

## **State Violence and the Writer: Towards the Dialectics of Intellectual Militancy in Transcending Postcolonial Nigerian Contradictions.**

By Uzoechi Nwagbara

Take justice  
In your hands who can  
Or dare, insensate sword  
Of power  
Outherods Herod and the law's outlawed  
... Orphans of the world  
Ignite! Draw  
Your fuel of pain from earth's sated core

---- Wole Soyinka, *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, 1972

### **The Nigerian State as Epiphenomenon of Violence: A Prolegomenon**

Nigerian history since colonial incursion is awash with political violence, crude use of power and deepening socio-economic crises. The principal factors that shaped this tradition are couched in hegemony, capitalism and politics of exclusion (Nwosu 2006:24; Kukah 1999:16), which underpin the logic of imperialism. Fundamentally, this pattern has left an aftertaste of lingering State violence, which is an epiphenomenon of this culture clash. Simply put, imperial violence and its concomitants are replicated in Nigeria's postcolonial State violence and political culture. The tyrannical State violence replicated is a function of colonial administrative subterfuge, which was modelled upon administrative convenience – even when the colonialists have left the Nigerian political space. Accordingly, “... the processes of the establishment of Western hegemony were designed in such a way as to make their stranglehold survive well beyond the period of their stay” (Kukah 1999:15). Thus, the compliant system of administering the colonial amalgam, Nigeria, is what Ogundowole in his book, *Colonial Amalgam, Federalism and the National Question* dubs “denationalisation policy” (1994: viii). This phrase is correlative of the British “Indirect Rule” policy in colonial Nigeria, which is largely the bane of the Nigerian State; and arguably, Nigeria's postcolonial contradictions stem principally from this policy. Since colonial Nigeria was ground on the anvil of violence, its corollary, the postcolonial Nigerian State is not lacking in crude use of power and

violence as well as “coercion and hegemony” (Dirks 1994:4) in the execution of its grisly political objectives.

As a consequence, the Nigerian political class has appropriated the mechanics of political operation left by the colonialist; this has given rise to postcolonial political elite, whose business is to advance the underdevelopment project initiated by the imperialists for the furtherance of its interests. In this vein, Richard Joseph sees this political opportunism as “clientelism” (1992:55) or prebendalism, which is a penumbra of “alliance of the purse and the gun” (Soyinka 1973: 134) and postcolonial tragedies. It is in the context of this national malaise that Claude Ake in his important book, *Democracy and Development in Africa* illuminates the nature of the postcolonial Nigerian state:

Since the colonial State was for its subject, at any rate, an arbitrary power, it could not engender any legitimacy... At independence, the form and function of the State in Africa did not change much. State power remained essentially the same: immense, arbitrary, often violent, always threatening. (1996: 3)

Since Nigeria’s political independence in 1960, ensuing administrations have virtually towed the path of violence – as ensconced by the colonialists in order to contain people’s dissatisfaction as well as to muscle opposition arising from the masses. Consequently, the most effective way to guarantee domination as well as private accumulation of wealth by the ruling class is the creation of the totalitarian State (Sklar 1979:537; Diamond 1987:569). These regimes have equally run the State as a private business, thereby personalising State power and liquidating constitutional authority. Since independence, Nigeria has passed through eight military jackboots in this order: Major-General J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi, General Yakubu Gowon, General Murtala Mohammed, General Olusegun Obasanjo, Major-General Muhammadu Buhari, General Ibrahim Babangida, Generals Sani Abacha and Abdusalami Abubakar. Accordingly, the civilian governments have taken the public space as a private business, thereby militarising the public sphere to ensure compliance from the masses. This is evidenced in the failed state status of Nigeria – which civilian governments have demonstrated even in democratic dispensations.

As politics is reduced to mere zero-sum game, in which the winner makes a sweepstake, leaving the loser prostrate, the political class in postcolonial Nigeria maintains that politicking by the wholesome tenets of democratic principles and the bettering of the condition of the masses are nothing short of sheer luxury that it cannot afford. Hence, the unbridled political schism and socio-economic exploitation in Nigeria characterise her politics: politics of violence, which the state furthers. On this score, “the state is viewed as the agent of the productive relations between a class of exploiters and a class of the exploited” (Jinadu 1980:100). It is against this backwater that the postcolonial Nigerian novelists’ art is forged. It is an artistic commitment aimed at transcending the postcolonial realities engendered by State violence. Herein lies the fact that the mainstay of this kind of literature is “to cognise and problematise the contradictions and alienation in human and social relationships from bourgeois ethics and psychology” (Lenin 1970:85). In this connection therefore, Martin Albrow has reasoned in his book, *The Global Age: State and Society beyond Modernity* that the “inability of the State to shape the aspirations of individuals and to gather them into collective political aims” (1997:75) have animated the dialectics of text and terror. This is so because the (Nigerian) writer in Niyi Osundare’s perspective,

is a person that people look up to, in whose works people are trying to see how they relate to the social, cultural and political problems that we are facing... (Na’ Allah 2003:470).

### **Text and Terror in Nigeria: An Overview**

A violent action is one which entails doing harm or damage to a person or thing; and this usually elicits pain from the receiver of the action, which violence produces. There is a reverberation of this in Gerald Priestland’s statement in his *The Future of Violence*: “... the essence of violence is that physical power is deliberately employed with the ultimate sanction of physical pain ...” (1974:11). Considered in the minimalist sense for the purpose of convenient discursive mould, violence, the sheer use of (physical) force to cause harm thereby creating emotional distress, physical pain and psychological desolation, spans the continuum of history. As indicated in the preceding argument, violence shaped Nigeria’s historiography and political architectonics; this experience percolates its literature, thereby linking the texts produced in this social space to terror (violence) therein. Hence in Trotsky’s notion, each literary work is a product of the materials drawn from a writer’s ambience or

social facts in a writer's social environment (Siegel 1970:13). Technically, the Nigerian novel is an upshot of social experience in Nigeria.

By extrapolation, the understanding of the dialectics of terror and text in postcolonial Nigeria is inhered in engaging with the dynamics of State violence and its fallout. It is within this matrix that Edward Said maintains that it is essential that a work of art (literature) be inscribed into its world so as to reveal the silenced interactions that unfold within it (Udumukwu 2006: 20). Moreover in order to negate terror, violence and dictatorship in the postcolonial Nigeria, writers, which include Chinua Achebe, Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan and Tanure Ojaide, among others, have taken literature as a platform for the negation of postcolonial tragedies. To this end, Bill Ashcroft considers African (Nigerian) literature as a function of "conflict between a dominant discourse and a local reality" (1). Accordingly, for a novelist (writer) to be relevant, there should be "a close relationship between his writing and his world, his society and life" (Kehinde 2005: 88). Here lies the dialectical nexus between terror and text. It is within this rubric that Joe Ushie x-rays the responsiveness of artists to the actualities in their social space:

In assessing their responsiveness therefore, it is necessary to gauge their art against the actual physical conditions of the society at the time when they compose. (2005:15-16)

Text and terror are indissoluble in the literary production of postcolonial writers, necessitated by the pressures of the moment to articulate the forces in society in their works through the creative process, thereby harking back to their traditional roles as moulders of thought and social commentators. This idea is in tandem with Achebe's preoccupation in his artistic enterprise:

In Achebe's view, the African (Nigerian) writer of our time must be accountable to his society; if he fails to respond to the social and political issues of his age, to espouse the 'right and just causes' of his people, he is no better than 'the absurd man in the proverb who deserts his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames. (Roger 1976:1)

In addition, postcolonial Nigerian writers appropriate art to delineate the mode of power relations between "the economically exploited, underprivileged masses of the society" (Ojaide 1996:24) and the State; this again crystallises in text and terror

rhetoric. The internecine relationship between text and postcolonial realities (terror) is a function of the nature of a writer's society (Lindfors et al 1972:8). The abortion of the bargained dividends of democracy, political independence and nationalist ideals in the wake of incessant military intervention in politics as well as political violence in Nigeria, (even during democratic regimes) has elicited aesthetics of intervention. Consequently, as Frederic Jameson asserts "... all Third World texts are national allegories..." (Aijaz 1994:95). To this end, the pestilential, despotic system in Nigeria since her creation till date provides an interesting material for the writers – which translates into their reconstruction of these events in society.

Aware of their oracular responsibility, Nigerian novelists (writers) have continued to produce a body of literature that adumbrates alternative values and political culture that eschew state violence and postcolonial disillusionment. This artistic mould saw the publication of the novels that decry the depraved state of Nigeria's nationhood. These works include *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* by Chinua Achebe; *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus* by Ngozi Adichie; *Season of Anomy* and *The Interpreters* by Wole Soyinka; *The Heroes*, *The Contract* and *Violence* by Festus Iyayi; and other works that chart a new historical course away from Nigeria's postcolonial political turmoil. For these writers, their artistic commitment to art that questions the legitimacy of Nigeria's postcolonial system bears testament to how this kind of literature is a correlate of terror; this nexus is made possible by the umbilical relationship that the former has with the latter. So, "art is the representation not of the body but of the forces which created the body" (Kazantzakis 1961:150). It is within the premise of using literature to refract the conjunctures in society as well as using it as a compass to navigate out of State violence that the connection between the text and terror finds resonance.

In portraying the forces at work against nation-building in Nigeria, the Nigerian writers have faced harsh and violent conditions; some of them have been exiled, incarcerated, terrorised, and cowed by the State. These writers include Wole Soyinka, Niyi Osundare, Ken Saro-Wiwa, among others. However, the Nigerian writer cannot baulk at their responsibility to use art (literature) to contest the public space – this is an integral facet of their vocation as moulders of thoughts, chroniclers of history, conscience of their age and critics. In this light, they believe "literature can play a

great role in straightening the patterns of change in Africa'' (Maduka 1984:13) – and Nigeria in particular. Commenting on the resolve of these writers to use art (text) to engage with the horrors in their society, Achebe dwells on the roles of writers in times of tyranny and political violence – and challenges them in this manner:

We must seek the freedom to express our thought and feeling, even against ourselves, without the anxiety that what we say might be taken in evidence against our race. (Roscoe 1971:122)

### **The Nigerian Novel and Form: Engaging Postcolonial Politics**

In *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson remarks that the “form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right” (1981:141). Preoccupation with the realities of violence as well as its implication in governance in Nigeria, has conditioned the craft of Nigerian novelists (writers) as well as their ideological persuasion. Therefore, form is shaped by the realities in a given social space – and this ultimately conditions the ideo-aesthetic colouration of a writer. Udentia’s statement lucidly bears up this position:

Man is variously understood and depicted from the perspective of the artist’s ideo-political impulses and weltanschauung. Form in art does not condition idea-content; it is idea-content that breathes life into the specific artistic forms used in Working them out. (31)

A diachronic survey of this artistic position shall be relevant in apprehending the import of this form of aesthetics.

Historically, the overarching consequences of slavery on African identity and heritage as well as the inhumanity meted to African slaves provided an artistic form that was inevitably focused on aesthetics of cultural re-affirmation: a literary culture that functions at the crossroads of an external struggle against cultural deracination. This animated the works of Phillis Wheatley, Olaudah Equiano, Ottobah Cuguano, and Ignatius Sancho, *inter alia*. Their writing was essentially steeped in the narrative of psycho-cultural and somatic violence they faced as a result of slavery and dehistoricisation project by the West that considers Africa as the Other. In their narrative style, they refracted in penetrating cadences their sanguinary experiences on the slave ships and on colonialists’ plantations. The concern and impact of cultural

erasure and displacement of the Africans, crystallises in what Bill Ashcroft *et al* describe as the burden of “‘place and displacement’” (1989:8). In like manner, the logic of the Senghorian and Cesairean Negritude movement was basically an ideological project of re-inventing the black race. Thus, this movement orchestrated a literary response that engaged with colonialist violence. Accordingly, writers like Birago Diop, David Diop and Aime Cesaire, among others directed their aesthetic dart to attenuating and erasing the impact of colonialism, which finds testimony in cultural violence.

In Nigeria as well as other African nations, the ledgers of postcolonial writers are replete with issues ranging from political corruption, State violence, to despotic governance, among others. In Nigeria particularly, the mode of governance in place has conditioned the form of writers’ craft; Nigerian writers’ quest for democratic and purposeful governance has been unwavering and unalloyed. All the military governments in Nigeria have ruled with Gestapo force, cruelty and intense violence against the subaltern and human rights activists; this is also true of civilian dispensations, which are mere cloning of militarised governments. The killing of the Nigerian ace journalist, Dele Giwa by letter bomb; the death of Kudirat Abiola; the hanging of the activist-writer, Ken Saro-wiwa with other Ogoni eight and the maltreatment of the Nigerian Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka by the powers that be are cases in point. This national tragedy in the thinking of Ihonvbere has consequently made the Nigerian State a wielder of immense power and violence, and this has left crisis of confidence in the State thereby creating a lingering flavour of violence and political contradictions (Raji 2000:76).

It is against this morbid, vertiginous landscape that Nigerian writers have used their craft to engage with the excesses of State and its machinery. In addition, the Nigerian writers’ commitment to depict the faces of State violence in their works stems from the fact that they see themselves as repositories of history, education and criticism (Ojinmah 1991: vii). In Festus Iyayi’s *Violence*, we witness a reconstruction of State violence and vicissitudes of life among the urban poor in postcolonial Nigeria petrodollar. The protagonist of the novel, Idemudia and his wife, Adisa, objectify the subaltern and marooned that are at the last rung of societal stratification, but who are determined to change their condition in the face of tyranny. Achebe’s political novels:

*A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah* bear testament to the act of using literature to address socio-historical issues that border on state terrorism, dictatorship and political corruption. In Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* and *The Interpreters*, there is decry of Establishment ideologies, societal anomie and monopoly of State violence. Within this seam, the portraiture of Tanure Ojaide's nameless protagonist, The Activist in his novel, *The Activist* distils ideo-aesthetic effort to transcend State terror and environmental exploitation.

The form of the Nigerian novel is a reflection of an intriguing interface between it and Nigeria's traditional values (Nnolim 1992:234). Thus, form is informed by the context or content of a work of art. A more radical facet of this argument is that the Nigerian novel is not essentially an independent entity that makes reference to nothing outside itself; it is not autotelic. In this connection therefore, in his *The Novel and Change in Africa*, Onyemaechi Udumukwu argues that

(...) critics who analyse a work in the light of its effects on social experience, agree that there is a connection between form and content. The novel brings together different aspects in one unit, i.e. the subject matter and the technique. (2006:7)

Deductively, the form of the Nigerian novel mediates the dialectics of a writer's responsibility to his environment; hence, form in this context is teleological – its architectonics is informed by social realities. In addition, Nigerian novelists recognise the blinding subjectivities of the day and the terror unleashed by the State in their works; their art is a protest against State excesses and anti-people politics. Crucial to this perspective is that the Nigerian novel is a child of social transformation; a genre that offers a blueprint to transcend the Nigerian experience.

### **Faces of Intellectual Militants in Nigerian Novel**

In an interview with Donatus Nwoga, Chinua Achebe brings to the fore the drive of Nigerian (African) writer:

I think we might be neglecting our proper function if we take anything for granted instead of thinking what exactly is our society, what are its needs, what can I do, what can I contribute; that is what I was trying to get at, and I think we have a very important function... this is only one of the roles of the writer... (Duerden & Pieterse 1972:7)

The essential duty of a writer in Nigeria, as gleaned from Achebe's statement above resonates with gross portrayal of the strategies to upturn justice as well as to fight for the downtrodden in the society. This creative preoccupation imbues writers with the fervour to see themselves as fighters for the marginalised and marooned – those at the fringe of the social space. Incidentally, one of Africa's postcolonial predators, Sekou Toure, stresses this position the writers have taken; in his opinion, there is no other platform for writers than to agitate for the rights of the de-humanised in the society (Fanon 1967:166). There is an exemplification of this aesthetic bent in the characters portrayed in the Nigerian novel – the faces of intellectual militants. Since the Nigerian writers may not be overtly political or engage in the political process per se, they could participate in the politics of the day through their artistic works.

Also the writers' formalist aestheticisation has undergone serious radicalisation, which finds expression in disengaging from the dreamy, farcical literature that looks at art from the inside rather from the outside. The writers' engagement in politics and fighting for the masses through their fictive works is crucial in critiquing as well as contesting the social space in the postcolonial era, when the pressures of tyranny has been redoubled in the wake of corporatist thraldom and state violence. Accordingly, the reaction of writers as they woke up from their "... opium dream of metaphysical abstractions ..." (Wanjala 1983:348) to depict reality in their social ambience is manifested in their works. Hence, "the reading of a text is intimately engaged in certain social, historical and ideological consciousness" (Udumukwu 2006:20). To this end, in Soyinka's *Season of Anomy*, Aiyero, the primeval status quo, which Ofeyi and the Dentist accept as the *modus operandi* for good leadership, is what is needed to put the society back on track on the heels of postcolonial brigandage and brutality. Thus the face of intellectual militancy is seen in the portraiture of The Dentist and Ofeyi, who are on the vanguard to better their society through their intellectual bent and agitation to espouse change by a call to the status quo ante. Similarly, in "Gabriel Okara's novel, *The Voice*, there is a strident interrogation of the prevailing state of cant in the nation in the 1960s" (Udumukwu 2007:9). In the novel, the face of intellectual militant is made manifest in the characterisation of Okolo, the protagonist, whose sense of search for the ideals of true nation culminates in people's conscientisation and political education.

In Achebe's political novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, there is a conscious effort in the craft employed to dramatise the power of intellectual militancy in transcending the trammels of State violence and inept order. We see this in Ikem and Chris – especially in the former. In espousing his intellectual militancy in order to change the militarised, elite-salving landscape in Kangan, the setting of the novel – an imaginary West African nation, Ikem has written a novel and a drama piece. And as the editor of the paper, *National Gazette*, “he has a more militant attitude towards the dictatorship” (Zapata 1993:224) in Kangan – aimed at changing the depraved status quo. Furthermore, unlike his fellow intellectual, Chris, “Ikem is militant and very outspoken” (Udumukwu 2007:77). Ikem's intellectual militancy culminates in his giving a lecture at the University of Bassa titled, “The Leopard and the Tortoise” (Achebe 152-161), which is an intellectual invective against Sam's dictatorship as well as a message to sensitise the masses about the nature and dynamics of His Excellency's (Sam's) State violence and chicanery. His speech is crucial in galvanising political development (Ojinmah 1991:102). As Chukwudi Maduka notes, as Ikem engages in this militancy, “he incarnates the spirit of social justice in Kangan” (Udumukwu 2007:77).

Odili in Achebe's *A Man of the People* symbolises another face of intellectual militancy in the Nigerian novel. His characterisation in the novel shows a foil between him and other intellectuals in Achebe's works like Professor Okong, who is portrayed as an agent of the political class in *Anthills of the Savannah*, and Obi Okonkwo, the extension of colonialism in *No Longer at Ease*. In this light,

What Achebe has done in *A Man of the People* (and *No Longer at Ease*) is to make it impossible or inexcusable for other African writers to do other than address themselves directly to (contemporary social realities) their audience in Africa ... and to tell them that such problems are their concern. (Ngugi 1972:54)

The essentials of the situation highlighted above regarding the duty of African (Nigerian) writers reside in intellectual militancy, which is being orchestrated through the characters they create – intellectual militants. In exemplifying this, Odili Samalu, the intellectual militant and protagonist of *A Man of the People*, mediates Achebe's

vision that the masses must not “give up” (Duerden & Pieterse 1972:13) in their fight to bring healthy change in society. In this connection, “Nanga, the villain, acts as a foil to Odili” (Dwivedi 2008:3); Odili’s intellectual militancy, finds resonance in the turf of good governance as against the elitist brand of politics that Nanga and his cohorts espouse in the novel. Achebe’s portraiture of Odili silhouettes intellectual militancy – particularly in the area of political participation to upturn social justice and good governance.

Also, in enervating the tragedies of postcolonial Nigeria sired by the instrumentality of State violence and misrule, Ngugi has re-echoed the need for the fictionalisation of postcolonial Nigerian realities through characters that foreshadow intellectual militancy as a means of socialising the people as well as challenging the mess made of leadership in Nigeria. According to Ngugi, this is a means to confront as well as transcend the leadership crises in Nigeria:

I believe that the African intellectuals must align themselves with the struggle of the African masses for a meaningful national ideal. For we must strive for a form of social organisation that will free the manacled spirit and energy of our people so we can build a new country... (1975:50)

Furthermore, intellectual militant characters like the ones Soyinka paints in *The Interpreters*, who routinely gather together to deliberate on how to move their country (Nigeria) forward, dramatise the place of paid-up intellectuals in effecting societal transformation. *The Interpreters* is a tale of five young Nigerian militant intellectuals trying to fit into the depraved Nigerian society to which they return after a period abroad. These militant intellectuals include Sekoni, Kola, Egbo, Bandele and Sagoe. Their views and militancy in critiquing as well as challenging the situation in modern Nigeria mark them off as agents of change. Also, Tanure Ojaide, takes a swipe at Nigeria’s failed leadership and sleazy oil politics through his militant intellectuals: Omagbemi, Ebi and the Activist. The Activist is the nameless protagonist in Ojaide’s *The Activist*. His image and portraiture – which find accommodation in political activism and intellectual militancy, constitute an ideo-aesthetic desire to change Nigeria’s moribund political leadership. Towards the end of the novel, intellectual militancy paid off: The Activist becomes the first elected governor of Niger Delta State – which was unprecedented (Ojaide 2006: 318); and State structure was

reformulated. Essentially, intellectual militancy in *The Activist* amounts to public lectures held by The Activist; sensitisation programmes he initiated to educate the community and his ideal by founding *The Patriot*, a Newspaper, which illuminates the minds of the inhabitants of the Niger delta concerning State violence, oil politics and environmental despoliation of their environment by the multinationals in cahoots with the political elite.

### **Transcending State Violence and Politics: The Writer and Change**

In *Martin Heidegger*, George Steiner argues that ‘to question truly is to enter into a harmonic concordance with that which is being questioned’ (1978: 69). What is being questioned in the postcolonial Nigerian experience is its politics of State violence and general misrule. Since Nigeria’s political independence in 1960, there has been palpable failure of political leadership; this is largely why it has been characterised as a failed state (Wunsch and Olowu 1995) or as having collapsed (Zartman 1995). Nigeria has witnessed more military government than civilian – and this has immensely contributed to State violence – hence the military rule by sheer force, which resonates with decrees and hegemony. The Nigerian state uses violence to silence opposition and to maintain compliance from the masses. In *State and Revolution*, Lenin presents a manifestation of state violence – which dramatises the nature of the Nigerian state, particularly during the heinous regimes of Generals Abacha and Babaginda:

The state is a special organisation of force: it is an organisation of violence for the suppression of some class. A standing army and police are the chief instruments of state power. But how can it be otherwise? (1917: 2)

Lenin’s question above finds answer in the literary productions of Nigerian writers (novelists), who use their artistry to sensitise the masses to match right with wrong; this dovetails with the Lukacsian theory of transforming the consciousness of the pauperised citizenry in his *History and Class Consciousness*, in order to galvanise change (Lukacs 1970: 80).

For a committed writer, his duty amounts to creative and ideo-political engagements that illuminate the mechanism and means of transforming his world. And this technically mediates articulating fictive works that offer insights into the inner

workings of the instantiated that needs change. By inviting readers (and the people) to his world – though fictive – the writer will be imbuing the people with the necessary stimuli to effect change. Hence, lived experiences are sheer reification of artistic conjunctures. The idea of political commitment by a writer, which emerges from the realities in his environment, is shaped largely by the dynamics of State violence and its fallout. In their provocative works, *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature*, Chinweizu *et al* touched on this unequivocally:

None can decide for the writer, as none can decide for the cook, the teacher, the soldier, doctor, merchant, lawyer... or politician. Each would have to decide which cause to serve by donation of his or her skill ... (The writer) can defend or attack the state, if that is where his impulse leads him... . (1980:254)

Accordingly, the writer's approach and aesthetic predilection are steeped in the spirit of the time. Thus, in congruence with this commitment, in Nikos Kazantzakis words, the writer has to “make decisions which harmonise with the fearsome rhythm of our time” (1961:4).

Furthermore, in transcending the postcolonial Nigerian malaise, the Nigerian novelists have opted for a change of consciousness through a body of literature that catalogues the ideals of the desire to alter the dynamics of power relations between the State and the citizens. They have also demonstrated the philosophical scaffold that underwrites the rhetoric of intellectual militancy. In like manner, Udumukwu has appropriately argued that

(...) in the current overwhelming desire for change the novel as a literary form has become both the channel for communicating the pattern of change and a powerful tool for fashioning out the desired change. (2006: 272)

In this respect, societal transformation amounts to what Ngugi in his *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams* referred to as “absolute art”, which is a logical antithesis of State violence and tyranny (Rodrigues 2004: 165). The art referred here in order to negate Nigeria's problems, should have utility value through its energies to contest the public sphere. This is the hallmark of Ngugi's thesis. As this type of literature distils ways of circumventing national morass, it would be foreshadowing Wole

Soyinka's perspective in his *Myth, Literature and the African World*: "one of the social functions of literature is the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purpose of a social direction" (1976:106).

Through history, the ability of the written word to transcend the ephemeral power of brute force and violence is well known. This brings to the fore the oft-quoted statement by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who said that "the pen is mightier than the sword". The analogy of the pen and the sword is a metonymic sound bite and does offer insight into the long-lasting and transformative energies of art in societal re-engineering. In his Nobel lecture entitled "Crediting Poetry", Seamus Heaney, the Irish poet noted persuasively the dynamics of art in circumventing State repression; art for him is a harbinger of ethical depth and values necessary for the masses to rise above the shenanigans of absolutism. This again points a flambeau to the form and character of artistic creation. Thus, the literary

(...) form is both the ship and the anchor. It is at once a buoyancy and a steadying, allowing for the simultaneous gratification of whatever is centrifugal and whatever is centripetal in mind and body. And it is by such means that Yeat's work does....: the power to persuade that vulnerable part of our consciousness of its rightness in spite of the evidence of wrongness all around it, the power to remind us that we are hunters and gatherers of values... (1995:9)

### **Pushing the Boundary: Intellectual Militancy and Nigeria's Underdevelopment**

The concept of intellectual militancy is neither a call to arms nor an effort at passivism or withdrawal to inaction; rather it is aimed at critically and intellectually questioning the basis and legitimacy of State violence, oppression and dictatorship, thereby replacing it with just and equitable order. It entails laying the groundwork for change, upturning truth – "the silent force", in Gandhi's locution; and effecting the redistribution of power. In "Men of the People: Chinua Achebe's Postcolonial Intellectuals and Politicians", Zapata offers a homologous view concerning the essence of intellectual militancy: this concept

(...) emphasises the potentialities of educated and competent professional civilians who should be instrumental in building a new democratic African society. (1993:227)

Following this, in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire insightfully argues that a “revolution is achieved with neither verbalism nor activism rather with praxis, i.e. with reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed” (1970:96). Although the reflection Freire talks about is not tantamount to a programme of praxis per se, rather, it is meant to conscientise the people about the inhuman world made possible by postcolonial Nigerian realities. The structure to be transformed in this instance is the dictatorial and repressive power relations between the State and the masses in Nigeria.

In Soyinka’s contention, intellectual militancy is more potent and efficacious than the crude and transient “victory” that violence engenders. This is because it borders on the mind and the intellect; this process is capable of going beyond the realm of the physical: it is ethically and morally based, thereby touching the very foundation of truth. This mirrors Steve Biko’s concept of intellectual militancy, which he says is deposited in the mind. In Biko’s opinion, the mind is the most effective weapon in the hands of the oppressed people in order to change their condition and world. Thus, engaging with the oppressor’s mind galvanises lasting change. Also, this idea inheres in Gandhi’s principle of “non-violence resistance”, which is hallmarked by Satyagraha, a philosophical and intellectual movement of non-violence, which utilises conversion instead of coercion in order to reach a just end that the oppressor is unknowingly obstructing. This pattern helped galvanise change in the Apartheid South Africa, where Mandela incarnates this ideal; it did foster change through Martin Luther King’s efforts during America’s Civil Rights Movement; and India’s independence was ground on its anvil. This is what Gandhi called “the force of truth”. In the Soyinkan parlance, “the route to the mind is not the path of the bullet nor the path of the blade, but the invisible, yet palpable path of discourse that may be arduous but ultimately guarantees the enlargement of our private and social beings” (2).

As the high hopes Nigerians evaporated in the wake of post-independence disillusionment, Nigerian writers started creating political-cum-artistic works to engage with the heartbeat of the times. This period of grand disillusionment, which eclipsed the bargains and dividends of Nigeria’s political independence, resonates with what Neil Lazarus refers to as Nigeria’s “preliminary overestimation of

emancipatory potentials’’ (1986: 50). However, this period called forth literature of engagement, which is a correlative of intellectual militancy needed to elicit change in the polity. In his *A Month and a Day*, Ken Saro-Wiwa delineated the power of literature to save the nation from postcolonial contradictions and State violence. He asserts:

Indeed, literature must serve society by steeping itself in politics, by intervention, and writers must not merely write to amuse or to take a bemused, critical look at society. They must play an interventionist role. (1994: 81)

This act of ‘‘intervention’’ celebrates the import of intellectual militancy. The militancy referred here is not physical (armed) violence, but pragmatic sensitisation via discourses, art and approaches that engender ethical withdrawal of consent by the people. This amounts to what Francis Waffert terms ‘‘the awakening of critical consciousness’’ (Freire 1970: 16), which exposes the intricacies of social discontents of oppressive order, thereby making societal change possible. Hence, people’s consciousness that is raised animates them to question the essence of State power, in that way challenging oppressive system therein. In Sharpe’s contention, this kind of process, which is ‘‘non-violent’’ in outlook, diffuses power as well as tears down the walls of unjust order. And over and above all, it brings lasting solutions to the problems made possible by brute force and state terrorism (1980: 62).

Consequently, to move Nigeria forward, intellectual militancy is a sine qua non; it is an alternative to tyranny – it ushers in real development, populist governance and for the foremost part, the consolidation of her fledgling democracy. This approach will in the final analysis reduce the incidence of national crises. To this end, Edward Said, one of the foremost intellectual militants in the Third World, has pointed out as follows:

The problem of democracy, development and destiny are real ones, attested to by the persecutions of intellectuals who have carried on their thoughts and practice publicly and courageously. (1986:45)

Therefore, intellectually committed militancy, the one that Nigerian intellectual militants (writers) illustrate in the novel is crucial to Nigeria’s national development. So, what these writers contend is that since such brand of militancy saw the withering

of State violence and oppression in the fictive world, which is a simulacrum of the lived world, it could happen in the real world; after all, art refracts reality. This shores up the fact that intellectual militancy could be the antidote to Nigeria's State violence.

### Conclusion

The main concern of this study is moored in transcending the beleaguering postcolonial Nigerian contradictions; and this attempt finds accommodation in the liberating energies of literature (the novel), to engage with postcolonial contradictions. This process crystallises in intellectual militancy, a concept that utilises radicalised intellectual engagement, ideo-aesthetic edification and political education to engage with inept order so as to upturn social justice. The strength of the foregoing resides in the fact that the Nigerian novel (art) is capable of generating the necessary stimuli for wholesome societal transformation. In its fictiveness, literature proffers disparate perspectives of existential problems and their solutions. Therefore, intellectually militant literature or discourse, the one that Tanure Ojaide, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Ngozi Adichie, *inter alia* write, is a veritable instrument for conquering State violence and postcolonial contradictions. Thus, postcolonial Nigerian writers' preoccupation is to illustrate through their works that change is possible through art on the heels of State terrorism and anti-democratic culture widespread in Nigeria.

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