematic preoccupation is accepted and agreed upon. A good satire is brilliant, intelligent and allows the fluidity of the imagination, it could, at first interaction, be nonsensical, foolish and even redundant but when closely poked and pried yields answers to important as well as complex matters. At the centre of a satirist intention is the presentation of moral outrage and indignation about certain topics that are taken for granted. Consequently, Jonathan Swift believes “satire is a sort of glass, wherein beholder do generally discover everybody’s face but their own; which is the chief reason for that kind of reception it meets in the world, and that so very few are offended by it” (Introduction to Satire, 2 ). Indeed, some of the actors of the chaos are unaware of the spawn they give birth to. In agreement, M. H. Abrams coherently describes satire as:

... the literary art of diminishing a subject by evoking ridicule towards it; an attitude of amusement, contempt and indignation of scorn. It differs from comic in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself while satire derides. That is, it uses laughter as a weapon and against a butt existing outside the work itself ( 162).

From the forgoing, it suffices to say that satire is a protean art form displaying clear and present dangers. It is pertinent to stress that with the hardship the Nigerian people are suffering because of the socio-political insecurities, unemployment, unhealthy migrancy to Euro-American countries for better living conditions and the growing appetite for everything Western. It therefore becomes very imperative, that, these serious social issues are tackled, by asking questions like, who is responsible; and how do the people and the government intend to solve these problems?

**(b) Postcolonialism**

The term “postcolonialism” has always poses a definitive problem even in scope. It is also polysemous in meaning and application (Ruben Munoz Lurrando, 2). Marxist critics have referred to postcolonial literature as “third world literature”, other critics have regarded postcolonial literature as “Commonwealth Literature”; but Postcolonialism is all, and more than merely these. Postcolonialism is a topical academic discourse in cultural and literary studies today. As a major force in criticism during the late 1980s and early 1990s, it has played significant role in anti-colonial movements in the colonized lands. Bart Moore-Gilbert in his *Postcolonial Theory* opines that this theoretical mode of engaging in literature is “preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms which mediate, challenge, or reflect upon...relations of dominations and subordinations” (3). Unfortunately, this definition is not space specific, and negates naming of the forces in contention. In the introduction to their influential work *The Empire Writes Back*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin have used the term ‘post-colonial’ to mean “all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day [since] there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression” (2). They, however, give the scope to include the literatures produced from Africa, Australia, Canada, The Caribbean, New Zealand, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and South Pacific island countries as ‘postcolonial’ literature. A commonality of these literatures goes beyond their distinctive regional characteristics. Each has “evolved” in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre. It is this which makes them distinctively post-colonial. (Ashcroft et al,: 2).

According to Terhemba Shija the term “Post-Colonial” arises more with the prefix “Post” which literally means beyond colonialism” (2). This clarifies the issue of associating the theory and movement within certain timeline. Hence, many authors have come to agree that: it is premature to proclaim the demise of colonialism (Loomba, quoted in

Shija), and that there is no dissimilarity between Postcolonialism and Colonialism especially when the discourse of inequality is brought to the fore. In agreement, John Thieme explains that it is best to explain the term postcolonial as “describing a continuum of experience in which colonialism is perceived as an agency of disturbance, unsettling both the pre-existing “aboriginal” or native discourse of the cultures it penetrates and the English (or European) discourse it brings with it (4). All these critics agree that Postcolonialism and colonialism are thematically synonymous as Postcolonialism still bears lingering sensibilities of colonialism; and it is sometimes difficult to demarcate the two eras and ideologies schematically.

Robert C. Young sees ‘postcolonialism’ from a relational standpoint as “a body of writing that attempts to shift the dominant ways in which the relations between western and non-western people and their worlds are viewed” (Young: 2). For Young, postcolonialism is also reactionary in which shifting of the dominant ways means to upend the world as if searching from the other side, for a different and yet significant experience. Postcolonialism, thus, challenges the dominant ways of looking at things mainly from Western point of view. It gives voice to the oppressed, to the peoples who are in the margins and demand equity of all the people of the world. Postcolonialism therefore:

...seeks to intervene, to force its alternative knowledges into the power structures of the west as well as the non-west. It seeks to change the way people think, the way they behave . . . [it] is about changing world . . . It threatens privilege and power. It refuses to acknowledge the superiority of western cultures.” (Young, 7)

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* agree that Postcolonialism is a:

way of reading and rereading texts of both metropolitan and colonial cultures to draw deliberate attention to the profound and inescapable effects of

colonization on literary production; anthropological accounts; historical records; administrative and scientific writing (192).

In Nigeria, there is seemingly more than a healthy continuous interactions between colonizer and colonized. Many would agree that the country has not matured much bearing hangovers one is afraid might not be easy overcome.

### **III. Satire and Postcolonial dimensions in Igoni Barrett's *Blackass***

Barrett in his debut novel cogently deploys satirical language to condemn and question amongst other thematic preoccupation the concept of identity. Kobena Mercer argues that identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced. The central character of *Blackass*, Furo Wariboko is a Nigerian who on waking up one morning, realizes that he passed through a radical identity change. He wakes to having mysteriously and miraculously transformed, he has "alabaster belly, pale legs, and his hands were not black but white (3). Furo has changed into an "oyibo' (a whiteman) overnight, this new identity change Furo welcomes wholeheartedly and even goes further to change his name to Frank White.

Indeed, with Furo's new skin emerges attendant realities, challenges, dispositions, and dichotomies. In his early transformative stage, Furo's only challenge is to navigate out of his father's house to avoid his family noticing his transformation. Later examination reveals that the poverty and lack in his life is causal for his 'escape' from his home and himself. Simply put, Furo flees from his family to escape a squalid life of an everyday lower class Nigerian. A life filled with unachieved desires, joblessness, poverty and several under-privileges. Later, Furo wholeheartedly accepts his transformation as a blessing and a privilege. He reveals, "the mere thought of a reversion to his former stasis was anathema to him (47)". This is further indication that his transformation is some sort of prayer or a wish in the unconscious that has manifested and he is consigned to detest going back to his squalid past. Furo transformation is immediately imbued with several colonist stamps which all emerge in satirical troupes. One of these



postcolonial signatures is that of ambivalence- a continuous oscillatory movement between identities- as he vacillates between being a white man with a black man's dispositions. He experiences all the anomalies of cultural crossings, "the experience of being looked at differently". The device of double consciousness is one of the tools Barrett uses to caricatures whiteness and blackness as the reader follows Furo ineffective straddling of both spaces of periphery and the centre.

Inarguably, Furo's receptivity of his change hinges on economic determinism. Here, Barrett demonstrates colonialism or the return of it as seen in the way whites and foreigners are given preferential treatment in Nigeria and how they exploit their colonized in a 'post' colonial situation. But it is pertinent how Barrett focuses not merely on the transformation of the central character but his relationship with other characters in the novel. Indeed, Barrett imbues the protagonist with the exploitative tendencies of colonists and imperialist as- pompous, manipulative and insensitive. For instance, in the early stage of his transformation, Furo is stranded while trying to make his way to an interview; he meets a lady, Ekemini and uses his skin colour (white skin) as a historical weapon to extort from the lady. First he lies, "I was attacked by robbers this morning. They took my car, my wallet...and my phone. I was lucky to get away with my documents" (15). And in reply, Ekemini offers, "Can I give you some money for the bike fare? (16)". It is crucial to state that by portraying the black skin he just shortly shades off for a white one as thieves and miscreants is not survivalist but simply re-echoes the colonialist labelling of blacks as thieves, and malefactors. After all, blacks are the historical villains while whites are regarded as angels. For Barrett, race is inevitably one part of a person's identity, but it is one that asserts itself principally through the lens of others. How others 'read' or 'see' those they encounter is what makes for racial readings. Barrett 2014 affirms this in an interview with Granta Magazine "We only see ourselves through external sources...whether as reflections in mirrors, pixels on screen, or word of love from a wife, words of hate from an ex wife. That is perhaps why we find comedy in others' mistaken views of themselves. Because we recognise ourselves in the person we're laughing at" (quoted in Joy Day, 2).

Also, the authorial voice in the novel observes that, “a good number of the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods have never held a conversation with an oyibo, never considered white people as anything more or less than historical opportunists ...(11). It is this opportunistic tendency that Barrett projects. He recreates postcolonial experiences of whiteness/blackness, self/other, centre/margin in the novel. It is a truism that postcolonial theory clearly formulates its critique around the social histories, cultural differences and political discrimination that are practiced and normalized by colonial and imperial machineries and this is what Barrett has drawn our attention by honing the past as he recreates the present and projects the future.

In *Blackass*, Furo as a white man is manipulative and seems to take advantage of people that genuinely love and care for him. In fact most of his victims are women. He is selfish and forgets the sacrifices, love and care his family lavished on him when he was black. Furo before his transformation is a “normal” obedient young man; after his transformation he becomes a monster who takes advantage of the people and situations. One cannot find a singular thing he does right after he transforms. From a relational point, white Furo becomes master| Self while the Other represents the black people he uses as tool to achieving his aim. Therefore, it is easy to read that Furo’s rejection of his family is akin to colonist rejection of humanity in their quest for domination, power and survival. In a colonized nation like Nigeria, whiteness has come to mean myriad opportunities- sexually and materially. In contemporary Nigerian novels like Helon Habila’s *Oil on Water* (2011) and Igoni Barrett’s *Blackass*, the reader is rudely exposed to the preponderance of white men sexually exploiting the local girls. This commercialization of love and the female body is borne out of economic determinism. The locals put themselves up for sale not basically to the highest bidder but to the paler the skin. Syreeta sells herself to Furo not because he is rich but because he is white. She does not only harbour, feed, clothed him but she goes ahead to be impregnated by a ‘poor white’ man. These are follies that are visible yet forgettable in the recent Nigerian situation. After all, satirical humour presents humour as “acts of everyday amnesia”

(Balce, 46). Satires therefore are everyday reminders of who “we” are, who “we” have been, and who “we” might come to be” (Balce, 47). Barrett’s narrative articulates a historical reflexivity that opens layered palimpsests of sexism, homophobia, colonialism and post colonial histories of Nigeria.

Satire is always directed at the state and postcolonial satire is an exercise in remembering and creating new pockets of resistance and encouraging a “returned gaze in the story it tells” (Ali Behad, 48). The novel screams at the government who gives the expatriate the undue power to continuously wield and maintain subjugation. Some characters in the novel encourage imperialism because they are cohorts in the victimization of the poor\other. In fact, Frantz Fanon warns of this archetypal black that seemingly evolves from the ashes of colonial “middlemenship”. This group Fanon notes, negotiate, entertain and enjoy the advent of the colonizers and his ways which they retain and uphold long after colonialism. Fanon calls this archetype, “the national bourgeoisie” and they “appropriates for [themselves] the privileges formerly held by the colonial rule” (cited in J.A. Cuddon 741). Indeed, this group has a “historic mission” as intermediary between its own nation and imperial capitalism (742). Characters like Arinze, Umukoro, Yuguda, Headstrong, and Syreeta all fall under this category of the colonized who work in liaison with the colonizer to maintain the exploitation of the colonized. Even after foreign colonizers are gone, this group panders, uphold everything Eurocentric and end up maintaining a symbiotic relationship with the colonizer. On the other hand, characters like Obata and Tosin who have the effrontery to query white privileges but can only do little, yet, are not encouraged. The character of Tosin is quite commendable because she sees *through* Furo’s whiteness. Furo himself admits, “Tosin was dangerous. She saw through his whiteness to the man he was”. Tosin also gives a telling oversight of white|colonial tendencies, she says, “You just want what you want. It is only about you” (291). Here, Barrett lampoons colonial egotism, wantonness and the length they can go to achieve their aim even if it means invading other people’s spaces.

***Laughing to Keep from Crying: Postcolonial Satire in.....***

In fact, colonizers have projected several justifications for the invasion of the colonized space. Historically, colonialism has been claimed justified for humanitarian, economic, religious, and political reasons. Furo intersects these spaces in his interaction with other characters. Barrett uses the character of Alhaji Yuguda to cement this postcolonial dimension as Alhaji Yuguda recruits the services of Furo Wariboko now known as Frank Whyte. Alhaji Yuguda says:

“I have a job for you...I need someone one at the helm to keep everyone on their toes... I need a leader who can command respect and inspire fear...you will get respect because you are white. They’ll fear you because you’re a Nigerian. You know the tricks, you understand the thinking, you speak the language. You can figure out their schemes, and you know how to block them.... But fear and respect-and power- those are your real tools.  
(281-2)

The above satirizes the re-implementation and re-indoctrinization of the colonist into machineries of power; as well as, enforcing immense responsibilities on the shoulders of the foreigner. Barrett recreates the laughable situation in Nigeria, whereby expatriates are given sensitive positions even though they lack necessary paper qualifications and expertise. In response to Alhaji Yuguda, Frank Whyte/Furo Wariboko notes:

I don’t have a degree  
That’s not important ,’ Yuguda replied...  
I don’t have a Nigerian passport...  
That can be arranged,’ (283).

Here, Barrett paints a portrait of governmental corruption and ineptitude. The negotiation of selling the country and its future to an ignorant *whiteman* culminates in the truism that Arinze proclaims “in this country, anything can happen...and you Mr Whyte, are a perfect example of that” (286). Another noteworthy postcolonial identity satirized is that of sexuality. Igoni, a character in the novel is a “shemale”. S/he also narrates part of the novel giving vent to Furo’s

ordeal of her being a transgender. It is obvious that the world is passing through a strong phase of identity/sexual re-orientation; Barrett opens the African reader's eyes to identity and sexual changes, fads that are growing popular in the Nigerian socio-cultural space. The relationship between the "changelings" -Furo\Frank White and Igoni the "shemale" writer bears an unAfricanness that Barrett notices and ridicules. In fact both characters are failed subjects of change. While Igoni is a comic figure of failed heterosexual masculinity; Furo| Frank Whyte is also a humourous figure of identity change. The queer and fraud both live a life of loss and unbecoming. In recent times, sexual identities are altered on a daily basis in Nigeia, a predilection borrowed from the West and its adherents are multiplying. Barrett lamenting this intoxication and rootlessness through the character of Igoni, observes, "it is easier to be than to become...his shocked reaction to my penis proved he didn't...I felt like a fraud...his black ass and my woman penis and his unchanging selfishness towards me and everyone else" (301-2).

Like Alice in Wonderland, these picaresque characters depict realistically the growing problems of identity and sexual conventions in Nigeria. This form of Menippean satire Barrett employs through assortment of content to express topical yet comical, and curious erudition. Apparently, this also buttresses the idea that postcolonial criticism is not a monolithic theory with a fixed set of rules and paradigm, but a critical lens that project ways of reading perspectives and mindset. Bearing on the foregoing, the novel *Blackass*, in addition engages with questions and issues of hybridity, mimicry-mockery and other ways of drawing out contrapuntal reading. Hybridity is a slippery and broad term which relies on the metaphors from biology. At a simplistic level, it refers to "mixing" of cultures and attitudes. Homi Bhabha sees hybridity as a "Third space" of enunciation with "newness" existing in some "in-betweeness"; the lack of desire to take on exact imitation. Also, Bhabha in "Signs Taken for Wonders" sees hybridity as a subversive tool whereby colonized people might challenged various forms of domination.

In *Blackass*, the author portrays the central character as a hybrid, incomplete in his metamorphoses. First, Furo is transformed but his

buttock stays black giving the novel its title, and pertinently too, his speech also bears the burden of the colonized and stays untransformed. Barrett caricatures the idea of complete transformation as opposed to Kafka's Gregor Samsa complete transformation in *Metamorphosis*. In agreement, Bhabha accentuates, "the hybrid is a product of colonial culture's inability to replicate itself in a monolithic and homogeneous manner" (Cuddon, J.A 732). Furo persistently tries to bleach his black buttock into becoming "totally" white giving the novel its title but Barrett here satirize the idea of racial perception of wholesomeness and completeness. Indeed the novels title is ambiguous and replete with hidden but open and satirical meanings too. The word "black" is referent to the people or either to state of or nature of being and "ass" according to the Cambridge Dictionary yield entries like: "a donkey", a person who does or says stupid things". The question is, by using such a satirical title, is the author expressing his resentment of the black man's ways, especially as he behaves stupidly, like a donkey? Or is Barrett questioning the ideology of blackness against whiteness, racial supremacy, perfection and completeness?

Another textual interpretation on the hybrid talk is that of Syreeta and her girlfriends expressing strong predilection for whiteness and all things West. Syreeta is only enamored by Furo's skin and she uses him to be the progenitor of her plan of having a "half caste" mullatto, or "metiszo" baby like her friends. This coterie of young girls hunting for white men as a "get out of jail ticket" is becoming a rampant phenomenon in Nigeria. Young Nigerians both male and female are leaving the country in droves to hunt for white men and women as some sort of meal tickets. Unmarried youths marry white men and women solely to flee from their homelands and to live in some illusory conditions of diaspora in Euro-American spaces. Here, Barrett strongly decries contemporary crave for Euro-American lifestyles. This exodus, braindrain seems to arise from the seeming hopelessness of the Nigerian situation. In spite of the craze for whiteness, blacks are still part of the "globalized minority", "the other", "them", "the rest" or "the poor of the earth". Going outside and beyond the text, a character like Syreeta paradoxically represents the "tragic mullatto" a group that are or would come to be disillusioned with rude and cruel

realities of forcing hybridity. Just like Furo feared, what colour would Syreeta's baby be? Would s/he be black or "half-caste" (mullatto)? Furo also observes that the possibility of having a "half caste" is impossible because of his own transformation.

One cannot discuss satire and postcoloniality without raising the question of language. Language is a key element in satire and of postcolonial literature because language and meaning are intrinsically interwoven. Barrett legitimizes the use of the English language in its continuous multiforms as he writes into the text the signification of Pidgin English, lyrical or poetic English, colloquialism, and formal English. Through these modes Barrett uses various functional sentence types to interrogate the issue of language. A key postcolonial African writer, Chinua Achebe in his book *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, avers that, by using the English language, he represents, "a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in world-wide language" (23). He advised that, the African writer should use English "in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. [The writer] should aim at fashioning out a variety of English words which are at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience" (23). Achebe writes in English and melds his Igbo language, a signature born out of the postcolonial experience. Also, Igoni Barrett from a postcolonial standpoint uses the English language with some dosage of the Nigerian Pidgin English to create and embellish his work giving uniqueness of purpose and craft. Barrett cogently 'deforms' yet borrows and transforms recognizable fictive techniques into meaningful self referential disguises. This amalgamation adds to the particulars of what makes a good satire.

Another important concept in postcolonial discourse that Barrett uses to satirize his society is that of mimicry and mockery. Homi Bhabha defines mimicry as "when the colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the colonizer's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values" (Ashcroft, Gareth and Griffiths, 139). Though the term seems subdued compared to its realities, this complex relation often creates situation of ambivalence. Mockery on the other hand is resistance to the views of

***Laughing to Keep from Crying: Postcolonial Satire in.....***

the colonized and for Bhabha these two “produce a consistent ambivalence narrative” (Bhabha, 86). Mimicry is seen as opportunistic behavior because by copying the master one hopes to have access to that same power. It is something shameful and derided by members of the group and Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Mask* mocks this affected pretentiousness. Bhabha also describes mimicry as sometimes intentionally subversive. J L Austin uses “performative mimicry” as a kind of performance that exposes the artificiality of all symbolic expressions of power. This is indeed what Barrett’s *Blackass* achieves as it strives towards dismantling, decolonizing and repositioning the minds of 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigerians. Hence, Furo Wariboko/ Frank Whyte and other characters demonstrate these themselves as they constantly exploit, transform, deform, dispense and criticize several clear and present dangers.

Mimicry could be subversive or even empowering when it involves the copying of “western” concepts of justice, freedom and the rule of law. Many anti-colonialist movements in Africa emerged out of what might be thought of as mimicry of western political ideas. For example, most Nigerians question democracy, amalgamation and militarization of Nigeria wondering if these concepts have done more harm than good? Even Barrett aptly speaks of this multiculturalism in his characterization. In depicting Nigerian’s multiculturalism, Barrett depicts characters that are most times named by their ethnic group, for example, “the Adamawa man who has the monopoly of garbage collection... (8), the Isoko woman who ran a buka (9) Furo, isn’t that a Niger Delta name? (14) dirty Yoruba rat! Old Igbo mumu (38) and Igoni is also typified as an indigene of Ibim (63). It is obvious that what Barrett has done is to foreground colonialism which has come to meld improbable fragments therefore stressing ethnic undercurrents. Therefore, it is sufficed to say that ethnicity and multiculturalism within the ambit of postcolonial discourse play out symmetrically.

On the other hand, reverse mimicry or *going native*, is when the colonizer, entrenches, upholds and reveres the colonized culture. In *Blackass*, a food vendor is overwhelmed seeing a white man-Furo eating the native food, “see how oyibo dey chop eba. This one nah full Nigerian o” (37). Ironically, Furo is actually a Nigerian, but by his



transformation he is seen as white and is treated as such; though he has a black ass and speaks like a Nigerian. But he is seen by other characters as white and seemingly believe to mimic the culture of the colonized in his perceived diasporic situation. The novel also portrays diaspora in the migration of the character, Headstrong, whose life's ambition is to leave the shores of Nigeria but is constantly denied visa (19) stresses, "I plan to marry oyibo when I reach your country. My brother's wife is oyibo. She is the one inviting me (21)". The Nigerian migrant situation has been a topical issue and its preoccupation has been visible in many spheres. The concept and problems of the Nigerian diaspora is always linked to its history that is fraught with poor governance. Nigerian Diaspora to Euro-American spaces are always economical motivated and these spaces are seen as safe heavens. Barrett laments the austere situation in Nigeria: the unemployment, corruption, poor or lack of basic amenities bad governance, insecurity, white privilege, unhealthy migration, and political instability. Satirically, foreigners prefer to stay in Nigeria while Nigerians flee to foreign shores as seen in the case of Headstrong and many real lived cases in Nigeria. Why is it so?

Satire is always political as postcolonialism is always reactive. The author looks at socio-political decay in the country and tries to address it. In doing so, Barrett first draws the reader's attention to the squalid situation in the country. He descriptively draws our attention to the city spaces of Lagos: the slums, the avarice of the leaders, the suffering of the masses, the rich areas and the accoutrement of these spaces. He also juxtaposed the city space of Abuja to Lagos stressing: "Lagos was built from blood and sweat and raw ambition. Abuja was designed as a playground for the rich. I'm sure some will argue that there's nothing wrong with that, but when the rest of your country is populated with desperate people, your dream city hasn't much chance of retaining its character" (273). This truism sees the increase state of kidnapping, robbery and other vices in the county's capital. Barrett goes further to describe Abuja as a "pioneer land, a frontier city, though the founding fathers were all rich folk and politicians. The bandits, here, rode Bentleys and settled fights with money blazing" (278). The sarcasm here is not lost as the city spaces continue to churn coteries of nouveau riche against the backdrop of poverty,

***Laughing to Keep from Crying: Postcolonial Satire in.....***

insecurity, bad governance, corruption, unemployment and poor education. There are several of these diatribes in the novel the author uses to stress the sociopolitical injustices in the country. His vivid descriptiveness of city spaces of especially Lagos in addition helps to further paint the plight of the rich and poor.

In all, Barrett's *Blackass* satirizes the socio-political situation of the country. He uses city spaces to address topical issues of colonial hangovers, identity, sexuality and the decadence in the country. Beneath the funny, inventiveness of the novel lies a fierce satiric writing that introduces the reader to different screaming slices of satire and post-colonialism.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The postcolonial satire is inclined to differing approaches in order to heal the effects of colonial experience on the colonized. Igoni Barrett satire, *Blackass* does not impel or conceal any voice-imperial or colonized. Though Furo Wariboko is a postcolonial puzzle, from a postcolonial viewpoint Barrett's characters come to dismantle and blur the certitude of "authenticity" and of most postcolonial ideas like race, hybridity, mimicry, mockery and identity. Another point of note is that postcolonial relationships between colonized and colonizer still suffer from historical idolization and marginalization. Expatriates in Nigeria tend to enjoy some unprecedented privileges and Barrett captures these trends; and genuinely feels these should be checkmated. Also, the portrait painted of a postcolonial Nigeria should address the issues of white privileges, socio-political and cultural assimilations and diaspora as Nigerians continue to make frantic effort to leave the country of their birth in search of greener pasture. On the whole, the novelist further expresses the angst he feels towards the emerging trend of anglomania and diaspora and calls for redress of this menacing situation.

Lastly, this paper uses satire and postcolonial criticism to urge that Nigerian writers should continue to write their postcolonial situation into the Nigeria and world literatures. Their literatures, just like Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* should encourage nationalistic values because the

national and individual identity is seemingly going through diverse decay.

**Works cited**

- Abram, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Rinchart and Winston, 1981
- Achebe, Chinua. *Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays*.: Heinemann, 1975.
- Apostol, Gina. *The Revolution According to Raymundo Mata*. Anvil Press, 2009.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World*. Indiana University Press, 1941.
- Balce, Nerissa S. "Laughter Against the State: On Humor, Postcolonial Satire and Asian American Fiction". *Journal of Asian American Studies*. Vol 19. No.1. February 2016. Pp 44-73. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Barrett, A. Igoni. *Blackass*.: Kachifo, 2015.
- Behad, Ali. *Belated Travelers: Orientalism in the Age of Colonial Dissolution*, Duke University Press. 1994.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*.: Routledge, 1994.
- Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffins. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*.: Routledge, 1989
- Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. Routledge, 2000.
- Day, Joy. "Blackass by A. Igoni Barrett". A Review. *Financial Times*. August 14, 2015.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*.: Pluto Press, 1967.
- Harmon, William and Holman, Clarence Hugh. *A Handbook of Literature*. Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009.
- "Jonathan Swift on Satire". *Columbia World of Quotations*. [Bartley.com\66\93\56793.html](http://Bartley.com/66/93/56793.html).
- Mercer, Kobena. "Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics". In *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*. (ed) Jonathan Rutherford: Lawrence and Wishart, 1995.
- Munoz-Lurrando, Ruben. "Living in Two-Worlds-A Postcolonial Reading of the Acts of the Apostles". Phd dissertations.
- Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah (ed). *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*. Blackwell Publishers, 2006.

***Laughing to Keep from Crying: Postcolonial Satire in.....***

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, 1979.

San Juan Epifanio. *Beyond Postcolonial Theory*. San Martin's Press, 1998.

Shija, Terhemba. *Post-Coloniality and the Poetry of Tanure Ojaide*. Aboki Publishers, 2006.

Thieme, John. (ed). *The Arnold Anthology of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*. Arnold, 1996.

Young, C. Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory: Culture and Race*. Routledge, 1995.