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THE TALE OF THE HAWK AND THE CHICKEN: LEADERSHIP PAINTINGS ON THE CANVAS OF LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

With the artist remaining the conscience of the people and the pen proving its might above the bazooka, Nigerian leadership receives whips of exorcism from protracted insanity of nearly fifty years. From dramatists to novelists but mostly the poets, echoes of disappointing leadership reverberate on the canvas of the books. With corruption remaining a legal tender in the affairs to governance whose players take on the attribute of 'hawk', 'leopard', 'lion', 'monkey', 'cobra', and 'vulture' to mention a few, the nation wobbles under the pressure of development-rape, while the masses wallow in poverty. However, echoes are also heard from these down-trodden miseries resounding in fresh oath for fight-back, even if it is for the sake of intervention. The state seems set. The keg of gun powder masquerading as that of palm-wine in the damning sun, shakes, in readiness for explosion. The hawks are oblivious as they swift as usual in their chicken-carrying-all-time-tradition. Sooner than now, the explosion shall erupt in their midst, inviting the gorillas from the jungle for the remaining spoil. This is the exhibition you are called up to appreciate as oil painting but on the canvas of literature tell tales of leader-hawks and citizen chickens.

BACKGROUND FOR EXHIBITION

It was Albert Camous in his monumental study – *The Rebel* who declared that a rebel is “born of the spectacle of irrationality, confronted with an unjust and an incomprehensible condition”. In Nigeria, it has become common place to hear such insinuations as ‘mad’, ‘drunk’ ‘insane’, and ‘revolutionary’, as tags, readily bequeathed to artists and writers because they have ‘confronted by unjust and incomprehensible action’, and they ‘rebel’ by daring to talk or write about it. Others who are lame over the expression of whatever conditions they find themselves, remain ‘sane’ and ‘loyal’. Insinuations and tags notwithstanding, it is instructive to note that “The revolt of the dramatist...is more imaginative than practical”, according to Brustein (1991:8). It is in this light that the same Brustein identifies Henrick Ibsen, August Strindberg, Anton Chekov, Benard Shaw, Bertolt Brecht, Luigi Pirandello, Eugene O’Neil, Antonin Artaud and Jean Genet as great masters of the *Theatre of Revolt*. Revolt is another word for rebel. So they can be described in the words of Camus, as “rebel”. Brustein (1991:18) further clears the air on the dramatists’ type of revolt:

Dramatic art is not identical with reality, but rather proceeds along a parallel plane; and dramatic revolt, therefore, is always much more total than the programs of political agitators or social reformers. The modern dramatists is essentially a metaphysical rebel, not a practical revolutionary; whatever his personal political convictions, his art is the expression of a spiritual condition...the work of art itself becomes a subversive gesture – a more imaginative reconstruction of a chaotic, disordered world.

It is from this perspective that all the artists and all their arts must be seen, in this essay. But beyond this declaration of scope, the

matters of the state, especially democratic state, should concern everyone, not only the artists. It is from this light that Ngugi Wa Thiong’o (1981:21) asserts that “Every writer is a writer in politics, the only question is what and whose politics”. In this essay, Nigeria’s nascent democracy and sometimes-Nigerian leadership since independence, shall be given focus. Leadership in the main, shall remain pivotal on the anvil of revolutionary examination(s). This also finds justifications in Achebe (1981:78):

An African creative writer, who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa, will end up being completely irrelevant like the absurd man in the proverb, who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.

While all others can afford to be absurd as the man in Achebe’s proverbs, the artist certainly cannot. For instance, Leopold Senghor (1965:....) asserts that “in Africa, art for art’s sake does not exist. All art is social...”. Equally, Marga Honess (1974:.....) opines that “Poetry became the principal means by which they (writers/poets) struck not among the people, writing for the people, making of the despair and suffering of the people...” In addition, Ime Ikiddeh’s submission is that “...literature(is) a tool if not weapon, in the cause of liberation” (2005:334). To him! “The kind of literature that we envisage from the pens of our contemporary writers must be such that pulsates with creative images of change and the ennobling vision of liberation”(2005:334)

Let it not be seen as if the “envisaged” literature as a weapon, is yet to exist. They have always been there nearly as old as the very first lines ever put down by the first Nigerian literary writers. Remi

Adeoti (2005:56) confirms, concerning Nigeria, that, "Expectedly, Nigerian literary drama has both predicted and adequately documented the travails of the political system". So also has Ahmed Yerima (2002:16) in his positing that "in pragmatic terms the playwright has become disillusioned with what continually appears as "democratic gamble" of both the civilians and the military".

On the form leadership has often taken in Nigeria, these political scientists contribute. Ikpe (2005:11) says that "...the political elite assumed the role of ethnic patrons who competed with other patrons for the communities' share of the "national cake" though, for most of the time they ate the cake on behalf of their communities... J. Shola Omotola (2005:58), in giving insights from Nigeria to civil limitations, identifies "the growing spate of authoritarianism and repression", "scorge" and "unprecedented degree of economic strain brought to bear upon the citizenry" among others, as some of what have combined to weaken the strength of CSOs" (Civil Society Organizations). Adelaja Odukoja (2005:102) equally enumerates the prevailing issues which plagued the Nigerian society with "bated breath" before the 2003 general election, to include:

This historically rooted fear ... compounded by the state of political assassinations, ethnic and communal conflict, divisions and antagonisms within all the political parties, economic depression and unemployment violation of the rule of law, intergovernmental discords, and executive lawlessness.

The discourses that shall come hereafter, under the topic "The Tale of the Hawk and the Chicken..." shall however concentrate on literary artists of complete literature genres: namely, drama, prose and poetry. These multi-sectional critical appraisals

shall lend credence to the universality with which leadership bastardization has notoriously been infested. However, that political scientists have been drawn-in at this juncture of the foundational thrust of the discourses, further accentuates the authenticity in which the issues of leadership-regret have obnoxiously become public knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Ye lonesome ones, ye seceding ones, ye shall one day be a people: out of ye who have chosen yourself, shall a chosen people arise..." Friedrich Nietzsche (1991).

Chekov indicts the bourgeois for his lack of culture and lack of nerve, Ibsen for his mediocrity and compromise, Strindberg for his cowardice. Shaw for his meddling an scandal-mongering, O'Neill for his philistinism' Genet for his sham... Robert Brustein (1991:9).

More than twice, *Transparency International* has voted Nigeria as one of the most corrupt nations of the earth. Some state governors have been caught with quanta of monies in foreign currencies, with some only to disguise as women to jump bail. Precisely in the last week of June, 2006, an independent international Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) researchably arrived at Power Holdings Nigeria Plc formerly National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) and the Nigeria Police Force, as the most corrupt Organizations in Nigeria. With a sprawling vista of neglect or decay in infrastructures because funds for them re-cycled their ways into the leaders' over-sized pockets, and worse still, with long worn-out miserable faces of frustrated citizens crying for change, it becomes common knowledge that leadership has been a woeful failure in this

nation since the first republic. Every person of reasonable age can feel the unworking or non-workable system in many indices – energy, education, health, environment, agriculture, industrialization etc. If everybody could have access to expressive opportunity in books, perhaps ALL by now, might have told the maniacal tales of leader-hawks prowling on the masses-chickens. But since the artists remain the daring heroes who would risk crying out the pains meted at them and their people, it becomes somewhat like they are the ones alone who are prone to complaining. The quotation at the apex of this essay by Brustein, confirms that every writer has a responsibility to his society. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (1981....) would not even see any sense in writing if not about politics. Therefore, for a writer not to comment on the society that he finds himself is to fail in his 'call'. With this as the justification for these writers to fulfil their civil obligations current leadership trends have been painted on the canvas of many a genre.

GROUND FLOOR: DRAMATIC PAINTINGS

Ahmed Yerima (2005:53) on a new work located on the Niger Delta grounds makes 'hard' statements that question leadership achievements in Nigeria since 1940. "We started crying since 1940...why is nobody listening? Why?" This is the desperate and miserable plight of the downtrodden on "hard ground". Specifically, Nimi, representing the masses of the Niger Delta, who have been pushed to the wall by persistent neglect, addresses Kingsley, whose name does not only suggest one in rulership via allegory, but one within the plot who has always been looked up to for "salvageon".

And worse still, you whom we thought was our vehicle of salvation, the symbol of our belief in God...is supremely...fake. Why?

(pause) Nothing is real anymore. Nothing, I don't even know what to call you now...I am going back to the jungle, where we write laws and live them, each day, as we feel.

With part of the lines by Nimi reminding one of the absurd theatre, with particular reference to Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Nimi seems to have lost bearing with life out here, or rather lost confidence in leadership (courtesy of its brazen leaders). He seems to have wantonly lost every sense of "human face" for the people. Little wonder then, that Nimi opts to be in the guerilla force, striking from the jungle in the wild hope that the terror of this alternative move would have forced a re-direction towards attention to the perennial cryings.

Ubong Nda (2005) a man who had the singular privilege of serving successive governors in the capacity of Chief Protocol in Government House, depicts in *khakhigbada* a typical leader in contemporary Nigeria. *Khakhigbada*, itself an aberrated mix which is only bound and destined to crash, visits the mind at once with this conviction. Can agbada be worn over or under khakhi? Or can khakhi be worn over or under agbada? Neither seems right. Both promise a riot. Therefore, the reader from the outset, is introduced to a riot act with the promise of military (khakhi) fiat, and the over flowing abandon of agbada naivety and stupidity.

Khakhigbada is apparently the new Nigerian "home grown" democracy where solidier disguising in agbada, terrorize the citizenry in uncanny abandon, wasting public funds on endless travellings, appointing "empty heads" to sensitive positions in the name of party loyalists, who do nothing but loot tax-payers' treasury, and then squash every opposition in a sweeping spree, to stamp their unviolated authority.

Khakigbada, a so-called governor, is not known for anything positive to the people who bequeathed treasured mandate to him. Rather, the people are placed under siege in what was supposed to be a democracy. They are cowed by terror-striking cultists in the brand-name of 'Youth Leaders' and 'Security Agents'. They flare knives, guns and axes at will against any person outside the camp of *Khakigbada*. Power-drunk to the point of absolute stupor, *Khakigbada* can even censor his wife with unfeeling dash, and burn down a purported enemy's house without recourse to his hibernating lover-son in there with his pregnant fiancée. Driven to absolute power, the intoxication goads him to schizophrenic frenzy, such that, in a public gathering, *Khakigbada* pulls out a gun and brings down a fellow-politician and member of his near junta-cabinet, who is at the brink of exposing *Khakigbada*'s anus of corruption and betrayal. Yet, despite the desperate attempts to conceal his wicked acts and feign innocence upon his wrinkled face, his pack of heinous cards crash on his demented head as three of his die-hard agents whose luck had run out of them, are thrown before him by the police. Their confessions via the torturous instrument of the force to extract truth had already linked *Khakigbada* to all their atrocities of arsons, killings and kidnappings. Even then, the monster called *Khakigbada*, would still flex empty muscles of claimed dignity, with so-called immunity, which should forestall his "esteemed" person from police arrest. His desperate assertion is however, not respected. With all of these and more, the text *Khakigbada*, proves itself one of the latest on canvas, on which current and situational political leadership has been painted. Hope you appreciated it.

On Johnson's (2001) canvas, the sheer abandonment of morality and utter disregard for decorum with which Nigerian leaders go about their endless successive tenureships—first term, second term, third term—is thematically though metaphorically illustrated in *The Fight Has Just Begun*. Much worse is heightened

greed which makes Nigerian leaders go the extent of depleting the remnants of the economic bag and as well propels them to Satanic scheming, to secure the tenacity of their vaulted ambition. Johnson paints an impression where Edidem Ekarika, uses sophisticated artistry of maneuvering and policy-manipulations, to justify an against-the-tradition system of succession. This is nonetheless challenged by daring Udobong, an uncle to Imo, and the heir-apparent to Ekondo throne. Quite typical of a sit-tight leader, Ekarika eliminates Udobong through the lure of courtesy in a poisoned drink. With sworn bravado to combat opposition to extinction, Ekarika would not heed an old uncle's counsel, the same he rather hushes to go bury his grey hair in peace or push him (Ekarika) to make his head role like that of all stubborn opponents'. "Heads that will stubbornly stick out will definitely roll. No doubts about that" (42), Edidem Ekarika, now totally intoxicated with power, threatens. But despite the trailing blood-spillage and the obvious threat hanging in the air for 'stubborn' opponents, the person who wants to die catches up with one who wants to kill him (as the saying goes). Udobong's friends, also with hot blood, swearing vengeance, march against the king's formidable security and cash in on a little opening all the same. And with their master-strokes, heads roll! But it is Ekarika's and his helmsmen's heads that role in such quick flashes that left no wink for thought. And change comes at last!

Hence, just like Nda brings an end to *Khakigbada* by making the long arm of the law catch up with him and a thud comes to his dynasty of terror, Johnson forces a desired change into existence by the counter-force of violence on the violent. In both plays, hope is painted at that far end of the canvas of this monstrous experience as an index that even in REALITY; an end is imminent to all tyrants.

With this index, Mfonobong Etok (2003:40) can be consoled whose canvas bemoans "a nation which has been down-trodden for weeks, months and years by (a) bunch of dictators, victimizers, blood lickers, authoritarian whore mongers..." it is amazing that despite changing "weeks", different "months" and new "years" the expected change has not come, to bring the desired leverage to the back-bent, pain-carrying masses. It would appear that leadership incompetence, gross misrule, wanton corruption, doggy-immorality, and brazen killings, have become so contemptuous and sickening that the likes of Etok, are nearly utterly bereft of any hope for change except to moan. For these types, despite their deep scars and brunts of this brutality, their ears have to be unblocked for them to hear the grunt of Yerima's guerillas, advancing from the jungle to the city gates. Their eyes have to be "de-cataracted" for vision to form for them to see Nda's law men capturing *Khakigbada* to a dungeon, or Johnson's Ekarika being hemmed down by unexpected masterstrokes.

MIDDLE FLOOR: NOVELISTIC PAINTINGS

The first painting here is that of Folorunso Folowosele (2004:67). He declares without fear or favour that in Glumania (the author's artistic coinage for Nigeria) "unfortunately, the national park and cemetery projects were never implemented though the bill sailed through the National Assembly". This is no news courtesy of the tenuous regularity with which many approved and 'upfronted' projects are no way to be seen implemented. Was it not a short while ago, the education sub-sector shockingly announced that billions of Naira have so far been expended on Basic Primary Education? And there is no corresponding structure on ground deserving of that amount of money! Every state of Glumania has this experience. None is the better for it. Folowosele is still waiting whether he will hear any soothing news of the abandoned jobs-contractors being called to

question, or to be told that they had been picked up for failure to refund the "upfronted" sum, for jobs not done...while none of these many never happen is because the contractor has vowed to give accurate report on how the money was expended at every point, to whom and for what!

Over there is quite an attraction. Martin Akpan (1999), the medical doctor-writer politician, "skillfully dissects our extant political experience with the practiced meticulousness of an experienced surgeon". Apparently pivved by the "mind boggling and blood-curdling intrigues, intricacies, machinations and skullduggery..." of our political experience, Akpan type-casts Chief Yeye Ebie (a name which immediately strikes one with uselessness in temperament, and sordidness in character depending on which pidgin English divide you tilt to, in the country) to unveil the sheer horrible macabre psyche of our leadership experience. Chief Yeye Ebie is so medi-literally dissected that he is displayed for public scorn with these stunning credentials:

His rise to wealth and seeming fame arose out of his incurable avidity for political manipulations, double dealing and skullduggery coupled with his penchant for sadistic extortion of money from aspirants and lobbyists for political appointments. Scars of his bare-faced sadistic conduct were visible on the consciousness of many a young man or woman in the community...who constituted the main target of his machinations...(56).

In this very interesting painting, Chief Yeye Ebie is easily portrayed as a real "yeyeman" in his unbridled tenacity for corruption. He really wields his craft as a typical representation of Nigeria's nascent

leadership. With a meanness only equaled to that of a colonial slave-master, Chief Yeye delights in subjecting fellow humans to squalid forms of indignity "as factotums and slave-laborers". While lecherously demanding sex in style from Mrs. Ndoya as a condition for accepting her husband's local government nomination, Yeye in a loathsome irony cajoles:

I don't demand much. In fact it is not in my character to demand much from women. What I'm trying to do now is open a permanent door of opportunities for you in the government house. The governor, you know, is a personal friend. Besides I put him there and so he can't refuse me anything (57).

And with the desperation of over-ambitious Mrs. Ndoya who wants to become the first lady of Ibunde Local Government, she yields to the seductive persuasions of Yeye; he is lying. Meanwhile, Dr. Atalo, a man cast in the mien of goodness, with a large heart for the emancipation of his community from the clutches of stagnation, attests to the nature of leadership making the rounds these past post independent years.

Well, you know that I've always felt very strongly about the total lack of moral backbone in the leadership of this country. There's got to be change. A positive change: one that will usher in a bright new dawn of genuine growth and development. The suffering masses of our people have got to have a respite (37).

In response to Dr. Atalo's seemingly utopian dream, his friend Mr. Ahane, whom he is addressing, retorts: "one only hopes that with their mindless craving for money, those hawks in your party will see eye to eye with your position" (37).

The hawks indeed do not see eye to eye with Dr. Atalo's. But one thing puts up the character of Atalo for admiration on this canvas. Before dabbling into politics with a core-determinism to succeed – primarily and genuinely to alleviate the sufferings of his people, he had quite a decent profile in the university which he lectured. Great antecedents of communal interest, objectivity, sincerity of purpose, love for mankind, hater of evil, among others, had been the hallmarks of his life-style. With these, the electorates are unanimous with him. Despite the maneuvers of Yeye Ebie, the attempted rigging of the election, the election tribunal where the case is to be finally decided and monies borrowed and spent, Dr. Atalo – the very emblem of sanity gets injected by Akpan into the hitherto brazenly-corrupt leadership milieu. For once in a very long time, hope seems to dawn upon a people scathed by the cantankerous and diabolic culture of pain and strangulation.

Chris Egbarevba (2004), like Akpan, with the most venomous bitterness, presents the intriguing tales of greed, power, lust, deceit, bribery and betrayal which have characterized the leadership of the nation. But Egbarevba, literally and most gruesomely, dives into violence as the long-delayed cure for the endless plunges of corrupt men in leadership. Amaze, the female lieutenant of Voices of Thunder (VOT) – a terrorist – like group, sneaking fast into national prominence, to provide alternative to the nation's course (or is it curse?), retorts in the most mean candour, just before she chops off the male organ of Alhaji (Dr) Ismaila, the director of the National Security Service (NSS).

We are not terrorists but we believe that in a nation like ours, terror is a pragmatic instrument to usher in sanity for after violence comes peace. That is the meaning of this symbol.

The said symbol is a small flag that bears the image of the bleeding moon. Perhaps the idea communicated with it being that, the nation's moon has seen so much obnoxious corruption that it bleeds for the apparent deadly stabs of the leadership on the electorate. Meanwhile, what heinous crime could Alhaji (Dr) Ismalia have committed that paying back took this most bizarre and horrifying dimension? The same character, Ameze, supplies the missing link.

And of course, for men like you, who inflict pain, suffering and hardship on others, men who shout tough in public, do enjoy pleasure in secret, especially pleasure between the thighs of women. I gave you that pleasure, you enjoyed it. Yet you refuse others the pleasure of enjoying pleasure, instead you inflict horrors and pains and create nightmares in place of dreams.

Though terror-stricken and bizarre-maiming the activities of VOT have become, yet the venom tends to find justifications against the weight of corruption and its desolations on the structures of existence. So far, the following felled from the violence of VOT: Alhaji Abba Abubakar in Yola, the controversial figure who has led the nation into the Federal Union of Islamic Nations (FUIN), Rev. (Dr) Moses Ugiagbe in Benin, the controversial and powerful king-

maker, was tied to the wings of his guest house bed, and his genitals chopped off. In Calabar, Obong Ette Umana, the controversial politician "*who perfected the theory that ethnicity was a pragmatic blue print for national unity...*" was killed in a sensational letter bomb. These are only samples of what VOT intend to do in their long agenda of sanitizing the system of its agents of dwarfiness and coterminous outrage. The message is clear as crystal, even as the latest victim has this insignia posted on his lecherous turned murderous royal bed: "this is the legacy of thunder to all agents of suffering in our society". Shivers are already streaming down the spine of suspect-candidates!

It is intriguing to observe that Egharevba is from the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, a zone currently plagued with militancy activities. One only wonders whether Egharevba's "*Voices of Thunder*" gave any inspiration to the militants, or it is mere prophecy getting fulfilled via his artistic pronouncements.

Since independence in 1960, successive governments have heard and seen the protracted misery caused the citizenry by wicked and unproductive systems and corrupt agents. They have only paid lip-service to the plight of the common people. This country had since become like private property to a few people. The same people and their families have eternally and elastically perpetuated themselves in cyclic leaderships of pain. They are all **KNOWN**. Most slaves, the world over, usually have moments of freedom, when iron fetters nonetheless fall off the necks of their brunt-bearers. And ours cannot be an exception. If this war looming now only or mainly on the pages of literature is allowed to walk out to the living scenario, as is the case with militancy in the Niger Delta, what Egharevba prophesies will doubtless fulfill; namely,

No one will be spared! When thunder speaks
the earth trembles, frightened. No one dares

say no to thunder. Within a few days...many wealthy but corrupt men and women in this nation, in whatever profession, will hear the voices of thunder and lightening flashes bequeathing to them the only legacy they know: payment or Death.

This particular canvas could actually do with an alternative title, namely, "Doomsday A coming!"

FIRST FLOOR: POETIC PAINTINGS

Joe Ushie (2000:14) is the first painting in this segment. On it, a picture of leadership characterized by meaningless wandering and monotonous swing, like pendulum, is painted. In a poem on that title – "Pendulum", Ushie paints a gruesome picture of the victimized Nigerian gasping under the boots of terrorized leadership.

We remain the sheep courted by the leopard
and the hyena, each flashing sweet – smelling
poison. What hand of God shall rescue us here
where we roast, a democracy in search of
democrats.

The spate of shades of terror with which the helpless people, like sheep, have found themselves in successive but devouring regimes, have been traumatic, to say the least. It is either a leader comes as a "leopard" or as a "hyena" – both carnivorous creatures using the sheep for their lunch! Thus, so far, the decimation has been monumental. Little wonder then that the poet is wondering what joker God (alone) would pull to bring about yawned-for rescue from democratic inferno.

Close to Ushie's canvas is Manson Akaduh's (2003:8). In it, leaders are christened as "pub-winos"; "giants... driven by sheer fluke to heights underserved". Beneficiaries of popular mandate "clinging unto power like vultures over a carcass". Let's pause a while and (re)consider this: "like vultures over a carcass" means more than the ordinary. Not only are the leaders here scavenging like vultures do not dead and rotten meat or flesh, but beyond that, the flesh in question is a human's. Akaduh painting that even when leadership has hemmed down a citizen, his body is allowed to be further desecrated by vultures and other scavengers of human carcasses. What a taboo! What a desecration! Akaduh is not done yet as he continues to address Nigerian leaders using catch-phrases like "custodians of cut-short wealth...gulping every measure of it" "maniacs of diverse shades", "living in belly-filled safe heavens", "pub-winos sipping both wine and dregs" until they "belch in ravishment". This is breath-taking. Frustrating. Traumatizing. Strangling...And in utter frustration, the masses can only wish that the "pub-winos" "like stubborn flies will greedily follow the corpse six feet deep in earth". Both Ushie's desire for a rescuing "hand of God" and Akaduh's wish of death for the "pub-winos" are good, as they are capable of bringing about the much needed respite for the masses. But there is yet a further step the masses could still have wobbled up to take, to enhance the speed of change. Let's move on to the third painting.

Hope Eghagha (2002:12) is dead-certain that the end is imminent for "crooked men" such that he seals their projected and deserving deaths with a curse.

"When the sky collapses may it land on the empty heads of tall crooked men who play ping pong with human lives". Hope Eghagha, here seems to share corollaries with Ushie and Akaduh. "When the sky collapses" seems to be the translation of Ushie's "hand of God" while "who play ping pong with human lives" agrees with Akaduh's

"vultures over carcass". But Eghagba's prayer, namely, "may it land on the empty heads of tall crooked men..." steps up the advancement towards redemption for the people beyond the fringes of Ushie's and Akudo's boundaries. By Eghagba's assessment, the so-called political leaders are empty heads-void of reason, morals, and neighbourly traits of any sort. Their entire system is hired up with crookedness; and that's all they have and give. Eghagba is doubtless sure that the sky will collapse on them.

Matthew Umokoro (2002:17) hangs closer. On it, the image of the locusts in unprecedented destruction is sustained. "Locusts plunder our lush and luxuriant farmlands". "Herds of cattle are carted away under the very nose of wolves clearly represent the leaders who menacingly plunder the otherwise lush and luxuriant country, particularly its economic life, Nigerians themselves are castigated by the poet as "dumb shepherds" who do not raise an alarm at the instance of the wolves. But what should account for this complicity? Is it fear *"while the rest of the timid generations, with their hearts in their mouth echo the loud silence, where a silent noise would have moved mountains"*. With "timid generation", the poet blames the "loud silence" on fear. He seems so sure that even "a silent noise" could have "moved mountains". And he is already making some of those silent noise(s) with his poetic painting. But a thought is presented in the poem's labyrinth, namely "dumb shepherds" vis-à-vis "the rest of the timid generation". Though both are to be blamed for not making "silent noise(s)" they are not one and the same people. "Shepherds", here represent those Nigerians who are in a position of pasturing, such as church leaders, Imams, principals of schools, medical doctors of hospitals, community leaders etc. They are all the "dumb shepherds" and Umokoro is bitter in his castigation of them. They are not doing enough. Invariably, by their lack-lustre performance, this plunge of pain has been aloud to continue whereas their "silent noise" "would have moved

mountains". On the other hand, "the rest of the timid generation" constitutes the congregation in churches, students in all cadres of schools, villagers in every village and staff and patients in all hospitals. Their apparent timidity is also undersirably limiting. They too can noise their pains louder than they are merely groaning, if mountains of ravages are to be moved.

Until the shepherds stop remaining "dumb" and he masses shake off the shackles of 'timidity', Umokoro warns "Babel bleeds badly still". The metaphor "Babel" is apt for Nigeria's entity as a Nation of over four hundred "nations" with their multifarious tongues. Worse for Babel, it would appear (from the poet's point of view) as if not part of it is without a bleeding wound! The fear of (the image) of the bleeding wound is that without at least first aid attention, Babel might die!

Isn't it nostalgic, this gripping reality of doom again, this time of the nation itself?

What makes it more intriguing, or embarrassing, if not worrisome, is that the leader-wolves, according to Austine Akpuda (2001:11) and the "shepherd" are "cousins". But beyond that level, Akpuda reverses Umokoro's order, in that, by their portfolios, the leaders are supposed to be "shepherds" tending the flock-masses. But, by their camouflage as shepherds (when ideally they are not) they (in character) have become more related to the devouring beasts. Hence Akpuda's designation of Nigeria's leaders as "cousins of wolves, cousins of hogs, cousins of hyenas, vultures and Lucifer himself".

SPECIAL ROOM FOR HAWKS

Granted, various animals of destruction have been generously used by artists in all the genres we have examined so far, but hawk seems to be making more rounds such that it deserves a special room. Let's enter it and see special paintings of the hawks.

Ebong Okon (2001:89) sees Nigerian leaders straight as "hawks" with ready "claws..." "to tear carcasses". Proffering remedy for the activity of these hawks, Okon adopts a known traditional practice, namely, loud wailings! If people are around the homestead when the hawk swoops on the chicken, and wail in earnest, the hawk might run away. So, Okon from that background instructs the electorate to wail for one to "send the hawks to jail" or "squeeze their throats for them to vomit the loots". Though Okon has not stated on his canvas how one can get the flying hawk by hand and then take it to jail, or opt to squeeze its scavenging throat for him to "vomit the loots", Okon thus agrees with Umukoro's stance on the workability of "salient noise" to "move mountains".

Fortune Archibong (2001:93) also has a painting on hawks with "Hawk! Hawk! Hawk!". Archibong castigates Nigerian leaders further:

They thrive in corruption and flourish in bribery...Dressed in jackets, agbada, goggles to deprive the people of their rights and turn the government into noman's land because they are hawks.

Just as the hawk swoops on the chicken oblivious of who owns it, so do Nigerian leaders prey on the nation as a no-man's land. Hence governance becomes an instrument of terror.

Friday Okon (2002) has "ravaging locusts" which agrees with Umukoro's and, then, interestingly, "pillaging monkeys frolicking our father's farmstead". You can be sure every banana, plantain and anything fruit on the farmstead have been consumed by pillages of monkeys. The farmer stands awashed with despair, stares over the unprofitability of his tumultuous toils. But Okon is not done yet because none of the above two made him to have space in the

"Room for Hawks". He also has "preying hawks which "we have watched in tears...seizing our chicks". Okon, while standing transfixed with his heart breaking over his losses, resolves to set the farmstead ablaze along with the locusts and the monkey! And then, replant new seeds. What about the hawks? While he still thinks about how to get the hawks, the larger implication of setting the farmstead ablaze is nearly scary. Do frustrated Nigerians of leadership slaps, resolve to set Nigeria ablaze? Is this the only way of making sure that animals of prey would roast in the inferno? Okon seems to think so – roast up old plantings and the pillaging monkeys who enjoyed them and then started afresh. There is a subtle muting of bloody revolution in Okon's tone as remedy for Nigeria! With what the farmer has passed through, it is most likely that every known fortification would have been provided for the new farmstead, that is, after heavy scrutiny would have been applied in selecting the seeds in the first place.

Next room, three beautiful but very emotionally-charged paintings are laced on the walls (except that holding the door). The first is that of Godwin Akpan (2001:175) it is a man crying over monumental wastages of God-given resources, which if they were properly harnessed could have peaked this country atop economic masters of the world. It is the painting of a crying man over shades of leaders whether in Khakhi or agabada who have all left bitter memories and broken hopes, failed dreams and lost visions, these many years. "Tell them, all messiahs are fake and false in Khakhi or agbada, they're the same".

The next emotional painting is Chris Egharevba's (2001:161). Here he is singing to Emotan with ululations, placations and rites of transition, for immediate remedy to the leadership imbroglio. He comes to this decision because, among others, "*our leaders trivialize and destroy our today, mortgage our tomorrow and create nightmares after murdering vision in daylight*".

The last on the right wall of this last room, in this gallery, is Etop Akwang (2001). In this sub-section of his exhibit rightly titled "fury", he lends his angry voice to the mass of bitter others, in expressing utter disappointments over the bad leadership in the country. Particularly in the painting "A TideWash in the Creek", his depth of venom against the suckers, masquerading as leaders, is manifest. With expressions such as "felonies of indulged pirates impersonating as leaders in agbada", "false patriots" "treacherous swam of wasting locusts", "thieves and marauders in official uniforms", "tyrant bullies in power" and the "crop of impostors in this tidewash", Akwang is plagued with disgust over so-called Nigerian leaders.

Of course he is very justified with that utter disgust. What with the people having tales of woes to tell about these "impostors". What with women living with "vexed scars from rapists", "lives cooked up together in a seething cauldron" and "today, our people snivel, elegizing the fierce scorch of false patriots". The pain is so agonizing, the experience totally scathing, to the extent that the poet himself have vowed to join "*a new crop of pugilists whose fist would conduct venom against the impostors*". One of the new crops of pugilists is the terror – striking militant group. Does this poet believe that this is the right answer to the fight for freedom in the land? The poet having not been a pugilist himself before now, but with his choice to join his fist to theirs, determinedly relinquishes his mind to them to draw on, encourage him on, in this fight to restore sanity. "*Draw me till we chant and march down their thrones*". Being a volunteer group of course, the poet will gladly be welcomed to join. And he has been drawn by them. Right now, he should, apparently be in camp for training, for the final onslaught against "tidewash".

CONCLUSION

It is amazing that the image of the hawk as a metaphor for our leaders is consistently painted by most artists across the generic

strides. The metaphor of the locusts also gained some prominence on many a canvas. The vulture followed in signification, before the leopard and the monkey. No artist associated the leader with any domestic animal that shares the threshold with humans. The hen that most mentioned, ran a consistent tragic experience in the lunch-plates of the hawks. The dove, it is certain, might never be associated with Nigerian leadership throughout history!

Also to be noticed is the various forms of interventions either desired or wished, prayed or divined, planned or plotted, all to strategize against bringing down the hawk. If the sky collapses and the hawk escapes, it is hoped that the keg of gun powder's explosion shall envelop him. If the hawk's swiftness allows for escape to be possible there, then, the gorillas' from the jungle will strike him from their secret targets. Should all that fail by certain inexplicable and unimaginative device, then the determined force of the pugilists, or the national inferno, shall doubtless catch up with the hawk. Interestingly, the hawk in its ostensible swiftness is not expecting anything different from the usual hen-hagged empty noise about chicken-seizure for lunch! That makes him the more vulnerable. And in the words of Dr. Atalo, of Martin Akpan's canvas, these interventions all constitute "the catalyst for this odyssey".

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