



‘Tears in Verses’: Leadership and Social Disillusionment in Tanure Ojaide’s Poetry

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines leadership, nationhood and social disillusionment in Tanure Ojaide’s poetry. The paper notes that one phenomenal trait characterising Nigerian writers, especially the one christened as second generation, is their innate susceptibility and strong resolve in confronting leadership and other socio-political ruptures in the society. Right from the dawn of independence, Nigerian writers have always been on the defensive and, in varying degrees, have depicted poignantly, corruption, injustices, oppression, exploitation and other forms of malfeasances perpetrated against the people by the leadership class. This orientation, to a large extent, informs the writings of Tanure Ojaide. Against this backdrop, this paper examines not only the creative depth of his poetry, but also the potency of his works in addressing socio-political foibles in the Nigerian society. Through an analysis of select poems in *The Endless Song* and *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, this research establishes that leadership is simply the cog in the wheels of the nation’s path to greatness and has, consequently, rendered the nation and her people miserably dispossessed, traumatised and disillusioned. The paper adopts New Historicism as theoretical framework and concludes that Nigeria may plunge into a precipice, if visionless leaders continue to parade the country’s leadership space.

KEYWORDS: Writers, Poetry, Leadership, Nigeria, Injustice.

REVIEW PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

Leadership question in African literature is as old as modern African societies. This all important issue, most times, seems to have been over flogged, given the quantum of literary and critical works that litter the African literary and critical space. It is almost getting to the extent that African writings which point at leadership deficit in African societies are regarded as a rehearsed script that had lost its currency. This corroborates Raph Stodgill’s position that “there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept” (15). From the era of the great African literary icon, Chinua Achebe, to the present time, leadership issues have always occupied a prominent position in Nigerian literary and social discourses. However, it has been noted that despite the enormous literary and critical attention it has attracted, there seems to be no tangible progress in this area, as the situation keeps degenerating at an alarming dimension. The above trajectory in the first place, necessitated the writing of this paper. Thus,

the thrust of this paper centres on the gnawing question of leadership crisis that remains the bane of postcolonial African states, and apparently, responsible for the myriad of socio-economic difficulties faced by the greater number of the population of these societies.

The Classical scholars such as Plato and Aristotle saw leadership as foundational to their society. Based on Plato’s theory, as contained in his *Republic*, “A good society is the one which is founded on a good principle and grounded on a good leadership” (28). As Plato discusses in Book ten of *Republic*, the ideal leader must be educated, cultured and an ethical guardian and not a show master. According to him:

It is precisely because of his gnoseological humility and nobility and his ethical honesty and sincerity, a true gentle person with dignity and integrity, that such a person will be elected or selected (drafted or compelled, if need be) by the people themselves to be their leader. It is firstly because he leads well

himself...in his own constitution that he can lead society as a whole in its constitution (60-1).

Therefore, his ideal leader is the philosopher - Philosopher-king. This does not refer to a particular individual raised for the purpose of filling the role of the King. According to John Philippoussis, his notion of Philosopher-king "is first and foremost, an intellectual and educational leader as a "Philosopher" and it is only a consequence that he may also be a political leader as a king" (59). Leadership position is never his birth right. The only condition of the Philosopher-king lies in his personal excellence. Philippoussis further argues:

Nor, evidently, is the Philosopher-king a leader because he is, in his outward and public image, phenomenally or rhetorically charismatic, as it was the case with Sophist politician who would be elected because he would charm, seduce and hypnotize the unconscious and uncritical crowds (The Quest, 117).

This implies that a true leader is not judged by rhetoric skills or a projected appearance, but by the possession of inner excellence within him.

Aristotle in his *Ethics* also suggests that "a leader must be an ethical agent, always striving to achieve that personal excellence" (206). He however advises that possessing "a goodly nature is not all about what leadership entails, and that leaders should also strive to be effective orators" (206). This is because, most often, leaders engage in the art of persuading their followers to sway opinions, and before a leader becomes an effective orator, he must be educationally and morally upright. Bill Croft, in his study of Aristotle summarises that "Aristotle's philosophy expressed in *Rhetoric* and *Ethics* applied to leadership dictates that a leader must first understand human goodness and strive to achieve this goodness in order to flourish"(4). Thus, both Plato and Aristotle agree that, for one to be a successful leader, one must possess personal excellence and a goodly nature.

The foregoing points to the fact that good leadership is needed for direction, guidance and accomplishment, the absence of which results in retardation of development and progress. Many have come to believe that any nation desiring to launch itself on the part of progress must first of all, consistently, develop its leadership resources. As a matter of fact, the progress of world civilization indisputably depends on leadership. Therefore, leadership is a fundamental platform through which the society's problems are solved. This is in line with the position of Mike Obadan that: "Leadership plays crucial role in establishing a potentially creative (or destructive) socio-political and economic environment in which a people can pursue development through genuine and sustained collective sacrifice" (16). This implies that whatever becomes of a

society is entirely the function of leadership. Maryisabella Eze strongly supports the above position when she avers that:

Leadership can destroy or transform the prospects of a nation. Where the leadership is self-centred, intellectually bankrupt, morally and ethically bad, government policies, the economy and social life will be affected negatively (157).

In Nigeria a today, a host of ugly indexes ranging from insurgency, banditry, militancy, bribery, corruption, skewed electoral system and other sundry issues are convenient grounds that could explain leadership deficit in the country. Nigeria started her independence with lofty ideals and overcharged euphoria about what she could do and what she was going to do in terms leadership and development. Yet many years after independence, one still notices the contortions and squeezing on the faces of Nigerians, a sad indication of Nigeria's bleak political landscape which is characterized by government misrule and arrogance, the moral depravity of rulers, mindless civil wars, ethno-national conflicts and the passivity of the ruled. This corroborates Kwesi Prah's observation that the early period seemed as if she was making credible headway, "But it did not take long, in most cases not more than a decade or a decade and a half, for disillusionment and sentiments of being lost in the wood to overtake us (8).

Brenda Cooper succinctly captures this bleak kaleidoscopic landscape thus: "the paradox of the unity of opposites, the contested polarities such as history versus magic, the pre-colonial past versus the post-industrial present and life versus death ... the mode that combines a mixture of profound pessimistic view of life in disarray and a glimpse of a hope in the twilight of tomorrow" (1).

Instead of justifying their claim to leadership, Nigerian leaders most times resort to blame game. According to Ime Ikidde:

The African of the thinking bourgeois class has an easy excuse for all his woes and short comings: colonialism. It is colonialism that is responsible for the proverbial indolence of the African of the business ruling class, for his tendency towards graft, his lack of a vision distorted and blurred years ago by religious fanaticism and narrow ethnic pettiness—It is hardly surprising that the two often go together (451).

To Ikidde, a typical African leader seems not to realise that other continents have, in the course of their history, been colonised before, some for periods longer than that of Africa, yet they are constantly and consistently on the tract of progress. This may explain why African countries must go back to the

fundamentals. Prah asserts that: "If after half a century we are bogged down in an immobilizing quagmire of underdevelopment, then we can say that there are serious inadequacies with the paradigms we are using in order to approach the development challenge"(8).

Today, while other countries are conquering the world in science and technology, Nigeria is retrogressing to the lowest ebb of socio-political life and has to rely on the Western countries for sustenance and relevance. Prah further posits that:

The absence of self-reliant creativity, self-assertiveness and cultural confidence on which to construct a developmentally sound approach to societal problems has consistently inhibited the culturally grossly imitative elite, which operate as if mimicry of Western values, habits and culture is the way forward (14).

Thus, the Eurocentric mind of Nigerian leaders will always justify exploitation as a religious, moral, civilizational, moral or imperialistic mission by claiming Western superiority in everything as normal and natural (Mehmet, 8). Bayo Okunade further avers that, "political ideals as to how society can be organised and ruled to the best advantage of all hardly entered into the calculation of the Nigerian ruling class" (20). The primary agenda of these leaders is to build themselves, not the nation and her people. This is what Emmanuel Obiechina satirically describes as "eating and sharing" politics:

They are being portrayed as having used their position of dominance not to husband national resources, not for stepping up production and disbursing it equitably, but of developing "great appetites" and devouring this wealth almost exclusively. For the members of elite, the new state is a large and dainty cake to be shared and eaten... (57).

Here the political culture is steeped in all forms of negativity, all in the interest of the few ruling elite.

In the face of these realities, literature becomes the rallying point and a convenient platform through which the situation could be projected and addressed. This explains why some Nigerian writers, especially the one regarded as second generation, seem to have been imbued with vested interest in re-imagining the imperatives of visionary and selfless leadership in their works, unlike the older generation. Ojaide says that the new generation of Nigerian/African poets/ writers is the one:

...who believe in the transformative role of the literary art and deploying it as a weapon towards regaining the lost ideals of nationhood; in Nigeria's case, the vision of a model of independent African state. The art this generation advocates is utilitarian

and meant to advance the goals of humanity, especially in the areas of good governance, equality, justice, and human development (13).

Idaevbor Bello echoes Ojaide when he argues that "...the writers of the period, having collectively witnessed the promise of independence and the decadence that followed not long after, became disenchanted with the rot and could not hide their disgust in the kind of arts they produced" (136). They are generally militant and radical in their works, and through activist (often acid) rhetoric, they attack those leaders whom they perceive to be authors of poverty among the masses (Egudu, 79). According to Ogaga Okuyade "Nobody prescribes to a writer; it is his/her response to exigent and urgent issues affecting society that is of paramount importance to him/her" (139). This is what gives art its elasticity, and as Samuel Asein insists: "a writer should play a purposeful role in the human drama of his time" (74). Thus, a cursory reflection on the Nigerian society and the bottomless abyss it was drifting informs the Nigerian writer's style and their thematic engagements.

It is out of this blossoming writing tradition that Ojaide emerged as one of the fiery voices to mobilise the masses against the predatory tendencies of the ruling elite. Through explication of select poems in his two collections: *The Endless song and Delta Blues and Home Songs*, Ojaide, does not only point out the malfeasances of the ruling elite but also expresses disillusionment at the turn of socio-political events. The dominant points of concern articulated through language and style in these poems clearly delineates the landscape of leadership crises and widespread disillusionment as the informing thematic agenda of the poetry collections.

Leadership and Social Disillusionment in the *Endless Song and Delta Blues and Home Songs*

Tanure Ojaide is one of those militant and radical voices that have emerged on Nigerian and African literary space. There are many poetry collections to his credit and, in all these literary oeuvres, Ojaide lends his voice to other sundry voices in not only telling a compelling story of an ailing nation, but also casting a jaundiced look at some socio-political inanities plaguing the Nigerian nation. This is in consonance with Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle argument that "literary text are embedded within the social and economic circumstances in which they are produced and consumed" (119). In other words, the meaning derived from a text is authenticated by the socio-political conditions that underpin the period and locale from which it ensues (Bello, 139). In *The Endless Song and Delta Blues and Home Songs* which are the primary sources for this paper, Ojaide exposes with photographic precision, the crass ineptitude and the administrative aloofness of the Nigerian leadership. Through his choice of words in the select poems, Ojaide

also exposes the socio-political ruptures in the country. He also weaves a thread of hope for the common people by instigating the people who are the victims to defend their destiny in face of the onslaught from their leaders.

The Endless Song is divided into four parts; "Looking Out", "The Encounter", "Lessons" and "Clearing". However, it is in part one that Ojaide bristles with anger, at the selfishness and the impunity of the political leaders. For example, in the "The Vision", the persona goes prophetic, and declares the end of exploitative leadership in the country. The metaphoric reference to "the Leopard" underscores the exploitative and oppressive trait of Nigerian political leaders, and thus, prophesies death for them in the course of time. Through this, the poet envisages an end to the present culture of impunity that defines leadership in the country, and looks forward to an enthronement of visionary leadership.

The leopard that haunts us will die,
Maybe in our life time, maybe not
Time plies the ambush with an invisible hand
(Lines 1-3)

Here the persona fuses the role of a prophet/seer with that of a teacher (Bassey, 171).

This confirms Okuyade's position that: "The writer is not only a "righter" (Osundare), but also a sage and a prophet; his or her prophecy is therefore dependent on the society and the ability to translate imagination, which is usually fertilized by the society, into reality" (139). By using the pronouns "we" and "us", Ojaide emphasises sacrifices, selflessness and synergies on the part of the downtrodden in the society, if they must change the status quo.

We have to incur debts to buy new weapons
Or mend our broken ones
Then go to the bush to prove our mettle (Lines 8-10).

It is with all amount of certainty and conviction that the poet persona ends the poem, reiterating his prophecy of doom for the exploitative leaders in the country.

As for the leopard that hunts us,
It will surely die, the ambush taut. (Lines, 23-4).

The same bitter note in "The Vision" continues in the next poem: "We Keep Watch over Them". Here the persona blows hot, as he expresses the readiness of the people in getting rid of corrupt and exploitative leaders. The persona makes allusion to "Orodje" and "Ogiso" who were tyrant Kings in Urhobo myth and, reminds the people of how the will of the people overpowered them. To the persona, if it was possible then, it could also be done now.

When they savage us, we withdraw to cabal;
Our experience over the ages helps us through
Our women know how to march naked at
twilight
And rid the land of tormentors,
Our men know how to bury despots with their
paraphernalia
We always regroup in the shadows of our fallen
heroes.

When *Orodji* ordered us to hold back falling
palm tree
He drove us into our closet of metal;
When *Ogiso* wielded his sword against his own
subjects,
He fired the guns loaded in our guts
When the tortoise grew fat as others thinned out,
He step into our death charges
Each praise song brought them closer to the
ambush

We knew what they loved most and what would ruin
them (Lines 5-18).

The poet's allusion to Urhobo mythology buttresses Obari Gomba's argument that amongst the Urobos, "a poet is believed to be one who performs a serious function in the society, and he depends on patron deities for his success and protection" (5)

In lines 15, the tortoise growing fat while others thinned out creates an image of corrupt and selfish leaders, who live fat from the common wealth of the people while the ordinary people in the society watch on from the slums of their existence. The tortoise is also known for its craftiness and deceit. Thus this is an indirect way of portraying the leaders not only as cunning and deceitful, but also as dangerous specie of humanity. Yomi Olusegun avers that one of their stocks in trade is "...the betrayal of the citizenry due to the irresponsible and empty promises of the ruling classes, which turn out to be mere ploys to consolidate their often rigged mandate" (12). Douglas Anele echoes this when he says that: "A party that does not exaggerate promises might appear dull, unambitious and uninteresting to voters compared to the one that does. Sometimes this could give an exaggerating party an advantage over the truthful...." (120).

The poet persona further reveals that in spite of the ugly situation, the people are hardened and will not relent in their vision to get rid of bad leaders. He portrays the leaders as armed robbers who live on the sweat of others. Instead of using the available resources to better the lot of the people, the leaders routinely cart the common wealth into their purse, leaving the system crippling. To this kind of leaders, the poet says the people will never surrender.

There is metal in our will, it shows

when we meet hardships
we do not break down before torturers,
we do not surrender our hope to robbers,
we do no groan despite the daily stab of hunger,
we do not give in to those who live on the blood
of the poor or the sweat of the strong (Lines 19-25).

The poet ends in a strong resolve to overthrow tyrannical leaders. The will of the people is so strong that the poet describes it as iroko tree that cannot be ravaged by any storm. As an evidence of revolutionary tendencies of the poet, there are references to weapons such as rifle, swagger-stick, matchet etc. as instruments that will be employed in changing the leadership.

The matchet is our fan,
the rifle our swagger-stick in the dark
we know what distance to go in silence
before unleashing thunder,
we know how to lead our prosecutors away
in the night of their power.
our will has become our god, and
from the iroko tree, aloft our hearts
we keep strict watch over them (Lines 33-41)

In "No Prescription Cures a Country Nobody Loves" Ojaide celebrates the common people in the society for their selfless services to the humanity. The little school girl who "surrender her recess-rice coin to a beggar" and the driver "who rescues his van from a treacherous puddle, then stops to plant there a red flag". This is actually why the poet finds this acts of patriotism a rarity and this gladdens his heart. Unfortunately, this selfless Nigerians are not always celebrated, they are not heard in network news neither are they used as sermon topic in churches.

And these do not make history or network news,
these do not earn national awards,
these are not sermonisers behind gilded lecterns;
they do not crow on roof tops (10-13).

According to Basse Basse, "...while these separate but heart-warming incidents do not make prime news broadcast, and so are not nationally recognized for awards, the stated comparison is with government officials who publicize even their ill – motivated token acts of charity" (172). The poet further portrays the country as bereft of love and patriotism from her citizens. Thus to the poet "no prescription cures a country nobody loves". It is heart rendering that what Nigeria has as leaders are those self-seeking and opportunistic individuals who perceive their primary role in governance as that of looting and a personal franchise.

And no prescription will cure the sick country
nobody proudly loves as an inseparable flesh.

has it ever happened here that the priest offered
his blood
to stave off the vesuvial scourge he foresaw,
has it happened here that the sharer forgot
himself
to raise the spirit of the eighty per cent lowlies?
(17-22).

Through this, the poet depicts the Nigerian nation as a sick contraption that defies all kinds of medication for it to be healed.

In *Delta Blues and Home Songs*, the reader simply encounters a disoriented humanity and a liability of leaders who creates a social atmosphere polluted with corruption, violence, injustice, exploitation and bloodshed. For instance, in 'Fetish Country' the poet employs imagery of tyranny and portrays the leaders as blood-tasty: "Inside the rocky cave they offer sacrifices/ to the god of power, a cobra with a hooded face. The "rocky cave" here symbolises Aso Rock, Nigeria seat of power in Abuja, while "a cobra with a hood face" symbolises General Sani Abacha, former head of military junta and Nigeria's Head of State. This brings to the fore the military leadership's claim to messiahship; for it has not only become corrupt and inept, but also worsened the people's sense of betrayal, thereby bringing disillusionment in its wake.

The persona also exposes how the blood tasty dictator brings terror upon the people he is supposed to protect. So many citizens were murdered that "Piles of bodies deck the altar with overabundance/and "the stench from the court shrine asphyxiates the country/. The tyrant is noted for perpetuating the ignoble acts of terrorising, bloodletting and the use of secret killer-squad to brutalise and cow any dissenting voice of the people he is supposed to be protecting. //Nobody dares in the open to speak ill of the god// whose lightening seeks to strike dissonant tongues//. A flip into the historical context around which this poem was written corroborates Bello's argument on his study of new historicism. According to him:

...the literary text and the extant historical conditions of its period of creation intertwine to give readers of the text an understanding of the true meaning that it communicates. Thus the text derives its life from the socio-political, economic and other such like events of the period of its creation, and it, in turn, serves as a canvass for our understanding of its epoch (140).

Thus New Historicism goes beyond the linguistic components of a text to apprehend its true evocation of the human relations of its period of creation. Despite the terror unleashed on the people on the people by this despot of a leader, the poet weaves a thread of hope for the people when he registers the fact that the blood tasty tyrant has a limitation, and that

there is no how he will cover the truth against the entire world as he does with his “round table of flies”. This is indicative of a possible redemption for the masses.

The persona continues his lamentation in “witchcraft” when he sees Nigeria’s backwardness as nothing but a result of witchcraft. Here the persona laments the underdevelopment of the country and simply lays the blame at the feet of the leaders.

No other spell than witchcraft explains
Nigeria’s closed eyes in the open world.
Every day spreads such a dizzying cloud
That people trip on stumps of beheaded dreams (1-4).

According to Ojo Olorunleke, “contrastive images of health and disease are used to paint other countries and his mother land respectively. The former are full of energy, vigour and vitality, while the later spreads contagion” (16). The poet uses the image of elephant to show strength in other countries, while Nigeria is portrayed as a contaminative agent that will sent people scampering for safety by the smell of her fart. “Other elephants pace with strength, // this only rattles the airspace with fart//. This is a very strong image of decay, dearth and retrogression and the poet seems to be certain that: “The bewitched land can no longer boast// of an erect head on its crooked bush paths//. The persona sees Nigerian leaders as clueless and not able to redeem the country from socio-political and economic coma she is now into: //Nigeria suffers between life and death//The rest of the world can only wonder//. The rest of the world is wondering at the spate of underdevelopment in the country when there are bountiful human and natural resources.

In “The Chieftain and His Tribe”, the poet does not only reveal the tactics of a tyrant leader in co-opting people to support his dictatorial rule, but also exposes the people for being accomplices in the wrecking of the nation. The people are so gullible and ready to sell out their consciences for “money, sex and power”:

A chieftain boasts of herding a far-flung tribe.
His people cannot live without bribes.
He spits at them, still they follow him
Each person has something to trade:
money, sex and power are there to die for; (1-6).

Instead of using the nation’s resources to fix the infrastructural deficit in the country, the leaders use it in servicing //millions of his worshippers//. The people has become so complacent that money now detects the flow of their allegiances. Despite the violence and bloodshed in the land: //the tortoise-brained people invent praise-songs// to get to the left overs of the chief//. The tyrant is so confident and boastful because: //he knows no dog will bark with its mouth full//. Following this, the poet opines that the

leaders are not the only villain, the common man should also be blamed for his role in orchestrating this sadism. //If you accuse the chieftain of being an evil idol/ don’t spare his tribe of willing worshippers/ they share the same monstrous faith//. Chinua Achebe had earlier created this scenario of a manipulated and complacent populace in his *A Man of the People*. In this narrative, when Odili complains the political leadership has failed and betrayed the people, the people cynically answer: “Let them eat...after all, when the white man used to do the eatery, did we commit suicide? Besides, who can tell what the future may bring? ...who knows, it may be your turn to eat tomorrow” (102). No nation can progress in a regime where everybody sees the common wealth as something to be eaten.

The diatribe against the leaders continues in the poem “Pregnancy of the Snake”. Here the poet is very explicit in his comment and castigation of corrupt leaders in the country. He sees corruption as being entrenched in the Nigerian polity. It has become a system within the Nigerian system and, this has not only rob the people of the basic needs of life, it has also plunged them into abject penury. Liwhu Betiang in his new novel: *The Rape of Hope: Diary of a Wasted Generation* remarks that: “...if there is anything Nigeria has achieved in twenty-six years, it is corruption, our sole export after petroleum” (26). Thus the poet describes them as armed robbers:

Armed robbers are waiting in ambush
To tear off the womb of the nation for sale
Police are collecting their only earnings from
travellers
The roads gutted with abundant holes
Scraps of iron, skulls and blood cover the soil
(Lines 1-5).

The system is so decayed that the Nigerian police officers, whose major duty is to protect the citizens now condescend to forcefully taking tips from motorists on the road. The money which is supposed to be used for rehabilitation of roads are shared by few leaders, thereby condemning the people to holes-ridden roads littered all over the country. The leaders are so blank that they know not and even care not where they drive the country to. “//A uniformed cabal ride a caparisoned horse to death//care not whether they are stranded in an eternal cemetery//”.

Also in the “Army of Microbes” the poet makes a candid incursion into the social neglect, violence and disorderliness that characterised the military leadership in Nigeria. As stated earlier in this paper, the military had touted itself as the messiah that would cleanse the nation and protect it from plunging into an abyss, following the perceived ineptitude of the civilian in power. Yet they had only succeeded in blowing the already ugly situation into abnormal proportion. Thus the poet paints a clearer picture of the people living at

the mercy of the military rulers. //To the usurper-chieftain who has set his rabid guard dogs/ against street of impoverished ones”//. The poet describes them as anti-intellectual who muffles any critical voices through intimidation and coercion. “//To the uniformed caste of half-literate soldiery// who close people’s mouths with trigger-ready hands//. Through this, the poet paints a painful picture of abuse of power and fundamental human rights. The poet describes the military as robbers //that have brought plague to the land//. Out of greed and selfishness, the military leaders have grown so fat while the ordinary people are daily strangled by hunger.

To the ruling council fat in the neck and thigh
 but whose plans make wraiths of workers
 To those who have creased faces of
 farmers and fishers
 With lines of hunger and pain (10-13).

Through these lines, the poet creates a vivid picture of corruption, indifference and insensitivity that has been the hallmark of the Nigerian leadership.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to show, through the analysis of the select poems in the two poetry collections that the only major challenge posing a threat to Nigeria’s greatness is poor leadership. The study shows that those parading themselves as leaders have failed woefully to provide the sort of leadership needed to improve the quality of life of the teeming masses of Nigerian humanity. According to Prah, “Contestation for resources and recourse to ethnic mobilisation instead of clear ideological positioning reduces politics to egotistical grandstanding and philosophically barren personality rivalries” (13). This scenario has also triggered off a culture of impunity and the absence of political decency. The above picture has become a major thrust in the post-independence Nigerian poetry. It is against this backdrop that this paper exposes, with clinical precision, that leadership deficit has been a blockade in the country’s path to greatness.

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