

**DTHE NIGERIAN LITERATURE AND THE MASSES IN 2020: AN EVALUATION OF SOYINKA'S  
THE BEATIFICATION OF AREA BOYS AND IYAYI'S VIOLENCE**

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**Abstract**

*This work exposes the seamy side of social and political enclaves in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. It depicts the suffering of an oppressed society suffering from the monstrous decrees of military and civilian dictatorship. The work pokes through the smoke screen of despotism from the past condition of Nigeria into the social, political and religious future. It explores the state of the masses as depicted by Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy* and *Iyayi's Violence*. The study found that the masses are still drifting on a raft in the bowels of the 21st century, as the Nation is basking in the euphoria of becoming one of the world's largest economies in the year 2020. It is a reflection of a society where there is class distinction. The poor continues to labour under the yoke of the corrupt while the rich get richer. It is a revelation of the wounds of the Nigerian masses that are still waiting to be healed. The work projects the year 2020 as a probable year of salvation for the masses and expressed optimism that the masses will move from the place of incarceration to recognition.*

**Key words:** *Literature, development, economy, vision 2020*

**Introduction**

This paper is an attempt to evaluate the Nigerian Literature and its effects on the masses in the year 2020, using Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy* and *Iyayi's Violence* as instruments for study. In spite of the difference in the genres, the artists have used the works as integrative materials to examine the socio-political system in the country and indeed, Africa as a whole with a view to bring rejuvenation. Both artists present a style of interposition, acting reciprocally against the dictatorial encroachment on the prerogatives of the state and its citizens. Their vision is to purge and reveal the self-centredness of the leaders against the led, their short sightedness, wickedness and all forms of oppression and repression in the nation.

According to Abiola (1971) in Arikpo (2009), all forms of art especially literature must have reference to human life and consciousness, if they are to make any significant impact in the society. Some writers look at literature as "life" because it pictures the society. Literature mirrors the very essence of the society to a point that many the leaders frown at it like a lady with an ugly face who wakes up in the morning and looks at her face in a mirror, she quickly throws away the mirror because it reveals the very rough contours of her physique.

Literature reveals the ills, oppression, moral decadence and human depravity in the society. It also neutralizes the blemishes of human sorrow and misfortunes and heals psychological imbalance and emotional gloom. The latter is the focus of this paper. Will the masses be healed in the year 2020? Will their sorrows and emotional trauma be neutralized as this nation gallops toward the proposed economic rejuvenation in the 2020s? As Nigerians await the unfolding of the theatre of absurd, where will the masses be?

Certainly, this paper is of the opinion that the masses would not have to wait for so long on the threshold of subjugation. The era of docility will soon be over - the era where the masses will continue to stoop to sterile and frustrating status quos will soon disappear into oblivion. It will give

rise to a time of consciousness, a period where the down trodden will be poised to engage the authorities in a show down because the proletariat are left with only the chains of their rights. This is what we have begun to see as the masses protested against the 2012 rise in the pump price of petrol and the various judicial demonstrations against the rape of justice in Nigeria. The print and electronic media have been at the centre of transmitting this information: there is a ray of light in the tunnel – the year 2020 may surely usher in a new dawn for literature and the masses!

A few years after the mirage of the year 2000 that signalled the rolling drums of flamboyant ideals by many nations like "food for all by the year 2000", health for all by the year 2000", "education for all by the year 2000", a decade and a few years after, many nations have realized that it was a hoax. They are forced to retract their steps and re-evaluate their values and economies. Various economies in the world have started rolling out new drums, new brooms and new dancing steps. The United Nations have set off Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For Nigeria, we are to become one of the world's twenty largest economies by the year 2020. That has been Christened- "vision 2020"

### **The year 2020**

The year 2020 is a dream year, as postulated by Nigerian leaders, in a policy that expresses their aspiration for the country in the year under review. It has been declared as the year that Nigerian will become one of the world's largest economies. It came on the heels of the preceding vision of 2010 projected in 2009. The Vision Statement reads: "By the year 2010, Nigerian will be one of the 20 largest economies in the world, able to consolidate its leadership role in Africa and establish itself as a significant player in the global, economic and political arena" (Nwoke, 2010, p 2).

This vision is precipitated upon the buoyant Nigeria's economic potential, well recognized as the biggest economy in the West African sub-region. However, in spite of the huge human and material resources, quite little has been realized in the years back. There have been colossal and dismal failures in major reforms that should have served as hallmarks or indices of global competitiveness: the embezzlement of the pension fund popularly referred to as "pension Scam", the embezzlement of the oil subsidy fund, just to mention a few. Whether this nation will be there in the year 2020, time will tell. But where will the masses be? Will their dead bodies be found on the streets of major cities in Nigeria as a result of protest against oil subsidy only to be carted away by the bourgeoisies? <http://www.nv2020.org>.

### **Literature and national development**

According to Olaoye (2012), there is triangular relationship existing between Language, Literature and Culture. Neither literature nor culture can exist devoid of Language. Language is the highest gifts given to man by his creator to control his universe. National development is integrated to Language because it plays a predominant role in the nation's education and culture. And Literature is internalized in Language. Literature is an art, which entertains and instructs. It opens the eyes of people to impending dangers and widens the scope of their experiences.

Literature proffers wide range of values and attitudes. It serves as a vehicle for cultural transmission and interpretation, interaction and opposition. It is a mirror that reflects people in either oral or written narratives, drama or poetry. The artist makes use of varied literary devices to communicate ideas, thought and feelings about the social ills and values. He chooses literary dictions; to ridicule, lampoon and criticize anti-social behaviours like corruption, assassinations, terrorism, political thugery, religious intolerance, dictatorial or oppressive rule in any social setting, (Ikong, 2011).

### **Nigerian literature and the year 2020**

For Nigeria to realize the expected economic glamour in the year, 2020, our literature should have proficient choice of diction that will reflect the social and political realities of our ideals as individuals, communities, states and the nation. A literature that will serve as a mirror to bring to the fore, the destructive effects of excessive ethnocentric behaviour, socio-political malfeasance, linguistic stereotype or prejudice, which promote instability and anarchy, oppression and depression,

corruption and nepotism. According to Olaoye (2012), through Literature, people have read about anti-democratic practices, corrupt leader's administrative tendencies and the consequences of dictatorship, insensitivity, high-handedness and other ungodly acts like rape, looting, assassination, sodomy, arm robbery (armed with a gun or biro), bombing, arson, murder, etc. Literature must rise to ridicule such acts of immorality, wickedness, cheating, discrimination, victimization, dishonesty, marginalization, economic sabotage and thus promoting social equilibrium, security and peaceful living.

If Nigeria's economy must be among the twenty best in the year, 2020, then our masses must be the best treated among the first twenty countries of the world. The Nigeria Literature will no more reflect "Wasted breeds". The masses will no more be drifting on Rafts and will never be seeking their dreams on divining chains. Nigeria Literature must depict a rejuvenated masses, that would not have to wait long to be delivered from the 'Novelle riche' or the proletariat. They shall no more suffocate silently in the haze of tumbled political dust. Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy* and Iyayi's *Violence* are examples of the various voices of Literature that aim at emancipating and rejuvenating the masses. An evaluation of the contents of these literary works creates a direction for the masses of this nation towards achieving the vision of the 2020.

### **Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy* and Iyayi's *Violence***

The choice of these seasoned artists bespeaks their relevance as specimens in the growth and development of the Nigerian theatre. Their works hinge on combating institutionalized retrogressiveness that sprouts on our social, political, cultural and economic system with a view to bring about a rebirth. Both texts (irrespective of the variation in genres) are a clarion call for a collective awareness on the part of the oppressed to rise against the forces of rot, corruption and subjugation of human dignity. Both artists are humanistic and conscientious in their approach in dealing with societal issues.

Although Iyayi's *Violence* is a novel, the author reveals the technique of a play in a Novel to create humour and suspense in the narrative progression, ( p. 140-157). No doubt, the drama sketch in this section does more than creating a sense of humour in the story. It carries along with it the satirical reference to government officials and their corrupt practices. And in Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy*, we see a hand book of a committed archetypal contemporary dramatist whose ideology is poised to use everything use-able to trumpet a call against the menace of corruption, oppression and poor governance.

Soyinka's (1995) *The Beatification of Area Boys* depicts the suffering of an oppressed society suffering from the monstrous decrees of military dictatorship over a chain of periods. Soyinka presents a theatre, whose pedagogical strings would not only propel and project the dramatist as a teacher of morals but also as a political adviser to the state. This work, no doubt, reveals that imaginative power and perception of a writer, whether poet, novelist or playwright is not conceived in any abstract mechanist society. Indeed, his dramaturgy pokes through the smoke screen of despotism of the past condition of Nigeria into the social, political and religious future. Thus, evocative in the collection and apprehension of memories on happenings within the country, pictures and intervenes to pave way for a refulgent democratic state out of crisis situation. Of course, Soyinka can be conceived as a dentist charged with the fecundity of extracting the decaying tooth plaguing his country and to a large extent, the African continent.

*The Beatification of Area Boy* is a satirical exposition that unveils the seamy side of social and political enclaves in the country and Africa as a whole. His vision is centred on revealing the self-centeredness of our leaders, their short-sightedness and wickedness in their land. His pre-occupation is to ridicule and scorn, explore and capture their encroachment on the prerogatives of the state and its citizen especially in a nation that is fragrantly tilting towards a one party state.

Therefore, in the most surreptitious manner, the play opens on the broad frontage of an opulent plaza overlooking the busy street of Lagos, admits its inherent bursting and hustling activities by

petty traders in makeshift stalls and the masses as represented by the "area boys". This open place for business by petty traders is often converted into living abodes at night by a number of homeless and lunatic citizens. Part of the area is inhabited by the "Barba" another by "Mama puts" (food vendor), a general purpose consumer shopkeeper and of course "Sanda" a security officer responsible for looking after the shop hall. He is a drop out from the university who has mastered the art of street "sociology".

"Mama put" wakes up with a start, she ruminates on the difficulties she encounters at night and how the day appears bleak because she is battling to sustain her daughter in school while the trader laments the poor social conditions necessitated by a fall in the value of the currency thus:

Trader: Even to say I did, I fit read, look na early morning. I dey prepare for my customers and won think small. We currency done fall again, petrol dey scarcity, which means to say, transport fare done double. As for food stuff and other commodity, even garri wey be poor man diet. (p88)

On the other hand, the day's interaction reveals "Sanda's" quest to provide security to whoever cares. He uses "Boyko" to fulfil his aspirations as well as pushing himself forward as the leader of "Area Boys". He is able to persuade the commander of the army detachment from demolishing the make-shift stalls because its occupants (the downtrodden) are ready for a showdown with the authorities. This gives us an insight into the impending chaos, dismay, confusion and stir between the oppressed and the oppressors. The animosity is clear from the voice of the bride groom whose bridal wine has been given to "Sanda".

That evening, the bride-to-be, "Miseyi" has chosen to abandon her groom for "Sanda", "all I want is to see him castrated publicly". Soyinka (p98) said the bridegroom angrily. The governor and his aids, the parents of the bride and groom, other dignitaries were all filled with rage at the behaviour of the bride. The scene of chaos and exasperation is clear; there is no marriage between the masses and the privileged. It is a reflection of political, social economic chaos in the nation. This makes Nigerians to resort to survival instinct which ever may possible. Judge says: "By now I should have been for aging in the disposal sector for the new night club - yes, the new lagoon- no matter, when I encounter you again in the morning, you will find I have gone professional" (p. 99).

The survivalist instinct sweeps through all the characters. 'The market woman alters her price list to cope with the cost of school fees, hike in transport, increase in fuel's pump, price etc.

Trader: "As for food stuff and other commodity, even garri wey be poor man diet . I just dey explain why I need small time to put new price for all these goods" (p7).

This signs potent great danger for the nation and her economy. Hence, even the petty trader is ready to adjust her price list to join the oppressor and exploiters of the masses. And the ruling class is adamant to the plight of the masses as depicted by the military officer, thus:

Military officer: My uniform is sacrosanct from cap to pom pom to under pants it cannot bear civilian touch.... Don 't challenge my esprit-de-corps. The uniform marks the all-round, be all, seize all, end-all. Alpha and Omega, self-install president and head of state, commander-in-chief great potentate (p84).

### **Iyayi's (1979) Violence**

This is a thought provoking story that revolves around the trials and travails of a poor and wretched couple. The couple, Idemudia and his wife Adisa are caught in a web of survival. Idemudia is a victim of broken home and school dropout. He has not been able to secure a decent job to make ends meet for his family. This places the family in constant crises and occasional fight. They both engage themselves in menial jobs to keep body and soul together. Idemudia resorts to selling his blood so that he can meet the needs of the family. And he would not be able to tell his wife that the money he

had brought home has come from selling his blood at fifteen naira a pint. Iyayi narrates idemudia's ordeal thus:

The things an empty stomach can drive a man to, he said to himself now, and shook his head, the thing hunger can make a man do? He couldn't continue to sell his blood there is bound to be a hint somewhere (p. 157)

He and his friends have to take the pains of offloading three trailers of cement amidst hunger and rain. As a result, Idemudia falls sick of pneumonia and he is hospitalized, leaving Adisa with the task of carrying out the family responsibilities. She has exhausted all means of borrowing to offset his medical bills until she is seduced by chief Obofon, the husband of Queen, the owner of the cement that Idemudia and his friends off loaded. He gave her one hundred naira and some whisky to start business. This rape on marital institution occasioned by poverty, a set of literary dictions that depict the rape of the Nigeria masses whose pride of existence has been trodden down by the rich who impoverish them.

### **Implication for national development**

Despite the rapid economic development in Nigeria since the oil boom in the 1970s, the standard of living of the masses remained unchanged. Gross under development remains the bane despite being endowed with human and material resources. Poverty and penury is the order of the day because the ruling elites use the public offices as an apparatus for amassing wealth and sharing of national cake instead of placing priority on statesmanship, patriotism and projects that will benefit the masses.

Obasanjo (2010) in Shior (2011p73) affirms that corruption has been responsible for the instability of successive Governments since the first republic. Every coup since then has been in the name of stamping out the disease called corruption. Unfortunately, the cure often turns out to be worse than the disease. And Nigerians have been worse for it. Nigeria's external image took a serious bashing as our beloved Country began to feature on top of every corruption index.

Also Shior (2011) opined that the establishment of EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) and ICPC (Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Offences Commission) was occasioned by the desire to stamp out corruption. However, most people believe that the two agencies were merely elements of witch-hunt by the Obasanjo's administration. He believes that like prostitution, drug addiction, and competitive gambling, alcoholism, corruption etc; they all have their roots in the dark kingdom which needs serious fasting and prayers for God's intervention. Therefore, the contemporary Nigeria Literature that will enhance National development must have the courage to stand out in an honest portrayal of societal struggles in economic, Socio-political and Cultural issues. This is confirmed by Achebe (1969 p53) in (Ojinmalu, 1991) Thus: "It is clear to me that an African creative writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary African, will end up being completely irrelevant like that absorbed man who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames".

In the Nigeria Society, the masses that constitute the labouring majority are ignored. And if the robbers of our wealth are able to instil the image of defeat, division, inferiority complex, helplessness and lavishness in the minds of the robbed, then they can eat their loot in comfort and sleep in peace.

That is why this paper salutes the courage of the likes of Wole Soyinka and Festus Iyayi who recreate the reign of deception and despotic will of the Military and Civilian regimes in Nigeria by anachronistic predators that we must continue to position our arsenals in order to dismantle.

### **Conclusion**

Literature does not exist in a vacuum. It is given impetus, shape and direction by social, political

and economic forces in a particular society. The focus of the contemporary writers must be centred on issues pertaining to the general wellbeing of the society. It must aim at serving the interest of the masses in the Society where class distinction encourages dehumanization. When Idemudia and his friends agitated for a wage increase, they were threatened with a sack just like the Nigerian workers were threatened with a sack by many state Governors because they agitated for their ₦18,000.00 (Eighteen Thousand Naira) minimum wage which had been legitimately signed into law by the president. For instance, commenting on the protest by the Enugu State workers on the 16th August, 2011, Chukwu in the Daily Sun of Wednesday, 17th August, 2011 remarked:

We are happy that Enugu has made history again as the first state where workers thronged the streets to demand for the ₦18,000.00 minimum wage contained in the national Minimum wage act signed into law by the president. The protest by workers on Tuesday resonates the spirits of 21 workers who were killed in the City by the Colonial police in 1949 for demanding better conditions of service from the Colonial masters.

The conclusion of this paper is that the scenario has not changed. As such our literature must continue to capture the realities of life in Nigeria.

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