

**IRRESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP AND THE DENIAL OF TRUE DEMOCRACY IN
NIYI OSUNDARE'S *RANDOM BLUES***

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DEMOCRACY IN NIYI OSUNDARE'S *RANDOM***

BLUES

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CERTIFICATION

I certify that this study was carried out by **IGBINOVIA ENDURANCE** with Matriculation Number **ART1510026** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God for His kindness towards me and my family.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Study:

This essay studies the artistic depiction of social injustice caused by mishandling of democracy arising from the reckless misconducts of those entrusted with public offices. Niyi Osundare's collection entitled *Random Blues* (2011) is employed in our literary investigation of how irresponsible leadership has eroded societal values that guarantee dividends of democracy.

1.2 Scope of Study:

Niyi Osundare is always concerned with failure of leadership in society hence he has many collections that bother on socio-political and economic collapse of his society. This study is however limited to only one his poetic collections entitled; *Random Blues* (2011) because the poems in the collection adequately capture the pains of the masses caused by bad leadership.

1.3 Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology. This method involves a close and detailed reading of a literary text before a critical analysis is carried out. The poems in the collection *Random Blues* are read in detail and excerpts that captured abuse of power, misconducts in public offices and depiction of social collapse are analysed with insight from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' Marxist theory.

1.4 Theoretical Background

This essay employs Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' Marxist criticism. Marxist theory deals with ideological principles that condemn the use of socio-political and economic mechanisms by the oppressive class (leaders and capitalists) to exploit and deny the masses decent life in society. Marx and Engels see those in charge of society's political and economic affairs as exploitative therefore they propound this theory to condemn abuse of power which hinders the less privileged masses' happiness. People beneath irresponsible leaders both in the business circle and government find it difficult to survive in society. To this end Marxism is conceived as a weapon against all forms of exploitation and tyranny. Maynard Solomon argues that "Marxism is the symbolism of dialectical conflict, of drama, of the unity of opposites, of revolutionary change, of matter and man in motion, constantly transcending the moment, pointing into the future" (17). Solomon sees Marxism as an ideological tool that seeks to liberate society from the selfish people who control every divided society. The tenets of this theory satirise the promotion of bad leadership arising from exploitation of the weak. Ann B. Dobie considers Marxism as an ideological mirror that attacks the antics of irresponsible leaders and captains of industries. She notes that:

in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), in which they identified class struggle as the driving force behind history and anticipated that it would lead to revolution in which the workers would overturn the capitalists, take control of economic production, and abolish private property by turning it over to the government to distribute fairly. With these events, class distinction would disappear. (80)

Dobie's observation reveals that Marx and Engels' theory encourages leaders in government to take charge of society's economic activities so that they can go against oppression and

exploitation which are the banes of injustice and inequality in society. Those in government however see power as theirs and as a result they abuse it. This is similar to the class struggles between the bourgeoisie (Capitalists) and proletariat (labourers). Selfish leaders take away the power that belong to all and place it in the hands of few nasty leaders. Dobie further reveals that:

as early as the sixteenth century, capitalism became a fully developed system with the growing power of the bourgeoisie in the mid-nineteenth century. At every stage it had negative consequences because it was a flawed system that involved maintaining the power of a few by the regression of many. The result was ongoing class struggle. (83)

Selfish leaders both in the political and economic spheres control state power to amass wealth. Worse still, they promote unjust policies that enrich the few privileged persons in power. The control of the masses is mainly through the promotion of socio-political policies and actions that deny the weak the dividends of democracy.

Human societies all over the world have witnessed the evil of bad governance. Some dubious people struggle to get power and the moment this happens, they do every possible to hold on to it. The need to challenge power mongers is behind the advancement of Marxism. Chidi Amuta notes this when says that:

Marxism arose when and where it did as a result of determinate conditions primary among which was the ascendancy of capitalism, the alienation of labour, and the galvanization of working – class consciousness. Consequently, as a system of ideas, it was bound to reflect, even its avowed “scientific” aspirations, the major weaknesses (including racial arrogance) in the world view of the period. What is crucial in Marxism, therefore, is not the nationality of Marx and Engels

but the practical content of their ideas especially in terms of positing in hypothetical form, an antithesis to the capitalist alienation of labour. (59-60)

Amuta's comments lay bare the essence of Marxist criticism. In furtherance of Amuta's observation, Charles E. Bressler comments that the economic power is crucial to the development of any nation and that is why political leaders strive to remain in power to enjoy unlimited wealth. This is to help them stay above the reach of the common people. Bressler writes that:

the bourgeoisie, have successfully enslaved the working class, or the proletariat, through economic policies and production of goods. The proletariat must now revolt and strip the bourgeoisie of their economic and political power and place ownership of all property in the hands of the government who will then fairly distribute the people's wealth. (163-4)

Those in power recreate society such that there is a world for leaders and another for the led. The few lucky individuals that find themselves on the corridors of power use absolute power, force and looted wealth to put society in their pockets. These selfish leaders reorganise society to favour their interest. According to M. H. Abrams and Geoffery Galt Harpham, "changes in the fundamental mode of material production effect changes in class structure of a society, establishing in each era dominant and subordinate class that engage in a struggle for economic, political and social advantage" (181). This claim mirrors most societies where reckless power mongers do everything possible to remain relevant. They seize power and use it to control every aspect of society in the pursuit of their personal interest. This is clearly revealed in Osundare's *Random Blues*.

Marxist writers especially those in the socio-political spheres condemn poor leadership which is the cause of division, injustice and denial of good life in society. It is on this ground that Marxism proposes a dethronement of absolute leaders who use force to subdue others. Jude Aigbe Agho puts this thus:

radical thinkers and philosophers of the Marxist persuasion outline in their discourses the tension created by the squabbles attendant on the interaction between members of the bourgeois and proletariat classes in every society. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels placed the redemption of the proletariats in the hands of the petite bourgeoisie or the lower or middle class: a class that was envisaged by the radical thinkers to mobilize or conscientize the masses through the dictatorship of the proletariat class to fight and sequester power from the bourgeois class and assume eventual control of the reins of government and control of the economy after the socialist revolution. (116)

Those in power seek to remain in power forever therefore they promote negative policies that ensure imbalance. They deploy the use of force and abuse power given to them to govern the interest of all and sundry. It is for this very reason that Marxism calls for revolution. Stephen McGlinchey et al argue that “workers from factories across the world - the proletariat – were to organize themselves into politically and revolutionary movement to counter the exploitative and unequal effects of capitalism, which were accelerated and expanded by the industrial revolution (42). Workers as used by McGlinchey et al refers to all those who want a just society. It is not enough to want it but they must possess it by struggling against the power that be. This is because changes do not happen by chance. It is in line with this reasoning that Osundare writes thought provoking poems like the ones in his collection *Random Blues*.

William Carlos supports the need for change in a society where abuse of power and injustice are celebrated. According to him, every society must seek changes when a few dominate the majority and “such changes would include the overthrow of the dominant capitalist ideology and the loss of power by those with money and privilege” (2088-9). Carlos contends that Marxism aims at dismantling the oppressive establishment of irresponsible government and inconsiderate leaders. This is to free the weak from the tyranny of those who are bent on abusing power entrusted with them to govern society. Carlos says that, “Marxism criticism is concerned both with understanding the role of politics, money, and power in literary works, and with redefining and reforming the way society distributes its resources among the classes. Fundamentally, the Marxist ideology looks towards a vision of a world not so much where class conflict has been minimized but one in which classes have disappeared altogether” (2089). Carlos claim is valid because it uncovers the tactics used by selfish leaders to remain relevant thereby oppressing the weak.

Niyi Osundare’s *Random Blue* satirises abuse of public office and political power with the view to rescuing the weak from the strong. This explains the choice of Marxism as our working theory in this study. The Marxist theory is used to condemn the behaviour of irresponsible leaders that see government as a tool for attending to personal needs of those in public office.

1.6 Review of Related Scholarship

Osundare’s *Random Blues* as well as his other works have enjoyed critics’ attentions consequently some of them are reviewed with the view to establishing what others have done so far. This is to situate our study in the right perspective.

Dick Ogbonanwii Tambari sees Osundare's style of poetry as a new light in Nigerian literary space. The strict rules guiding composition of poetry sometimes makes its messages sometimes obscure. Many modern poets find it difficult to deviate from such artistic traditions that stress the use of established conventions and rules. Tambari however notes that, "the emergence of Niyi Osundare along with a new poetic tradition is perhaps the height of the concept of deviation in modern African/Nigerian poetry from the loins of the Eurocentric Poetry" (1). The simplicity of Osundare's *Random Blues* makes it effortless to comprehend his messages. Again, Tambari asserts that, "Osundare uses the oral sources to lay bare his message thus exploiting the traditional intuition in accessing the meaning of a poem, his literary artistic innovation appears to be the most distinctive among the new generation of poets because of his peculiar choice of diction" (16). This assertion posits that Osundare is concerned about his messages to the masses therefore he uses a simple but creative language to carve his poems. Olamide Ogunrotimi in another study focuses on Osundare and his art and he reveals that:

the accessibility of the language of Osundare's poetry does not in any way take away the seriousness of his art. More than anything else, he unceasingly addresses the socio-political problems of the society by taking on the tyrants, politicians, vagrants, rebels, outlaws. Indeed everybody who subscribes to the debasement of the country's socio-political aspirations. (41)

Ogunrotimi's comment is apt because it captures the strength of Osundare's poetry. It lays bare the intention of Osundare which is to reach the masses with his poetic messages. He therefore removes every sense of obscurity in his poems.

The style of Osundare's poems has fascinated other critics too. One of such critics is Kadir Ayinde Abdullahi. In his appraisal of Osundare's poetic style, Abdullahi affirms that, "the poet's deployment of style makes his poetry more accessible to a larger audience than that of his predecessors. Like the oral traditional performance. His poetry employs rich Yoruba oral literary devices in a way that is unique and glaringly innovative" (74). Truly, Osundare's uses of local contents makes his poetry stands out. He uses language and imageries that reflect his Yoruba linguistics background. His creativity has always been tied to his language and style has pointed out by Abdullahi. In another study, Raflu Jimoh and Ibitayo O. Odetade also write that the formation of Osundare's language is unique. According to them, "the poet employs the use of compound words, figurative expressions like simile, metaphor, personification and hyperbole, foregrounding, collocatives etc. Finally it is important to state that Niyi Osundare in this poem has successfully satirised the greedy attitude of Nigerian political elite" (51). As earlier noted, Osundare is a satirist who directs his attack to those who use their influences to hold societal progress down. This is the focus of Jimoh and Odetade's study of Osundare's poetry. Their submission affirms that Osundare is creative and conscious of the falling state of his society. In his study of Osundare's poetic styles, Fidelis Odun Balogun further notes that Osundare's "adoption of the stylistic elements of orature and a preference for intensely committed social themes" (186) are the strength of his works. A close analysis of Osundare's poetry reveals the mastery of his Yoruba language and world view.

Another critic Asomwan S. Adagboyin studies the style of Osundare and he comments on its strength as the beauty of Osundare's arts. In his comment he says that:

apart from being a trained stylistician, Osundare who belongs to the school of poetic accessibility, considers the need to communicate as the primary aim of

language use. So also does the desire to establish contact with the addressees represent an essential concern. The reason for this is obvious: language use, whatever arguments may be proposed, is never an end in itself but a means to an end. Thus, the level of relationship maintained between the addresser and the addressees will determine how effective communication has been established. (17)

Adagboyin observes that Osundare is linguistically inclined and this often reflected in his poetry. In another evaluation of Osundare's work, Amen Uhumwangho writes that, "Osundare mixes high, historical romance with low earthly humour which coincides with "universe time" that denotes an infinite stretch of time which an event can be situated" (48). This observation has simply confirmed Osundare as a creative poet who understands how language can be manipulated to suit his message and his audience. According to Felix N. Ogoanah and Ray N. Chikogu, "... Osundare has, however, demonstrated that we can domesticate standard English with such a flexibility that is at once appropriate for our socio-cultural development and literary expression, without inhibiting international intelligibility" (80). The dou Ogoanah and Chikogu, note that Osundare has a rare linguistic ability to deploy a foreign language the way he uses his local language. This quality is rare among writers in Osundare's bracket.

Osundare has never shied away from issues confronting his society therefore he satirises short comings. For example, Isidore Diala notes that, "the dialectic between politics and history, on the one hand, and poetry, on the other, remains pivotal in Osundare's art. The poet is engaged with history as it demonstrably clarifies the writer's vision" (406). The messages in *Random Blues* clearly portray Osundare as an activist. He employs his artistic strength to speak against leadership challenges that have kept society back for too long. Christopher Anyokwun affirms this notion in his comment which states that, "Osundare deploys his poetry to champion and fight

for the cause of society's dispossessed. In short, this class conscious poetic fundamentally affects his attitude to and handling of such categories as myth, language, nature, society, culture, literature and power-relations" (4). As noted by Anyokwu, Osundare sees society as his business to protect from evil men who go about destroying the common good of all and sundry. He centres his poetry on the quest for good society and the need to preserve the rights the downtrodden. Anyokwu further states that:

reading Osundare's poetry we realize that his poetic canvas is peopled by human, supernatural beings (gods and goddesses) and such personae of the social underclass is beggars, the diseased, and the desperately poor who are locked in epic fight-to-the-finish conflict with the more favoured members of society. (3)

Unlike writers that massage the ego of those in power, Osundare uses his art to promote the welfare of the weak. He pitches his tent with them so that he denounces bad leadership in favour of the masses. This is the best any writer can do for his society especially for the helpless.

The message in Osundare's *Random Blue* is similar to the one in one of his plays where he clearly condemns the abuse of public funds. According to Wumi Raji's comment on Osundare's play *Wedding Car*: African celebrity wedding or ostentatious parties are mostly sponsored by dubious men who have close access to public funds. This is the core of Osundare's message in the play. In his comment, Raji notes that:

a society wedding stands as the core action in *The wedding car*. A typical wedding programme in contemporary Nigeria itself represents a veritable study in post – colonial culture. The wedding price, the attire donned by the participants,

the manner of entertainment presented as well as the rituals of wedding are all fusions of traditional heritage and “modern” practice. But perhaps more important for the playwright here is the characteristic ostentatiousness and superficiality associated with the programme (531).

People with questionable source of wealth are allowed to flaunt their il-gotten wealth all in the name of celebrating societal parties. This form of misconduct is the cause of financial corruption in the public space. What Raji points out here is similar to the message in *Random Blues*.

Abuse of power is a notable theme in most Osundare’s works. For example, it is the central message in his collection entitled *Random Blues*. It is also the core of his play *The Wedding Car*. This theme is central to most African literature and it does not surprise readers to find it in Bode Sowande’s *Flamingo*. According to Okey Okwechime and kola Eke’s comment on *Flamingo*, “What Sowande also presents in the play is the use of political position for personal enrichment, the dramatist does not show this directly, but the fraudulent activities are brought out through the interrogation of Mowambe” (62). Sowande uses the play to satirizes dubious act of those entrusted with public offices. Raji notes that “... the man is at one with Osundare in expressing outrage and indignation against the people who “live in an ocean of wealth.” Chief Chamberlain as the complete embodiment of this artificiality and vanity is the consistent target of derision and wit. His ultimate disgrace is not just as a consequence of smuggling a car into the country but the cause of his innumerable crimes committed against the dispossessed of the earth “(531). The leaders Osundare condemns in *Random Blues* are the as those in Sowande’s *Flamingo* and Osundare’s *The Wedding Car*.

Class consciousness, class stratification and social inequality form the core of Osundare’s *Random Blues* and these social phenomena happens to be the focus of Osundare’s *The Wedding*

Car and *The Man Who Walked Away*. These Osundare's plays can be likened to Olu Obafemi's *Dark Times are Over*. According to Okey Okwechime and Efosa Julius Legamah:

the need to redefine class and its stratification is dramatized in *Dark Times are Over*. Class in relation to the society is the division of a people into particular group according to their financial, intellectual, social or religious status. This grouping is usually unwritten in any societal law or code. It can be better referred to as a social construction which is as old as man himself. Though class and its stratification is unwritten in any formal law but the daily happenings in the society underscore its presence and its inevitability in the activities of mankind.

(85)

The leaders and the led are never on the same level in African society and this has affected so many areas of life. For example, the rich send their children to schools that are far beyond the reach of the poor who live with them in the same society. Some leaders use a different health care system that the led can never access. This disparity is what writers like Osundare and Sowande fight in society.

In Osundare's *State Visit*, the masses kick against suppression and oppression which hinder their happiness. The height of bad governance depicted in *State Visit*, Sola Olorunyomi notes that, "students and other social groups join in the crowd. The police attempts a dispersal but the population, in high spirit and determination, will not bulge" (542). Standing against bad leaders has often been the front burner of Osundare's artistic quests. He uses his works to conscientise the masses especially the helpless downtrodden to liberation from from leaders that stand in the way of their freedom.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Osundare's works have attracted many critical comments from different stand points. This study however offers a fresh investigation into the evils associated with bad leadership as portrayed in Osundare's *Random Blues*. This is done using insights from the Marxist theory.

1.6 Thesis Statement

This essay argues that political violence, public theft and abuse of power as depicted in Niyi Osundare's *Random Blues* are the causes of bad leadership in society

CHAPTER TWO:

USE OF VIOLENCE IN ELECTIONS

Power conferred on leaders is meant to better society. Every state has a constitution that confers power and authority on selected people so that they can carry out their duties unhindered. It is however alarming that some of these leaders misuse their influence to gain political power. The recruitment of hooligans to win elections is the focus of this chapter.

Elections in Africa are mostly seen as a do or die affairs. It is common for those in power to recruit hooligans that they send on selfish errands during elections. This is captured thus in one of the poems under study. In “Random Blues 6”, readers are confronted by what Osundare call “rogue rulers.” Such irresponsible leaders are depicted thus:

Here once again

The Penkelemesi years

I say, here once again

The Penkelemesi, years

Rogue rulers are back on the prowl

The streets quake with sundry fears (RB, 19)

In a normal clime, elections are won on the merits of a leader’s manifestoes and campaign strategies. This is not the case in the society Osundare exposes through *Random Blues*. The

leaders in the society he paints do not believe in the rule of law therefore they govern society in their own way. One of the ways they govern society is by recruiting thugs to disturb the peace of those who oppose their abuse of public power and offices. In the following lines, Osundare states that:

Yet another era

Of thugs and cut-throats

I say, yet another era

Of thugs and cut-throats

Veteran arsonists and hired killers

Who dump the dead and steal their coats (19)

The lines above lay bare a society where goons are allowed to have their ways. In an ideal society where laws and orderliness are cherished, thugs are not allowed to roam streets freely. In Osundare's society, they are however given a special place because they are leaders' errands boys. "veteran arsonists and hired killers" connote a lawless society where thugs are used by those in power to carry out their revenge on opponents that defeat them during elections. This is a form of exploitation that Marxism condemns in society.

Elections are won on the merit of numbers but most African leaders believe that election is a game for the ruthless hence thugs are relied on to secure political victories in elections. The

poem “Random Blues 23” gives a dramatic picture of how violence is enthroned during elections. This is captured thus:

Another voting season

And the sad story of the ballot

Say, another voting season

And the sad story of the ballot

Stolen, swapped in every ward

Like a helpless harlot. (53)

The expression the “sad story of the ballot” is built on personification and it draws attention to the fact that even ballot papers are victims on election days. Irresponsible politicians go about seeking power by all means and they care less if a normal process is truncated. The quest to gain power at all costs however pushes them into violence which they use to have their way. On an election day, thugs are sent out to snatch ballot boxes. They do this without fear of being arrested and this is depicted thus:

Ballot boxes here

Ballot boxes there

Say, ballot boxes here

Ballot boxes there

In the Oba's palace, in the thug's bedroom

Green-white-green, fair and square (54)

This is the height of abuse by politicians who think they own society as a result they do whatever pleases them. Their thugs invade polling units and use force to hijack a smooth running process set in place by law abiding citizens. Snatched ballot papers and kidnapped victims of elections are taken to politicians personal prisons. The constant mention of thugs reveals that African elections are mostly dominated by frauds perpetrated by political thugs.

Election period is often likened to a war scene where endless destruction is carried out. On election days, politicians do their worse by sending out their boys to terrorise law abiding voters. They use threat and violence to coerce voters into giving up their constitutional rights. This is revealed thus in "Random Blues 24":

Polling day

And Hell is here

Ah, polling day

And Hell is here

A battalion of thugs with powerful guns

Their weedy breaths pervade the air (55)

"Hell" is known to be a place of torment and African elections are considered to be one. The expression "hell is here" is alliterative and it reveals an unexpected coming of violent destruction

which can be likened to hell. The rouses come out like thieves to rob people of their freedom to vote peacefully. In polling booths, they cause commotion which enables them to have their ways.

These lines revealed how ballot boxes and votes are being carted away:

“Your life or your ballot!”

They scream at the polling crowd

Say, Your life or your ballot”

They scream at the crowd

“Do as we say, and stuff the box,

Or end up in a dirty shroud” (55)

The above lines allude to bitter politics that usher in coups in early independent Nigeria. In those days of bitter politics, elections are battles for the dare devil politicians who use all means to assume power. The use of threat during an election suggests the denial of true democracy. Democratic principle gives everybody the right to express his or her freedom but the exploitative nature of African leaders negates this.

Osundare notes that the homes of most leaders are the dens of thugs and killers who they employ to silence their opponents. In the house of a leader, skulls of innocent people are arranged to put fear in people who may want to dare evil men in politics. This is captured thus:

Medieval his method

Parlous his ploy

Oh, medieval his method

Parlous his ploy

His backyard is loud with skulls

In bloodshed thrives his sickening joy. (19)

The above lines allude to the bitter politics in the first and second Republic when politicians believed in the use of violence to achieve their political goals. The kind of politics permitted in most African societies allows political god-fathers to operate the way they like. “Penkelemes” as used in *Random Blues* refers to the bitter politics that flourished in Ibadan during the Western Region of Awolowo, Adedibu and Akintola. Political god-fathers are seen as authoritative leaders therefore they take the laws into their hands. One of such irresponsible leaders is described thus:

Commander-in-chief

Of numberless thugs

Yes, commander-in-chief

of countless thugs

who rush for the kill at his swift behest

Doles and crumbs their fastest drugs (20)

Laws and orders make democracy works better but these leaders with inordinate ambitions use their rouses to unleash violence and somehow they are ignored.

In an ideal society, constituted authority is supreme and its agents' actions are never challenged. The reverse is the case in Africa. State recognised or commissioned officers sometimes fear political thugs because these thugs are allowed to go on rampage unchecked. Most times, they dare security agents to touch them. This type of abuse is illustrated thus:

Arrest us if you can

Boast the Rampaging Gang

Yes, arrest if you can

Boast the Rampaging Gang

Our orders come from the ruling clique

Who never hit without a bang (20)

The words of the thugs speaking in the above lines reveal that there is no political thug without a state backing. The fact that thugs are empowered above state security officers is worrisome. This is a simple case of exploitation worthy of condemnation. Marxist critics attack a society that empowers few individuals to lord it over other people.

Politics involves the use of approved strategies to gain popularity and win elections. This is however a different stories in Nigeria where things are done differently. Violence is often resorted to when some irresponsible leaders to find it difficult to actualise their selfish ambitions.

In “Random Blues 7”, violence is portrayed as politicians’ method of responding to their failures. This sometimes leads to wanton restlessness that disturbs the peace of the nation. Sadly, it is this style of politics that those in power often support. They approve the use of violence by their cronies who are hired to wreck destruction on peaceful people. This is put thus:

Roadside birds said the Abuja Emperor

was no stranger to the plot

I say, roadside birds said the Abuja Emperor

was no stranger to the plot

For never backing his plan for lifelong rule

The Emperor wanted the king somewhere hot (21)

The phrase “Abuja Emperor” is repeated to point attention to the fact that those in power are involved in violence seen on society. The phrase “roadside birds” also depicts rouges as worthless and homeless people who can be easily picked by roadsides for evil intents. From a Marxist perspective, the leaders promote policies that encourage class division. Those in power stay at the top enjoy the best form of life while those placed below are used and dumped by the road sides where they are picked. This is an evil that drives society in crimes.

Violence begets violence. Most leaders are products of violence therefore they are not willing to enthrone peace. They have little or nothing to offer society so they pass unpopular bills sponsored by their irresponsible friends. This is put thus:

Lawless lawmakers went to work

And a gigantic malaise was born

Yes, lawless lawmakers went to work

And a gigantic malaise was born

The king lost his crown to a sponsored clique

Justice bowed under a heavy scorn (21)

The type of leader painted in the lines above is the reason democracy is abused. Having assumed office on the ground of fraud, he does what pleases him and not what promotes democracy. Alliteration and repetition are used in the first four lines to draw attention to evils that come from the use of fraud to produce leaders in society. Leaders that gain power through unpopular means pose dangers to democracy. This is revealed thus:

He strutted all around

As if he owned the world

Indeed, he strutted all around

As if he owned the world

Crows shat on his motorcade

His tongue stumbled on the word (22)

This is the height of abuse that goes with electoral processes in most African countries. Badr leaders express their anger through evil plots. They go about destroying the values that make society habitable. This is contrary to the tenets of democracy. In other words, Marxist orientation does not support tyranny that leaves a class of people in an exploitative state. The selfish leaders presented in Osundare's poems under study are ruthless people that take advantage of the weak that they ought to protect.

Marxism believes that socialism is a reasonable system of government in that it protects the weak. It does not allow a set of people to see society as theirs. Unchecked democracy produces leaders with reckless thinking. Lawlessness is often a lifestyle to irresponsible leaders and their friends. It is on this account that they are seen or portrayed as bigger than the laws:

Untouchable the chieftain

And his contraband guest

Say, unforgettable the chieftain

And his contraband guest

His power comes from those above

Who send him guns and stock his nest (54)

Leaders are elected to serve the masses and pursue policies that can exalt a country. It is the opposite that is seen in most African counties. Most time, the gain political control through frauds therefore they use public offices to amass wealth in the face of large scale poverty. The next chapter looks at the consequences of bad leaders in public offices.

This chapter discovers that leaders chosen through unpopular means are irresponsible. They go about recruiting thugs to have their ways. The thugs often think they are lucky to be around their leaders but the application of Marxist theory in this study reveals that they are being exploited. They are only engage to destroy society where they also reside. The attitudes of leaders presented in poems studied reveals that most leaders are reckless with power entrusted to them. The deployment of Marxist criticism in this study shows that democracy alongside gullible thugs are being exploited by leaders are believe they should be worship by their followers.

CHAPTER THREE

EMBEZZLEMENT OF PUBLIC AND DISTURBANCE OF PUBLIC PEACE

As earlier hinted, some politicians in a typical African country seek political power to satisfy personal gains. They do this by stealing from a societal commonwealth. Osundare's *Random Blues* satirises such leaders through his attacks on their reckless looting of from state own treasury. The ways this financial misconduct is carried out and its attending effects on governance is explored in this chapter.

Most times, selfish leaders see their official positions as means of making money therefore they fight very hard to wreck havoc the moment they get into offices. A good example of such irresponsible leader is revealed thus in the following lines in "Random Blues 8":

Public funds

Were his pot of gold

Oh, public funds

Were his pot of gold

A hefty sum to his patron Father

The rest for him and his thieving fold (23)

Marxism does not promote a system of government that rob the masses through state power. It seeks a political culture that will serve the interest of the people and not that of the elites.

Osundare's *Random Blues* indicts leaders that exploit the masses. . This is well illustrated in the above lines. They are like the capitalists that rob their workers all in the name of economic freedom to determine so much. Political god-fathers see politics like a business therefore they employ political god-sons who they plant in public offices. These anointed office holders that serve as stooges steal money to satisfy their benefactors. This encourages looting sine they have many people to settle with public funds

Most African leaders run to Western countries to borrow money which they later steal and stalk in Western banks as loots. The rate at which public funds is embezzled is alarming therefore Osundare in "Random Blues 9" echoes the speed with which money is being stolen from state coffers. This is to alert the general public about the evils of irresponsible leaders in offices. This is put thus in the poem "Random Blues 9" :

Public funds vanished

Into private pockets

I say, public funds vanished

Into private pockets

Poly-trick-tians fester in wanton loot

Another fiesta of seamless rackets (25)

The word "vanished" alarms readers about the reckless looting that goes on in public offices. The word "poly-trick-tians" also point readers' attention to the dubious personality of most public office. They steal public funds and throw money around to intimidate people around them. According to Emeka Odumegwu-Ojuku:

The Nigerian must wear the most expensive clothes, drive the most expensive cars, build the most expensive palaces, patronize the most expensive clubs, send his children to the most expensive schools, drink the most expensive beverage, throw the most lavish parties and mate the most mercenary mistresses. The objective is rather con/on nor luxury. Rather, it is in order to be recognized. The greater the assault on the eyes of the under-privileged, the greater the satisfaction. (xiii)

Odumegu – Ojuku’s comment reveals that the quest for materialism is responsible for the high rate of frauds in society. Dubious people often seek to impress others as a result they get money at all cost. This is condemnable by all standards therefore Osundare directs his satire against the oligarchy that holds a nations of many people to ransom.

There is often an abuse of public funds so that a vibrant economy is reduced to nothing. The irresponsible leaders that steal money do so to enrich themselves and their cronies that support them to seize power. For example, the money embezzled goes to torts, god-fathers and even law enforcement officials or those in the judiciary. This is to reward them for aiding the abuse of democracy which often occurs at election periods. The corrupt public office holder hints that electoral fraud is part of some politicians’ strategies to win elections:

And the secret manipulations

Which won us the last election

Yes, those secret manipulations

That won us the last election

Those hit squads and ruthless riggers

And the millions spent to hush their missions (37)

This kind of reckless spending encourages corrupt and waste of public funds. What ought to be spend on public projects is given to private individuals who cushion the emergence of corrupt public office holders.

Dividend of democracy is denied when leaders steal from public coffers. The effect is portrayed in the suffering the masses' welfares . Marxism seeks the welfare of all therefore it clamours for a system that will ensure transparency in public domains. The lines below reveals a society that has been denied infrastructural facilities:

Holes in our roofs

Ragged roads unravel our soles

Alas, holes in our roofs

Ragged roads unravel our soles

Hunger has taken over the marketplace

Our rulers are beasts in need of souls (25)

The “Holes in our roofs” and “Ragged roads” point to the fact that embezzlement of public funds is the cause of poor governance. The money meant for infrastructure goes into individual pockets and this hinders the dividends of democracy. Sadly, the speaker announces that, ‘Hunger has taken over the marketplace.’ This is anti democracy. This kind of evil reign continues for a long

time for corrupt leaders often seek to remain in power for as long as they wish. This sit-tight syndrome is captured thus:

For many, many months

The usurper held the throne

Yes, for many, many months

The usurper held the throne

Till Justice woke up one day

And parted the dog and its stolen bone (25)

As a result of the delayed introduction of the poem's central symbol, the last two lines have a

In "Random blues 15", the speaker reveals that prostitutes also benefits from these bad leaders abuse of public funds. The expression, "Till Justice woke up one day" is an example of personification and it expresses optimism. It speaks of a time when the masses will take back their country and re-establish justice and fairness to all. The anger of the masses will be based on leaders wicked acts which drive the poor masses beneath societal scale. The lines below reveal leaders' recklessness spending pattern. That is , these naughty leaders who embezzle public funds buy:

Trendy jeeps for mistresses

Countless scoops for sundry bribes

Say, trendy jeeps for mistresses

Countless scoops for sundry bribes

The Accountant-General lost count

Of doles and doles to teeming tribes (37)

This is a clear case of abuse. Worse still, they destroy public institutions by promoting their personal goals. The speaker uses rhetorical questions to challenge the integrity of these irresponsible leaders. This is put thus:

“And whose money built your university?”

“And whose money established your own?”

I say, “whose money built your university?”

I say, “whose money built your university?”

“Whose money established your own?”

That question surely rings a bell

Ask it in a soft and gentle tone (37)

The lines above suggest that most public office holders have money than their salary could have given them. They engage in spending that calls for inquiries into the sources of their wealth. This is the main contention of Marxism. It condemns the wide gaps between the rich and the poor. It seeks a classless society which is the best for the good of all.

Osundare also satirises religious leaders who encourage politicians' recklessness. Some religious leaders massage the ego of bad leaders because they are part and parcel of their corrupt rackets. Marxism attacks those who manipulate others with religion. It is on the ground that it holds that religion is the opium of the people. The poem "Random blues 11" reveals the warm and cordial relationships between bad political leaders and compromised religious leaders who benefit from embezzled money:

And said the Bishop:

"Oh welcome the Lord's Anointed"

And said the Imam:

"All hail the favourite of the Almighty"

"Whoever opposes him

Is on a one-way ticket

To the hottest part of Hell

Whoever queries his order

Will disappear behind the clouds" (29)

This is the height of religious hypocrisy. Religious leaders ought to stand by the truth but the quest for personal gains often compels them to compromise their standards.

The bad boys following irresponsible leaders are often seen at the fore front of violence sponsored by their pay masters. These evil elements are described thus:

Arson squads by day

Murder gangs by night

Yes, arson squads by day

Murder gangs by night

His rain of terror rattled every roof

Freedom died, succeeded by fright (30)

They set fire on their the houses of opponents and take away the peace of their fellow human beings.

Marxism condemns a system of government that makes life unbearable to the masses. There are however reasons for wanton leaders to put pain on the faces of their law abiding followers. This is captured thus:

Lavish share-outs

Base and mindless junkets

Pity, lavish share-outs

Base and mindless junkets

Their private welfare, our public heilfare

Rulers who empty the people's pockets. (30)

This is a worse form of exploitation because what is taken away matters to the existence of the masses. Irresponsible leaders often attack those who strive to fight against their evil ways. In a democratic setting, the people ought to matter more to the leaders but is not always so. The irresponsible leaders projected in *Random Blues* are dubious. This is captured thus:

Phantom projects

Invisible poultries

I say, Phantom projects

Invisible poultries

Packaged lies, expensively posted

No end to the felon's confounding rogueries (29)

African leaders most employ deception to remain in the good book of their followers. The deceits of these nasty leaders are endless therefore they always have their ways. They go on to deceive the masses about projects they are not carrying out:

Roads tarred with sputum

Mansions framed with falsehood

Oh, roads tarred with sputum

Mansions framed with falsehood

Public coffers emptied by bulky ploys

The state fire burned on plastic wood. (29)

Politicians use propaganda that cushion their deceits. The masses however have eyes to see for themselves. Most public projects these politicians claim they are carrying out are nothing but propaganda. Adewumi Samuel Idowu and Akinkurole Susan Olajoke argue that “politically speaking, politics has not been practiced the way it should be within our society. It is widely believed that politics should be practised in a way that dividends of democracy could be brought nearer to the people particularly those at the grassroots. The reverse is the case in Nigerian context where politics is played by politicians to enrich their individual purses”(14). This is the very scenario that Osundare paints in *Random Blues*.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DOWNFALL OF IRRESPONSIBLE LEADERS

Nigeria has been in shambles for a very long time and leadership challenge is one of the major problems responsible for the country's woes. Leaders in Nigeria see politics as a personal avenue to enrich themselves and this is the very cause of stagnation in society. According to Idowu and Akinkurolere:

the moral, social and political decadence in the Nigerian society since independence in 1960 cannot be over emphasized. Since attainment of independence, all the facets of the Nigerian nation are decayed, totally in shamble and in a sorry state. At the age of fifty years plus, nothing can be said to be moving forward in the country whereas other developing countries like Nigeria are fast growing technologically, producing enormous goods for global consumption. (10)

Decadence has been a serious challenge in Nigeria and this has manifested in various ways. For instance, all institutions in the country have been mute due to unaccountability from leaders. The need to progress out of this setback requires the massive to rise against bad leadership. The masses are Marxist weapons that can crush the reign of bad leaders who exploit them. They will however remain in servitude as long as they failed to realise their place in the governance of their land. Osundare in "Random Blues 14" wants the masses to realise their potentials to get rid of bad leaders. This is because no one from the ruling class can come to their rescue:

Who will save us

From the madness of our rulers?

I ask, who will save us

From the madness of our rulers?

They trample our dreams without a mind

Coffin-makers and dead-end dealers.(35)

The answer to the above questions can only be given by the masses' actions. They have to be prepared to take back their lots from those who lord it over them. This is the main argument of Marxist criticism. The oppressed must be willing to set the stage for changes in society. According to Carlos:

Marxist critics examine literature for its reflection of how dominant elites exploit subordinate groups, how people become "alienated" from each other, and how middle – class/bourgeois values lead to the control and suppression of the working classes. Marxist critics see literature's value in promoting social and economic revolution, with works that espouse Marxist ideology serving to prompt the kinds of economic and political changes that conform to Marxist principles. Such changes would include the overthrow of the dominant capitalist ideology and the loss of power by those with money and privilege. (2088-9)

The leaders presented in *Random Blues* are corrupt and it is only what Marxism suggests above that can kick them out of government. There is a need to for changes and it is the masses that will propel the wheel of these changes. Again, Carlos argues that, "Marxist criticism is concerned both with understanding the role of politics, money, and power in literary works, and

with redefining and reforming the way society distributes its resources among the classes” (2089). This what Osundare stands for in his poems under this study.

Corruption begets unreasonable display of wealth in public. Most times, the money corrupt office holders loot is used for oppressing the poor masses. They parade themselves as demi gods. This is revealed in the following lines:

Drums thundered

Singers burst their throats

Yes, drums thundered

Singers burst their throats

Swindled masses and their mindless dances

For scoundrels of state who purloined their votes. (24)

Parties are thrown to celebrate successful looting. Praise singers and drummers are employed to sing the praises of their corrupt leaders. The lines of the excerpt below reveal a proud politician that is set out to exploit his country. This is captured thus:

His head swells and swells

In his stolen crown

I say, his head swells and swells

In his stolen crown

The vulture who parades like an eagle

Bribe-soaked cop once, now a shameless clown (23)

The exploitative leader described above is a good example of most African leaders that use their positions to amass wealth in the face of their peoples' poverty. Such leaders attack state treasury so that they hardly get enough money to execute projects that will benefits the masses. They however suffer a downfall that ushers in the end of their terror. This is put thus:

He sneaks through town and country

Like the vicious thief he is

Yes, he sneaks through town and country

Like the vicious thief he is

Rodents live in his footprints

Thombushes welcome him with a hiss (27)

This is a terrible fall for those who govern their countries for personal gains. This stanza contrasts those above. The moment the masses realise their place in society, wanton leaders who parade themselves as lords over the helpless move under the cover of darkness. This is to avoid attacks from the conscientised masses. In a new dispensation, irresponsible leaders hide here and there.

Osundare is optimistic that irresponsible leaders cannot remain in office forever therefore he argues that the slow hand of justice will catch up with those who abuse public offices. The speaker in *Random Blues* collection emphatically puts it thus:

At last, the usurper fled

His foul dream in disarray

Yes, the usurper fled

His foul dream in disarray

Justice woke up one morning

And put an end to the vicious play (26)

Marxists thinkers believe that the masses, that is, the proletariat need to get themselves together in order to get rid of bad leaders. Unless they rise against their tormentors, it will be difficult for them to break the chains that hinder their freedom. The moment actions are taken against evil men in power, their reign will end and freedom will return to their lands. Again, the speaker says that:

The usurper fled

His wake a heap of sordid deeds

Oh how the usurper fled

His wake a heap of sordid deeds

The land lies prone from choking stench

Our voices croak like broken reeds (26)

The land must surely be rid of bad leaders therefore there is hope that one day African nations will be free from bad leaders that are terrorizing their people by placing heavy yokes on their shoulders. Put differently, there is time for everything to flourish and wane. Osundare uses *Random Blues* to predict the downfall of those who exploit the masses by abusing public offices. The masses can unite to get rid of bad leaders by voting and standing by their votes. Osundare opines that a day will come when all bad leaders will become unpopular among their people who they oppress. This is expressed in the poem entitled “Random Blues 10”:

The Gangster Governor

Is now on the run

Yees o, the Gangster Governor

Is now on the run

His nasty noise is now a whisper

Fear has replaced his wanton fun (27)

The above lines depict the reversal of fortunes which most leaders often suffer. The slow hands of justice often catch up with bad leaders as a result they are disgraced out of office. This is further captured thus:

The sirens are silent now

Dispatch-riders have jammed their wheel

Yes, the sirens are silent now

Dispatch-riders have jammed their wheel

Waving crowds have turned into jeering mobs

The Gangster has a wound that time cannot heal (27)

The 'Dispatch riders' symbolize the masses who team up to get rid of bad leaders. They have the potentials to take over their land provided that they are willing to confront their tormentors.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Democracy is a system of government that guarantees freedom for the masses and ensures that the poor people's welfares are taken care of regardless of class and beliefs. Failure of leadership has however posed a serious challenge to the place of democracy in Africa. Osundare's *Random Blues* identified irresponsible leaders as a threat to dividends of democracy. This study points attention to manipulated processes that produce incredible leaders that are responsible for retrogression in society. It also draws attention to the outcome of a conscientised masses.

Osundare's *Random Blues* is written such that it highlights the dangers of manipulating democracy. For example, it poetically reveals that the use of thugs and violence to win election foreshadows bad leadership. The crops of leaders presented in the collection of poems under study are weaklings who solely depend on the use of force to gain public offices. The bitter politics of Old Western Region during the "Penkelemes" politicians' days is alluded to. The politicians of that era see politics as a do-or-die affair therefore they use thugs to find their ways to public offices. Osundare's *Random Blues* indicts the first and second generation leaders as evil men in power. They exploit the downtrodden by using them as political mechanism through which they enthrone themselves into public offices. Marxist theory employed in this study clearly reveals two classes of people in society. The leaders and the led, the poor and the rich and the mighty and the lowly are revealed. The poems in the collection reveal that most African societies are not balanced because a set of privileged people lord it over others that they keep in yokes of servitude. This is a societal challenge that Marxist stands against.

Osundare's *Random Blues* also reveals that irresponsible leaders are visionless because all they care about is what they will make out of their positions. Marxist theory argues that some sets of greedy individuals seek ways to exploit others. This is done on a large scale in Osundare's *Random Blues* because the nasty leaders presented in the poems exploit a whole country by embezzling what belongs to all and sundry. Corrupt leaders steal freely from government coffers. Worse still, the money stolen is used to manipulate the processes that can ensure good governance. For instance, money that is meant for public projects are used to organise parties or to pay political thugs and stooges for devilish services render. This is a rape of democracy that thwarts good governance. Osundare satirises leaders that exploit the masses by embezzling money that is generated to execute public projects.

A close study of Marxism reveals that the poor masses can set themselves free from bad leaders by working collectively especially during elections. Bad leaders are scared of conscientised masses that seek ways to dethrone their tormentors. Osundare's *Random Blues* reveals a promising society where bad leaders will be on the run for the fear of the masses' attacks. Insights from Marxist orientations show that it is possible to get rid of bad leaders through the formidable or collective action of the oppressed. The optimistic poems in the collection foreshadow a society that is free from corrupt leaders. This, according to Osundare, can be possible if the oppressed identify their common enemies in government and attack them to ensure a stable society where life is meaningful for everyone irrespective of class and positions.

In summary, Osundare's *Random Blues* has been studied and it is revealed that society is always in conflict between different sets of people. It is discovered that the leaders in a docile society lord it over the weak. On the contrary, the weak or the oppressed can take back their society provided they are willing to sack those who milk their common wealth. The act of using force to gain power is seen as oppression and the embezzlement of public funds is considered to be sheer exploitation. This informs the use of Marxist theory in this study. Marxist overall aim is to free society from selfish individuals' grips and that is the aim of Osundare's *Random Blues*.

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