Political Sycophantism and State Governance: A Political Discourse Analysis Reading of Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*

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Abstract:

Postcolonial discourse does not only interrogate western epistemology about postcolonial societies; it is a double-edged discourse that also analyses the activities of postcolonial states in order to establish whether they are not also responsible for their socio-political and cultural demise. This explains why issues of governance and political leadership are fertile discourses in postcolonial literature and cultural studies. This is so because the future of any society depends on how the society is governed. Thus, governance and leadership are the levers that can project a society to the summit of success or to the nadir of underdevelopment. This paper, therefore, aims at articulating the relation between postcolonial political drama and the governmental and leadership situations in postcolonial societies, especially in contemporary Africa. The paper shows how the ideological posture in postcolonial dramaturgy is an interpretation and dramatization of political governance and leadership management in Africa. From the theoretical paradigm of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA), this paper defends the premise that in Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit* (2002) the African postcolony is retrogressing in development because of the kind of political leadership that cropped up in Africa after most African countries gained political independence. This type of leadership and governance has been the trademark in most African states even up to contemporary times. In the play under study, there is an acute lack of visionary and patriotic leadership that can lay the foundation for meaningful development and progress. The political leaders and their sycophants in this play are most of the time indulged in political demagogy, paternalism, manipulation, and sterile propaganda which have very little to do with concrete development and progress in their nations.

Keywords: Postcolonial discourse, governance, leadership, postcolonial drama, political discourse analysis, and paternalism

Introduction

William Tordoff, in *Government and Politics in Africa*, gives a critical analysis of the political situation in Africa after the departure of the colonial masters. The critical spirit that animates Tordoff's work is that the dreams of independence have not been realised because of the excruciating hardship of the downtrodden masses due to the rigid individualism of the ruling elite. Tordoff lays the foundation to the argument that postcolonial discourse does not only interrogate western

epistemology about postcolonial societies; it is a multi-faceted discourse that also analyses, *inter alia*, the activities of the postcolonial nations in order to establish whether they are not also responsible for their socio-political and cultural demise. This explains why issues of political governance are fertile discourses in postcolonial literature and cultural studies because the future of any society depends on how the society is governed. Thus, governance and leadership are the levers that can project a society to the summit of success or to the nadir of underdevelopment.

Postcolonial African writers and political scientists have been extremely acerbic of the kind of governance and leadership posture in postcolonial states after the departure of the colonial masters; they interrogate post-independence leadership and wonder whether it was even worth the trouble fighting for independence. To this effect, M.S.C. Okolo, in *African Literature as Political Philosophy*, notes that "In post-colonial Africa those who emerged as leaders are made up for the most part of petit-bourgeois nationalists more concerned with replacing Europeans in the leading positions of power and privilege than with effacing a radical transformation of the state and the society around it" (127). In other words, Okolo's assessment alludes to the fact that the post-colonial African political elite, after replacing the European in the administration of Africa, has become more dangerous to the very existence of the African people because they are more interested in the grandeur and paraphernalia that surround the position of political power and not in meaningful economic and infrastructural development.

Using Niyi Osundare's play, *The State Visit*, this paper articulates the relation between postcolonial drama and public governance in postcolonial societies, especially in contemporary Africa. The paper shows how the ideological frame in postcolonial dramaturgy are an interpretation and dramatization of political governance and leadership management in Africa. In this connection, Thomas Postlewait, in "The Idea of the "Political" in Our Histories of Theatre: Texts, Contexts, Periods, and Problems", notes that "Politics can be situated in the idiolect of each dramatic text, performance' or event – that is, in the semiotic features of the documents, works, and actions, that give them specificity and particularity" (25).

This paper, therefore, postulates that in Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit* (2002) the African postcolony is retrogressing in development because of the kind of political leadership that cropped up in Africa after most African countries gained political independence. This type of leadership and governance has been the trademark in most African states even up to contemporary times. In the play under study, there is an acute lack of visionary and patriotic leadership that can lay the foundation for meaningful development and progress. The political leaders and their cronies in these plays are most of the time indulged in political demagogy, paternalism, manipulation, and sterile propaganda which have very little to do with concrete development and progress in their nations. The activities of the postcolonial government have helped to undermine and slow-down the nation-building project in contemporary African states. However, what is *political sycophantism* and how does it affect *state governance* in postcolonial societies?

The concept of *sycophantism*, or *sycophancy* as the case maybe, is derived from the noun

sycophant. The word sycophant, in itself, is derived from the Greek work "sykophantes" which has a whole range of synonyms: a flatterer; a swindler; an informant; a stooge; a lackey; or a yes-man. In other words, a sycophant is a person who uses exaggerated compliments, flatteries, or overstated encomiums to gain undue favours or advantages from another even to the detriment of others. In fact, a sycophant is Machiavellian and existentialist in character and strongly believe in the dictum of the end justifying the means. In this case, sycophantism is the attitude or behaviour of giving undue praises to a person or an institution in order to have unjustified favours from the person or institution or structure. By extension, *political sycophantism* could be seen as a political ideology which is aimed at defending a political system that controls a nation even when such a system is counter-productive to the wellbeing of the citizens. Those who indulge in political sycophantism hope to benefit from the largesse of their political leaders in the domain of appointments as the case maybe. In this case, political sycophantism is synonymous to patrimonialism or paternalism. Political sycophantism is different from patriotism because the former has to do with defending of political system in place because one is benefitting from the system while the latter deals with defending one's country. One can hate a political system that rules one's country but it does not mean that the person is not patriotic.

Another concept in political science and legal studies that needs to be elaborated upon is the concept of *state governance*. The word governance is a derivative from the verb "to govern" which signifies "to administer", "to manage", or "to control". In this connection, governance is concerned with the management and control of something – be it an enterprise, a corporation, or the state. Andrew Heywood, in *Key Concepts in Politics*, notes that governance is a broader concept than government. He defines governance as "any mechanism through which ordered rule is maintained is maintained, its central features being the ability to make collective decisions and the capacity to enforce them" (19). This definition shows that the concept of governance is loosely synonymous to administration since one cannot govern without administering or administering without governing. In this vein, the concept of state governance can be defined as the assemblage of all the institutional mechanisms and structures used by the executive arm of the state in the management and control of state activities and its citizens. This form of public control and management can be likened to public governance or administration.

Political sycophancy is a culture in contemporary African politics; it is this practice that has laid the foundation for a crisis in state governance. Preben Kaarsholm, in "States of Failure, Societies in Collapse? Understandings of Violent Conflict in Africa" examines the occurrence of political conflicts in postcolonial Africa and situates the cause of such conflicts in the way politics is practiced in Africa. According to him, the underdeveloped nature of Africa is caused by "its economic underdevelopment" although "a focus for debate has been whether the nature of African politics is in itself to blame for the economic crisis and lagging behind of nations" (3). In his article he asserts that the nature of politics in contemporary Africa is the cause of conflicts and underdevelopment in Africa because "Politics and the state in Africa are understood to operate through rent seeking,

personal rule and patrimonialism" (3). This practice is visible in African politics because the political or constitutional structure under which must African states operate has transformed the leaders into political leviathans who are above the institutions that are supposed to govern the nation-states. In this context, the postcolonial leaders control every aspect of political, economic, and social life of the nation; those who desire to get into the administrative machinery of the state must demonstrate unalloyed loyalty to the leader before they can be appointed to positions of power. Thus, in most postcolonial African states, appointments are based on the degree of loyalty accorded to the leader and not on managerial competence as could be seen in Osundare's *The State Visit*. It is this political culture of sycophancy that has led to corruption and bad governance in postcolonial African states.

Theorising Political Discourse Analysis

Theorising Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) and its adaptation as a critical-theoretical paradigm in the interpretation of postcolonial literary texts presupposes the existence of a discourse which can be described as "political". What then is political discourse? Discourse analysts such as Teun A. van Dijk, Paul Chilton, Norman Fairclough, James Paul Gee, and Theo van Leeuwen unanimously agree that the concept of political discourse is complex and, albeit, difficult to define. The complexity of the notion of political discourse has given rise to different definitions of the concept by different discourse analysts. Thus, van Dijk, in "Political Discourse and Ideology", "confined[s] political discourse to the institutionally bound text and talk of politicians" (20). In other words, he is of the opinion that "only those discourses of politicians are considered that are produced in institutional settings, such as governments, parliaments or political parties" (20) are considered as political discourses and "the discourse must be produced by the speaker in her professional role of a politician and in an institutional setting" (20).

Notwithstanding the ideas of Teum van Dijk and those of his peers, it is the standpoint of this paper that political discourse must not only be rendered by professional politicians in a given political context. This paper contends that any discourse that has a political content and directed towards a political goal or dimension can be described as political – irrespective of the person articulating it and regardless of the context. It is for this reason that political discourse, in the context of this paper, is seen as a verbal communication, either oral or written, which is aimed at passing across a political idea with the hope of having a political effect on the reader or audience.; it is a system of political knowledge rendered in a specific language for a specific purpose. Thus, political discourse is concerned with the discourse of political issues in a way that will influence the minds and actions of people in a political society.

Mindful of the above-definition, Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) could be described as an approach in political/cultural studies, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis which is concerned with the analysis and interpretation of political discourse at the triple levels of form, content, and intention. It is a discursive reading practice that tries to interpret political actions, texts, and talks within their expressive contexts and intentions. Proponents of this approach include, Teun A. van

Dijk, Paul Chilton, Norman Fairclough, James Paul Gee, and Theo van Leeuwen. This discursive strategy is based on the premise that political discourses, be they political actions, texts, or speeches, do not occur by divine prescience but are produced within specific political contexts. Consequently, the content-analyses of these discourses can only be meaningful when the political context of rendition is taken into consideration together with the intention of the discourse. Consequently, Teum A. van Dijk in "What is Political Discourse Analysis?", postulates that in the domain of political discourse, texts are mutually connected to their contexts since they are semiotic resources whose significations are informed by their contexts. Thus, "political discourse" Dijk says "should not be limited to the structural properties of text or talk itself, but also include a systematic account of the context and its relations to discursive structures" (15). Dijk's ideas are also shared by Adrian Beard who argues that texts are discursive products produced by authors "who live in the political and social world of their time" (3). Summarily, Dijk and Beard are of the opinion that political texts are semiotic agents which must be read in conjunction with their contexts in order to be meaningful and functional.

Most of postcolonial African literature could be described as political discourse because of their respective contents and visions. This is because must African writers present themselves, consciously or not, as political activists in their various societies. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, a foundational writer of political literature in Africa, forcefully argues that writers are political animals; thus, literature cannot be separated from political issues. This argument is buttressed in *Writers in Politics* where Ngugi posits that literature is coterminous with politics. In a Preface to the book, Ngugi contends that every writer is involved in politics and the only difference is the type of politics they are indulged into. In this context, Ngugi argues that "Imaginative literature in so far as it deals with human relationships and attempts to influence a people's consciousness and politics, in so far as it deals with and is about operation of power and relationship of power in society, are reflected in one another" (71). Niyi Osundare's *The State Visit*, therefore, could be expressed as postcolonial political discourse since its dramaturgical content and vision are political. Thus, this theatrical piece can only be meaningfully significant and functional when interpreted within the backdrop of its socio-political and ideological contexts an approach which is grounded in political discourse analysis.

The Crisis of Public Governance

Leon Trotsky, in "Class and Art", argues, *inter alia*, that there is a faithful link between art and the social class of the writer since a writer's social class provides the material cause and the vision of his artistic work. Thus, "Art is created on the basis of a continual every day, cultural, ideological interrelationship between a class and its artists" (81). In other words, literature, as political discourse, is the result of the creative consciousness of a writer who himself is a political animal and lives in the midst of other political animals and is affected by political decisions in his immediate social context. Therefore, Niyi Osundare's dramaturgy is a politico-literary discourse whose signification is deeply-rooted in the political context of the postcolonial society.

It is a radical political idiom on the irresponsibility of the postcolonial governing elite in the administration of the state. The ideological posture of the playwright is to expose how the lack of positive ideological foresightedness and insight in statecraft can plunge the post-colonial nation-state into an unfathomable socio-political crisis and imbroglio.

T. S. Eliot, in "The Frontiers of Criticism", argues that "[...] any critic seriously concerned with a man's work should be expected to know something about the man's life" (218). In other words, Eliot shows the important role of authorial biography in the interpretation of the author's work in question. This is because aspects of the writer's biography will enable the critic to understand the politics surrounding the content and the aesthetic slant of the work under examination. In fact, the strength of this argument is the reason why having a synoptic view of Osundare's biography is of categorical imperative. In this connection, Niyi Osundare is a Nigerian playwright, a poet, and a non-repentant literary iconoclast; he is one of the most popular and committed writers in Anglophone Africa especially in the domain of post-colonialism and neo-colonial theorization. In the preface to his collection of poems, entitled *The Eye of the Earth*, Osundare declares that he was "Farmer-born" and "peasant-bred" where he "encountered dawn in the enchanted corridors of the forest, suckled on the delicate aroma of healing herbs, and the pearly droops of generous moons" (xi). Osundare's declaration circumscribes him as a writer who grew-up in an agrarian and peasant background and still identifies himself with that social background of his birth. This explains why he represents the desires and aspirations of the suffering masses in his literary works as in *The State Visit*.

Furthermore, Christopher Anyokwu, in "The Essentials of Niyi Osundare's Poetry", describes him as a revolutionary writer whose artistic vision is "aimed at bringing about fundamental social change and a clear improvement in the quality of life and the economic emancipation of the lumpen-proletarian elements in society" (5). Anyukwu's statement finds relevance in *The State Visit* which is a postcolonial *dicta probantia* that dramatizes and also interrogates the lack of leadership foresight in the postcolonial fictional Republic of Yanke; it is a diatribe against political individualism as orchestrated by the ruling elite in postcolonial Africa. Yanke, therefore, is an extended metaphor of postcolonial states/nations, in general, where the ruling elites are more interested in their individual aggrandisement and absolutely uninterested and unruffled in the plight and miasma of despair of the downtrodden and destitute masses. Osundare's dramatic vision, thus, is to caution the post-colonial superstructure of the negative and devastating outcome of their political misdeed. It is in this context of political commitment that Wole Soyinka postulates that "When the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognise that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler or post-mortem surgeon" (21).

The title of the play is self-explicit because its discursive content revolves around a "state visit". In *A Dictionary of Diplomacy*, the concept of "state visit" is defined as "a markedly ceremonial nature paid by one head of state to another" (227). It further states that "the state visit may provide a cover

for important talks" (227). In other words, these descriptions show that state visits in international relations and diplomacy are functional in the sense that they serve as an occasion for the heads of state to discuss issues beneficial to their states. According to the *Monte Video Convention* of December 26, 1933, one of the attributes of the state is the "capacity to enter into relations with the other states" (Article 1). The capacity of the state "to enter into relations" with other states should be exercised only in the context where such relations are beneficial to the citizens of the state. This is precisely so because, following Jean Jacques Rousseau's principle of "the social contract", the state is a moral personality that has the moral responsibility to take care and protect its citizens. However, the envisaged state visit in the play is not one that can be of any beneficial significance to the people of the fictional postcolonial state of Yanke.

The play is about the Executive of the state of Yanke which is preparing to receive the Head of State of the Republic of Wilama who is coming to Yanke on a state visit. In international relations, when a president of foreign country pays a state/official visit to another country, it is supposed that the two states are discussing issues of bilateral concern that will eventually and mutually benefit both states. This is due to the realist view of international relations that the quest for national interest is the driving force in international relations. Thus Kenneth Minogue, in *Politics: A Very Short Introduction,* notes that "Realists claim that national interest remains, and indeed ought to remain, the lodestar of international relations" although he argues that "National interests are in some degree negotiable" (60). However, the state visit in the play has very little to benefit the masses of Yanke neither can it benefit the people of Wilama because the head of state of this country and that of Yanke share the same ideological consciousness – that of individualism and political vainglory. The visit is just a show of elite aggrandisement and national wastage. The entire preparation of the visit of the leader of the state of Wilama to the state of Yanke is a symbolisation of how postcolonial states lay emphasis and carry out lavish expenditure on things that are of no beneficial consequence to the majority of the masses. This is due to the fact that many postcolonial states are constructed on the basis of bourgeoisie capitalism where it is individual wellbeing that supersedes collective wellbeing.

The play commences when the entire Executive Cabinet of the fictional Republic of Yanke are in session to prepare for the visit of the Head of State of the Republic of Wilama. However, before the commencement of the cabinet meeting, Narrator appears at the beginning and end of the play and performs the role of the chorus in Greek drama. Narrator's discourse, before the cabinet meeting begins, gives an extensive depiction of the socio-political situation in the Yanke coupled with the irresponsible nature in which the leaders rule the state. Through Narrator, it is understood that the "land of Two Rivers" is "a land blessed with milk and honey, the softest and the healthiest of sunshine" (9). Despite these riches, citizens of this state do not benefit from her resources because "a few men fouled and mix the honey with cow-dung" (9). In other words, the country is suffering because the leaders are not administrating the state in a way that cannot lead to prosperity and the equitable wellbeing of the citizens because "the wealth is in the hands of a few kings and queens" and "The only possession the people have in abundance is poverty" (10). Narrator's discourse shows

that in this dystopian political context, the wealth of the society has been highjacked by the minority political elite while the masses languish in abject destitution. The attitude of these leaders, in the running of the state, shows that they are self-minded in their vision since they are concerned only with their wellbeing and not of the general wellbeing. In fact, the postcolonial or post-independence ruling elites are just a facsimile of the colonialists whose purpose was exploitation of the indigenous masses to their own ends. Thus, Adekunle Mojeed Animashaun, in "State Failure, Crisis of Governance and Disengagement from the State in Africa" argues that the nationalists who took over power from the colonialists after formal independence and later the soldiers have failed to transform the character of the state because "the post-independence governing elite have succeeded in deepening these attributes of the colonial state in post-colonial Africa" (4). These "attributes of the colonial state" include exploitation, corruption, and the insensitivity of the plight of the masses. In this regard, Adekunle contends that "The post-colonial state in Africa in several respects is a continuation of its precursor, the colonial state" for "It [has] inherited virtually all the salient features of its colonial forebear including its lack of legitimacy and capacity to deploy violence against civil society" (8). It is in this mindset, in the state of Yanke, that every sector of this society is corrupt from journalists, contractors, and the entire police force.

The Cabinet Meeting is presided over by the Head of State of Yanke (in the play he is simply called Head). From the perspective of onomastics, he is given the name "Head" in order to show his supremacy over the citizens which goes a long way to reveal his tyrannical nature. This explains why through, Osundare's use of stage direction, Head is portrayed as an autocrat who is deified by his ministers in his (mis)management of the state. The stage direction reads thus: "The stage is set for a state cabinet meeting" and "the Head of State is seated on a throne-like chair with a prominent backrest and gold-plated arm rests" (9). The playwright's use of diction and imagery such as "throne-like chair", and "gold-plated arm rest" conveys the image of a postcolonial emperor with the *locus standi* to administer the state according to his whims and caprices. Furthermore, the stage direction also notes that Head is "chronically obese" and "in army uniform" with "hefty soldiers in full combat fatigue, guns at the ready" (9). Samba Diop, in "African Elites and their Post-colonial Legacy: Cultural, Political and Economic Discontent – by Way of Literature" argues that "Africa's governmental ministers and those others appendaged to the all-powerful state apparatus ... all enjoy a quality of life that rivals the wealthiest individuals in the West". Thus, "This pillaging of the resources of the state by the neocolonial bourgeoisie leaves nothing for the toiling masses who are victimised by the lowest salaries in the world" (225). Diop's assessment finds relevance in the content-analysis of *The State Visit* because throughout the play, members of the bourgeoisie regime are interested only in their individual wellbeing and not that of the community. In this regard, the above diction/imagery gives the impression of an over-fed and individualistic megalomaniac who is interested only in his own welfare and not that of the political community of the state. This goes ahead to strengthen the fact that one is in the realm of the postcolonial police state where the army is deeply-involved in the political life of the state with the aim of defending the ruling system at all costs.

Interestingly, the State Cabinet meeting commences with the singing of the Yankean national anthem. The national anthem in any country is a patriotic song which is chanted by the country's citizens to show their loyalty to their fatherland. It relation to this Robert Neustadt, in "Reading Spanish American National Anthems: "Sonograms" of National Identity" contends that analyzing the lyrical, musical, political, and historical development of national anthems "offers insight into the negotiation of national identity" and "Reading the various versions and modifications to national anthems underscores the manner in which these songs reflect a specific political culture at a given time" (1). The anthem describes the state of Yanke in superlative and hyperbolic terms such as "Land of Lion", "Land of the Strong", "Land of Righteousness", "Land of Plenty", and "Land of Wealth" (12). The anthem further states that Yanke is a land of "Equal Justice" and "equal Peace" and "Where every robe is sumptuous silk" and "Known everywhere for its gentle laws". The content of the Yankean national anthem shows that it translates the political culture of peace, patriotism, justice, and nationhood. However, the discussions during the Cabinet Meeting show that these ministers, who are supposed to be the harbinger of the above political culture, are not patriotic but sycophantic - with the exception of the Minister of Finance. Their sycophancy results from the fact that they are more interested in defending the political regime in place for their individual gains and not the country in itself. According to these high state functionaries, the entire country can crumble but let the system remain since they are benefitting exorbitantly from it.

In fact, the unpatriotic disposition of Head is visibly seen in his opening address to his ministers. He announces to them that "A brother head of state from the Republic of Wilama is paying us a state visit next month" (13). Thus, the *ad hoc* Cabinet Meeting is to brainstorm on how to give the Head of State of Wilama a befitting welcome and a rapturous reception. Since birds of a feather flock together, the manner in which the Yankean president eulogies his counterpart from Wilama shows that both of them are ideological bedfellows. According to him, the President of Wilama is "a true son of his father" because "As a benevolent leader of his people", Head continuous, "he banned [s] parliament", and prefers "the direct rule of his family to the endless bickerings of that house of words where the only thing that gets done is nothing". "Believing as we here do that opposition is injurious to good governance", Head says, the president of Wilama "burnt down unfriendly media houses and dumped vocal critics in some safe prison behind the hills where they receive a real royal treatment!" (13). Jo-Ansie van Wyk, in "Political Leaders in Africa: Presidents, Patrons, or Profiteers" notes that "Contemporary African political leadership is neo-patrimonial featuring presidentialism, clientelism, the use of state resources, and the centralisation of power" (12). Van Wjk's statements captures the behaviour of the Wilama leader who rules the country as if it is his family estate. His rulership in Wilama also portrays him as a bourgeoisie monarchical dictator who does not care about the existential needs of his citizens. In this guise, van Wyk asserts that although political leadership can be coercive, "Good" political leadership is exercised in the public interest, rather than in leaders' self-interest" (17).

After Head has posed the problem and the purpose of the Cabinet meeting, the debate is

opened on how to raise the funds to prepare for the visit. The Minister of Public Morality says: "Our Head, Father of the Nation, our Most beloved leader, God-fearing, God-chosen to rule [...] you have spoken well. But money says: 'let nobody make any plans without me'. How much are we budgeting for this great visit?" (14). Achille Mbembe, in *On the Postcolony*, notes that personality cult is one of the features of postcolonial African politics and leadership. Most postcolonial leaders instil a reign of fear in their countries thereby raising up political lackeys whose purpose is to render absolute worship to the leader and not to serve the citizens they are supposedly appointed to serve. In this respect, Mbembe opines that, political flatteries are a culture in most postcolonial African states – since "flattery is not just produced to please the despot; it is manufactured for profit or favors. The aim is to share the table of the autocrat, to "eat from his hands". Thus, extraordinary deeds are attributed to him, he is covered with vainglory" (123). The Minister's use of these honorific phrases such as "Father of the nation", "our most beloved leader", "God-fearing", "God-chosen to rule" depict the deification of the leader in the Republic of Yankeland and, by extension, post-colonial societies as a whole. This is because most postcolonial states, after independence, were founded on the principle of paternalism – an ideological framework that breads tyranny and political sycophancy in postcolonial African.

Furthermore, Isabela Fairclough and Norman Fairclough, in *Political Discourse Analysis*, observe that "Politics is about making choices and decisions about what to do, what action to take in response to a situation. It is typically about making decisions in a context of scarcity" (26). In other words, politicians and policy-makers, in general, are bound to take decisions that will satisfy the interest of the highest majority. This, however, is not really the case in the postcolonial state of Yanke because the Cabinet meeting, in general, performs a semiotic role or framework; the meeting symbolises the fact that whenever these Cabinet Ministers are in conclave, the intention is to craft strategies on how they can conserve political power for their personal aggrandisement and not for the welfare of the postcolonial citizen. This view is grounded on the fact that when the discussion on how to raise funds to finance the occasion is introduced, different proposals come up which do not take into consideration the general wellbeing of the citizens. Head suggests that the state can "Borrow it from a friendly nation "or "Take it from America" because "America will give you anything as long as you promise to have nothing to do with the Russians" (17). The suggestion of Head shows that the state of Yanke is prepared to indebt itself and impoverish the postcolonial masses just to make sure that this state visit holds. This attitude relates to the absolute mismanagement and inability of the governing elite in postcolonial societies to prioritise their wants. It is interesting that the Head is proposing to borrow money to fund an event which does not yield any dividend to the state.

In addition, the Minister of Public Morality shamelessly suggests that the state should "print more money" (18) in order to finance the visit – an idea which is supported by the Minister of Agriculture. However, it is the Minister of External Affairs that cautions them of the negative economic consequences of printing money in a country since "the supply of money will exceed the

quantity of goods, and the result will be inflation" (18). Peter Shirlow, in "Governance", argues that effective governance must take into consideration the participation of the citizens in the management of the affaires of the state. In this context, he argues that "Governance thus increasingly deals with issues relating to the mechanisms required to negotiate between various and competing interests" (43). The mentality of the Minister of Public Morality shows that the postcolonial ruling elites do not usually count the costs of their actions; they can go to any length to satisfy their individual political egos regardless of the consequences on the state and the masses as a whole. Nevertheless, at the end of the Cabinet Meeting it is resolved that the Maize Fund money (six million arina), earmarked to help farmers improve their agricultural productivity in Yanke, should be diverted to the Welcome Project. This proposal is made by the Minister of Public Morality which is supported by the Minister of Agriculture, and finally endorsed by Head who declares that they should "Transfer the entire amount to the Welcome Project" (18-19). On his part, the Minister of Finance argues that it is unreasonable to use money for the Maize Project because he had "already told the nation about the Maize Project at a wildly publicised press conference" (19). The views of the finance minister show that he is a man of conscience who believes that it is unfair for him to start shewing his words about the project after he had publicly and officially announced it. Head, in his characteristic tyrannical nature, hushes the minister by reminding him that "We can always unsay what we have already said" (19). He, thus, is insinuating that the state can go as far as coercing journalists to tell lies that the state has mentioned nothing of the sort.

In this guise, the state waylays the media to announce that the Minister of Finance said nothing about the Maize Fund project and that the mass media and the general public misinterpreted him. The state of Yanke, thus, is manipulating the mass media to serve her purpose against the general. This attitude of state-media manipulation is a visible attribute in postcolonial societies. In fact, Christopher Ochanja Ngara and Edward Ndem Esebonu, in "The Mass Media and the Struggle for Democracy in Africa: The Nigerian Experience" mentions that during the reign of Sani Abacha (1993-1999) the media suffered continuous persecution in Nigeria. They argue that during these years "General Sani Abacha embarked on a brazen elimination of perceived and imagined opposition against his rule particularly the mass media and pro-democracy groups who opposed the continuation of military rule" (187). The situation in Nigeria at the time, as painted by Ngara and Esebonu, is synonymous to the situation in the fictional post-colonial society of Yanke where the state is operating on the logic of suppressing media organs that she considers aggressive against the state. In this regard, the Minister of External Relations tells Journalist to lie the public that he "just had and fruitful discussion with the Cabinet and discovered that the six hundred million arina announced by the Finance Minister last week for the Maize Project has, in fact, not been received" and "the Minister announced it (hesitates) by mistake" (21). The statement of the External Affairs minister is an indication that the state of Yanke is one whose *modus operandi* is based on the manipulation of information and the media in general. This idea is further buttressed by Head who affirms that "We control the newspapers and the radio and the television, and we can always tell

them what to say. Afterall, we spend a lot on these media and we must get our money's worth (21). In addition, after coercing the journalist to manipulate the information to the public, Head boasts that they owe no accountability to the citizens because they were never elected by them. This justifies why the postcolonial regime has the latitude to do whatever it wants because it does not enjoy legitimacy. Thus, "We have the people in our hand", says Head and "We decide what they eat, where they sleep, when they live, when they die. We may banish them, dissolve them if we choose. Our government owes nothing, absolutely nothing to their existence" (22).

The president's statement portrays the overbearing nature that the regime wields on the postcolonial subjects in the society. The statement portrays the postcolonial state as a monster which is predisposed to crush any acts of rebellion from any sector of the country, since "Our government owes nothing, absolutely nothing to their existence" (22). This declarative statement by Head is reminiscent of most postcolonial patrimonial rulers who are above the laws in their country and are endowed with powers to administer the country without any accountability. In fact Peter Takirambudde et al, in "Civil Society in Governance and Poverty Alleviation: A Human Rights Perspective" notes that "Lack of accountability and transparency ... contributes to poverty and economic stagnation or recession by facilitating corruption. It is not uncommon to find poverty running rampant in countries with rampant government corruption" (70). This comment captures the situation in Yanke where corruption and lack of accountability are institutionalised political cultures amongst the ruling elite.

More so, the activities of the state also endorse the fact that there is heavy state censorship and even students are not predisposed to read any book of their choice since the state censors the books that enter the country. This is an important hallmark in most autocratic societies where the ruling oligarchy controls the books and documents that the citizens read. In these societies, citizens are banned from reading any book whose ideology is not *in tandem* with that of the state because of the fear of an uprising. When the External Affairs minister comments that students in Yanke are demonstrating because of communist books from Cuba, Head is furious and wonders how the students had possession of these books. He further comments that "One of the first progressive acts of this government was to ban all foreign ideologies, burn all Communist books, and impose heavy penalties on whoever tried to import them into our country" (23). Head's statement reveals his ideological posturing as one who is bourgeoisie capitalism, not Marxist-Leninism. In addition, the Yanke people do not have the freedom to express their views concerning the ruling of the nation. Even at the level of the university, students and lecturers do not have the right to freely express their political views especially when these views are against those of the rulers of the state because, just like in all dictatorial states, informants have been hired to report and blacklist those who project political ideologies which are contrary to those of the ruling elites. During the Cabinet Meeting, the Minister of Public Morality advices Head that the regime should device ways of handling and silencing students/lecturers who are criticising his government/regime. Thus, "My Head", says the minister, "as our people say, a desperate problem needs a desperate solution. Instead of sitting here and

shivering like women .... I mean .... Like cowards, let us think of how to handle these students so that they don't ruin the good work our government is doing" (23-24). The Minister of Public Morality's views are ironical and satirical because the activities of the regime are not one that any rational analyst will describe as "good work our government is doing". Interestingly, Head accepts the proposal and affirms that "We shall tighten our security belt, recruit more spies among students and lecturers ... and send more of our spies on the campus" (24).

Throughout the discussion on how to manipulate the media to give a faulty information on the Maize Fund, the Minister of Finance is silent. His silence connotes that he is not in accord with what the government wants to do. In fact, Head enquires from him why he has been so silent throughout the discussion. He says: "Now, Finance, what is inside you that has kept you so silent since ...." (27). Head's worry is because he is suspecting that the Minister of Finance does not support the decision, they have taken concerning the Maize Fund. The same fear is also expressed in the utterance of the Minister of Agriculture. "Yes, I too have observed that he has said nothing for many minutes now. Heeen? What is your problem? You better talk now or we may mistake your silence for a conspiracy against our government" (27). The statement of the Minister of Agriculture shows that in the Yanke society, no one has the right to his opinion even the government ministers; they must follow the dictate of Head else they will be seen as treason against the state. Despite these threats the Minister of Finance, being a man of conscience, criticises the entire cabinet that they do not feel for the destitute masses by diverting the Maize Fund for a meaningless state visit. He lambasts them in the following rhetorical questions: "What is there to say when rulers have turned liars like prophets of the Bar Beach; when those pretending to be statesmen say one thing while they mean another? What am I to tell the poor people of Yanke? That their long and painful suffering and starvation have to continue because their Hunger Relief Funds have been diverted to the hosting spree of overfed dictators and their followers?" (27). Through the use of the flashback technique, minister goes ahead to explain how the Maize Fund came about; it was because of the famine in Yanke that caused the entire world to help the state with the funds which is being unjustly syphoned to a meaning state visit. The Finance Minister's critical stance on the state is responsible for his dismissal and his eventual death in the play. He is a signification that in the Yanke society any criticism against the state is synonymous to death or imprisonment.

The second act of the play is antithetical to the first act both in setting, characters, and the general discursive issues in the act. The setting of this act is at the "Frontage of an opulent Supermarket with large shop windows flaunting the latest in European fashion with large shop windows flaunting the latest European fashion" (30). The characters who are involved in the act are Sule, Etim, Obi, and Abeke. There are mendicants and sitting at the frontage of this supermarket is their mainstay so that they can beg from buyers/customers who come to the supermarket to purchase goods for themselves. Giuseppe Veltri, in "Social Semiotics and Social Representations" notes that in social semiotics "The focus of attention is the social life of signs, with the intention of considering the social and cultural context of the process of sense-making" (239). In this guise,

this act is a semiotic rendition of the effects of bad governance and the mismanagement of political power on the citizens in contemporary Africa because these characters have turned into beggars because of the horrible way in which the state governs the country. It is for this reason that in the dialogue among themselves, Obi describes themselves as "victims of fortune at the mercy of a merciless world. Remember, nobody gives you anything unless they have been so instructed by their *dibia*, or *babalowo* or *afaa*" (30-31). Sule's reply shows that the beggars have now resigned to fate and their only hope is divine intervention. He says "Here God is the patron of beggars: his injunction provides us with everything. Fridays and Sundays, barrel-buttocked women (*demonstrated*) with their gold teeth, men in agbada, trying to please God by throwing a few coins in your bowl" (31). Obi and Sule's statements show that the state of Yanke does not have social welfare policies to take care of the underprivileged like the beggars; they are left to themselves and at the mercy of well-wishers.

While performing their customary activities of begging, the mendicants recount their stories to one another on how they came to be scroungers. Sule, who is blind, was never blind from birth. Following his discussion with Etim, he reveals that he used to be a labourer at a textile mill in Lagos before he became blind. Unfortunately for him "An outdated, badly serviced boiler burst open and poured its contents on my head. For several months, I was told, my neck was white like that of an albino. *(Pause)* Ah that terrible day! Humming machines and fleeing workers were the last I saw. And then everything went dim!" (31). Sule describes the boiler as "outdated" in order to bring to consciousness that the Yanke society is still very underdeveloped and the conditions under which workers work are not secured. The archaic nature of the boiler, therefore, is a connotative agent that symbolises the archaic nature of the entire country. What is really sad about Sule's situation is that the company, under which he was working, compensated him for six months but the Personnel Manager of the company "asked for one tenth of my allowance" (31). In other words, the Personnel Manager enjoined him as a condition that he must bribe him before continuously taking his compensations or allowances. Sule refused to abide to the demands of the manager because, as he says, "the rest would not feed me for one week". The manager retorted by expunging his name from the payroll and register of the company. One hearing this very sad account, Etim admonishes him that "You should have protested. Your rights! Your rights!" (32). Etim's response to Sule's story shows his revolutionary nature and keeps one in suspense on how the play will end – whether in a revolution or otherwise. Nevertheless, Sule replies to him that "Six times I tried to speak to the Chairman, but the secretary wouldn't let in. She said I would dirty the rug in their office" (32). The Personnel Manager's attitude depicts the corrupt mentality of bosses in postcolonial Africa who will stop at nothing to extort money from workers who depend on them for their existence and subsistence.

Obi is another beggar whose story is also as pathetic as Sule's own. He is a pushful and diligent character who lost his parents "during the civil war" but has been struggling to survive in this dystopic postcolonial society. In fact, the stage direction states that "all along he (Obi) has been

watching with attention" (32) when Sule was recounting his ordeal. His attention comes from the fact that he too has a similar story of suffering and affliction from the hands of exploitative personalities in the Yanke society. In this guise, when Etim tells Sule that he should have protested when the personnel manager of the textual mile in which he was working treated him shabbily, Obi rebukes him thus: "Etim, you talk as if you don't know how easily the weak crumble under the weight of the powerful" (32). The exploitation of the weak by the strong is a similar experience that Obi goes through. He recounts his own story that he was a schoolboy in Enugu but had to work as a houseboy to pay his fees. One day, they were trying to move a new piano upstairs their master "had presented to his daughter for her birthday" (32). The piano is a semiotic resource to indicate that Obi's employer was a bourgeois in the Yanke society. In the process of carrying the piano, "The other houseboy fumbled and the big thing crashed down and landed on my back. That was the last time I ever stood on my own legs" (32). It shows that Obi's paralysis comes as a result of an accident he had at his jobsite of which his employer did no compensation for that. Instead, he was in the hospital for two years and was unattended to and "the birthday girl" never came to visit him. Instead "during one of her vacations, she sent me a card from London with the message: 'GET BACK ON YOUR TOES QUICK!' (32). The message on the card, which is written in upper case, is connotatively cruel and exploitative. In fact, it is a command for Obi to get back on his "toes quick!" so that they will continue to enslave him. The shabby treatment given to Obi, by his employers, depicts the bourgeoisie exploitation in the post-colonial Yanke society.

Abeke also recounts her story as a beggar. She was born blind and was sexually assaulted by a gang of young men who probably were jobless youths who had nothing to do in order to earn a living. In answering the question on what caused her to be a beggar with a baby on her back, she recounts her story thus: "Sometime last year, I was sitting under the bridge at our usual place near Koto. It was in the evening. Suddenly, I heard a truck pull up by the roadside, and about three men jumped down and pounced on me" (33). As she continues her narrative, she notes that she was taken to a house where she was handed over to the leader of the gang who finally raped her and she became pregnant. She recounts the scene as follows: "And what a terrible room that was: smelling so strongly of alcohol and other things. I felt like throwing up .... The master came close again breathing hard. He must have been a really fat and heavy man. His breathe as hot and seemed to choke the room. [....] I summoned all the strength in my little body and rammed my right knee into his big stomach. He fell back with grunt, then shouted for his thugs to come. They rushed in, held me down while their master .... The result is the baby I hold in my hands" (34). Although she was kidnapped in the presence of the other beggars, they were helpless and could not do anything substantial and concrete to rescue her.

In fact, Isabela Fairclough and Norman Fairclough note that "The development and pursuit of political strategies, with the ultimate goal of transforming the world in particular ways, is an essential feature of political action" (24). However, the "political strategies" foregrounded in the running of the state should be directed towards the common good of the citizenry. In this view,

the above-stories and experiences of these beggars point to the fact that the state of Yanke does not have credible humanitarian policies to take care of underprivileged citizens since the victims are not directly connected to them. What is interesting is that the state sends the police force to oust the beggars because of the state visit instead of solving their problems. In an argument with the beggars, the Policeman warns them that "Maybe not, but right now you are sitting on the head of the law. Something important is about to happen here. Our country is expecting a guest and this (*pointing*) being our main street, must be completely, thoroughly, mercilessly ... clean" (37). The beggars, on their part, tell the policeman that they cannot live the streets because the street is their home (37) and they have nowhere to go. While Policeman sees them as "a disgrace to the nation" and "a dirt of our streets" (38), Sule retorts that "they are the conscience of the nation, the scruple of the streets" (38). In fact, according to Sule, "We beggars must unite against these injustices. Just consider this: the rich steal your food and then punish you for being hungry. Our rulers cast us on the streets and then jail us for homelessness ..." (38). In this context, the beggars start reflecting on the possibilities of creating a beggars' trade union. Sule says: "... Yes, we should unite – all the beggars in this country. I understand that in Ganisel, a country just a few miles from us, beggars have a trade union ..." (39). The action of Policeman shows that in Yanke, the state is only clean when there is an external visitor in order to create an impression of a clean and organised state that does not really exist.

Sadly enough, some members of the postcolonial cognoscenti have been infiltrated by the ruling elite and the few who have refused to sycophantise the system are victimised. Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist, in "The Formation of the Intellectuals" argues that intellectuals have a crucial role to play in their various societies because they help in shaping minds and contributing ideas that can help in the positive development of their society. He states that "All men are intellectuals [...] but not all men have in society the functions of intellectuals" (1140). In other words, intellectuals are relevant in their societies in terms of their functions and not of their titles. It is in cognizance of this that Gramsci further postulates that "The mode of being an intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passion, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, "permanent persuader" and not just a simple orator" (1141). In a second Cabinet Meeting to evaluate the level of preparation of the visit, a university professor who had been assigned to write the welcome speech for the occasion is summoned by the Head to give a report on his assignment. The stage direction describes Professor thus: "Professor appears in an outlandish, obviously uncomfortable three-piece suit; an oversized black academic gown whose tail sweeps the floor behind him, giving him the look of an old penguin; and round-rimmed Victorian spectacles" (46). Through this description, the playwright satirises contemporary African intellectuals who allow themselves to be manipulated by the political lords. In fact, when this Professor appears before the Cabinet, Head says: "Eee, Professor, welcome. I ask people to bring you so that you can tell us how far you have gone with the welcome address" (46). The Head's statement shows that he has no respect for the professor who is supposed to be an intellectual. He says that "I asked people *to bring you*" and not "to invite you". The Head knows that

using the verb "to invite" will mean that he is according respect to a professor he has no respect for. Professor's response depicts a prototype of personality cult in postcolonial Africa. As one reads into the discussion between Head and Professor, it is realised that he accepts this assignment because he is expecting to be appointed as the principal of the University College in the state of Yanke.

Religious institutions, both traditional and modern, which are supposed to be the moral conscience of society are conniving with the state to victimise the downtrodden masses. The corruption and negative infiltration of these institutions in the state of Yanke, by the ruling oligarchy, alludes the statement by Jon Abbink, in "Religion and Politics in Africa: The Future of "The Secular" where he notes that "political leaders' use of religion, including in Africa, is often highly dubious and opportunistic – a way to keep power and influence others" (85). These institutions are more interested in material things than spiritual and moral upliftment of the society. When Head enquires whether the Minister of Agriculture has consulted "the Rain-maker" to use his magical powers to prevent rain from disturbing the state visit event, the minister answers in the affirmative. "Yes, my Head, says the minister, "This time he is taking five million arina to keep the skies quiet for three days. *(The other Ministers open their mouths in amusements at the cost, but none utters a word)*" (55). Thus, the Rain-maker is asking for a sum/bribe of five million arina in order to prevent rain from falling during the occasion. The reactions of the other cabinet ministers, as seen through the stage direction above, show that they are flabbergasted with the amount but they are helpless to say anything since the Head is in support of the amount. In accord, the Head remarks that "Let him have anything as long as he does the job" (55). Moreover, the Head, also, inquires to know whether religious organisations have been contacted, the Minister of Public Morality answers in the affirmative. She says that she spoke to the Archbishop of Yanke and the Chief Imam of Yanke and the state visit. "They have promised", says the minister, "interdenominational prayers on Friday and Sunday. The have assured us that the Almighty God is behind this great government and its God-fearing Head. No cause for alarm. They are praying for success of the visit. God is on our side" (55-56).

In a bid to immortalise this event, Head appoints a new Medalsmith to fashion him a new medal for the occasion. Head, like must dictators in postcolonial societies, is only interested in issues that will project his self-image. According to the Ministers of External Affairs and Agriculture, the medal does not befit the dignity of the Head. In corroborating this fact, the Minister of Finance argues that "We judge a nation by the crown of its ruler. It is a widely accepted fact that a ruler is nothing without his medals. Look at Britain; they put the best of their diamonds on their monarch's crown: Napoleon's crown was not only made of the rarest French minerals; at his coronation he placed the crown on his head!" (50). The post-colonial state is one that depends on external trivialities and not on concrete programmes that can activate development in the society.

More so, the Painter who is called to paint the picture of the visit refuses the assignment saying that he cannot participate in the project of dictators. In his bluntness, he declares to Head that he is "not a public painter" and that his "brush wrinkles the face of tyrants" (51). In other

words, the painter, as a committed artist of good conscience, does not use his art as a panegyric symphony for dictators but as an instrument of criticising their irresponsible and authoritarian leadership. This is unlike the Medalsmith who has compromised his art in support of an illegitimate and tyrannical machinery. In this regard, Ulrike Auga, in "Intellectuals Between Resistance and Legitimation: The Cases of Nadine Gordimer and Christa Wolf" explains the role of the intellectual-writer in shaping the destiny of their society as is the case of Nadine Gordimer from South Africa, and Christa Wolf from Germany. He expostulates the view that "writers [artists in general] act as public intellectuals within the processes of transformation undergone in their respective societies" (192). The painter is a semiotics of the remnants of postcolonial artists who have not been corrupted by the ruling elite to use their art in praise of them. Head is flabbergasted to hear the Painter's refusal to carry out this assignment for him and the state. Head tells the Cabinet: "Just wait, Lady and Gentlemen. Let us hear him well. *(To Painter)* So you refused to paint the picture of me and my visiting friend – the picture we are to put in the market-square? (51). The Painter responds that "The brush has a pulse which only responds to the feelings of humans; monsters need a witch's broom for her self-image" (51). His refusal to paint Head's image causes his arrest and his eventual incarceration (51-53). The Painter, nevertheless, retorts that "My allegiance is to those lead bones which fatten the paunch of the rich" (54). On the instruction of the Head, he is arrested and taken to the prison cell called "Chamber 40" (54).

Finally, Emmanuel Ngara, in discussing the role of the African writer in national liberation and socio-political reconstruction, notes that "In any epoch literature either supports the ideology of the ruling class or opposes it" (130). The ideological conflict in Osundare's dramatic text is between the ideology of the ruling class, which could be likened to the bourgeoisie ideology, and that of the mases, which is akin to socialist-communitarian ideology. The political vendetta between the ruling bourgeoisie class and the proletarian masses is related to Karl Marx observation in the opening lines of *Manifesto of the Communist Party* that "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" which leads to "a revolutionary reconstitution of society, at large, or in the common ruins of the contending classes" (9). In this context, the play ends with a social revolution against the ruling bourgeoisie elite, thus, portraying Niyi Osundare's dramatic ideology as one of Marxist-socialism since every writer is associated with a social class (and ideology) which sharpens his world view and vision of art. In fact, the stage direction talks about citizens of all works of life and ages holding placards with radical messages alluding to the mismanagement of the resources of the state. These placards are a semiotic representation of the general frustration of the people against their leaders. In order to show their frustrations, the crowd composes a song which could be termed radical. The content of the songs shows how the people of Yanke have suffered under the rule of the Head.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Per Wasberg, in "The Role of the Writer in Modern African" argues that "One of literature's tasks is to help people understand their own nature and make them realize that they

are not powerless" (24). In other words, literature should be functional and most have the spirit of galvanising a people for action against societal activities that posse as a threat to their existence and wellbeing. In this regard, this paper set out to show the relationship between political sycophancy and governance in post-colonial societies as expounded in Niyi Osundare's dramatic discourse, *The State Visit*. The play is a critical articulation of Osundare's political epistemology which is based on the perspective that no society can develop where political sycophancy has been established as a political culture. This is because in the present context of post-colonial political sycophantism, appointments are carried out on the basis of how the individual can praise and hero-worship the despot and not on the basis of any competence. Thus, when hero-worshipping is seen as a way of ascending to political leadership, mediocrity and mismanagement of the scares resources of the state become the inevitable consequence. This explains why the fictional post-colonial state of Yanke is constantly sinking into the abyss of underdevelopment and continuous hardship and misery. When this situation continuously persists, the possibility of a popular social revolution becomes evident as it is witnessed at the end of the play.

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