

VERSIFICATION OF ANGER AND RESISTANCE IN HALIMA AMALI'S *I WANT TO JOIN THEM*

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Abstract

Beyond colonization and the emergence of self-rule in Nigeria, Nigerian literature has been a pathway of critical analysis of the sorry predicament among other woes, the diverse manifestation of post-independence disillusionment in the Nigerian nation. Whereas the political marauders disregard the people, the citizens suffer irresponsible leadership prevalent in the country. As a consequence, Nigerian literature has continuously proffer solution to myriads of problems confronting Nigerians and Nigeria without any significant improvement. Using Halima Amali's *I Want To Join Them*, this study explores the debate of advocating resistance as medium of emancipation for the people. It is glaring that high percentage of post-independence Nigerian literature is lamentary against man-made degradation of the people. The main aim of this study is to show that tyranny, oppression, subjugation, exploitation of the Nigerian state towards the masses will not end until the people resist and collapse oppressive tendencies of the rulers. The theoretical framework for this study is sociological approach to literature. This study employs the content analysis approach to qualitative research.

Keywords: Nigerian, Literature, Disillusionment, Leadership, Resistance.

Introduction

There is no doubt that disillusionment has informed the thematic preoccupation of post-independence Nigerian literature. Through literature, literary critics, scholars and writers criticize bad governance, proffer solutions to the problems confronting the country. Generally, writers who tend to represent bad governance as consequence of disillusionment have in their literary works proven to be committed to the emancipation of the people. These literary works are often referred to as protest literature. Protest literature is a literary work induced with quest for freedom. Protest literature as a sub-genre shows a link with resistance literature. Resistance literature is also seen as protest literature as it criticizes, proffer solutions to problems of the society but in another angle, gelatinise the people to fight for their rights. This idea of protest literature is to prevent continuous oppression of the people. To adherents of protest literature, literature is a social force and ideological weapon against bad

governance. Among these writers are Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Festus Iyayi, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh, Florence Orabueze and host of others.

High percentage of post-independence Nigerian literary works command definite themes. Apart from highlighting bad governance, these literary works expose effects of poor leadership to include exploitation and exploration of human and material resources, poverty, disease, hunger, infrastructural decay and the negative effects on the people and polity. Nigerian literature serves as compass for societal direction. Kolawole Ogungbesan (1979:1) asserts:

African writers in general do not believe that they should abdicate their ethical role by eliminating themselves, and therefore the question of responsibility to their readers, from their books. They value the relation of writer to reader and take very seriously their moral obligation to their audience.

Again, Kolawole Ogungbesan (1978:7) believes:

The writer is a member of society and his sensibility is conditioned by the social and political happenings around him. These issues will therefore perforce to present in his work, but they must be more implicit than other wise ... these issues form a part of the substance of life within which his instinct as a writer must struggle.

It is important that Africa writers should be committed to reshaping the society. Commitment is an important factor in African literature. Peter Nazareth (1965:6) opines "no African writer who writes about society in present day Africa can avoid being committed and political". This is exactly what this study is endorsing

Disillusionment is a major theme of African literature. Writers, literary scholars and critics have consistently contributed to this concern. However, this study will focus on broadening literary scholarship by exposing feminine perspective to the emergent Nigerian resistance literature. By this, questions will be raised: to what extent does Halima Amali's *I Want To Join Them* further Nigerian literature? How can the people utilize resistance as weapon of mass destruction against societal malaise confronting them?

The theoretical framework for this study is the sociological approach to literature. The sociological approach relies in the social relevance of a literary work to man and the society. The motion of a social relevant literature maintains that there is strong relationship between literature and society. "Every work" as J.W. Karlsruhe (1983:3) argue, "reflects and represents the form of society which produced it in its essential aesthetic quality".

Sociology deals with human beings. From this premise, literature is seen not as an aesthetic object but as tool for emancipation of humanity. Thus, literature propose revolutionary ideas making literature a weapon of change. The sociological approach

to literature is a radical overview of exploitation in society. Here, there is abiding concern for the people and a belief in society that cater for all humanity, devoid of economic elitism and hegemony.

The sociological approach to literature asserts writers should see literature from the standpoint of societal decadence and inequities. Adam Hazard (1971: 942) states: "works of art, including literature are strategic naming of situations that allow the reader to understand and gain a sort of control over societal happenings through the work of art". This assertion reinforces the notion that literature should serve as vehicle of understanding man and the society.

Lanre Bamidele (1992:148) conclude that art should as a social function, expose, reflect and indeed magnify the decadent rotten underbelly of a society that has lost its direction.

Austin Harrington (2004:207) insist literature should function as, "normative sources of social understanding in their own rights". Chinyere Nwahunanya (2007:34) opine, three tripod are raised in the sociological approach to literature, that is the sociology of the writer, the social context of the work itself and the influence of literature on society. According to him, the writer is influenced by society just as he also influences the society supporting the fact that literature is a mechanism that reflects the society with the aim of radically changing the society.

VERSIFICATION OF ANGER AND RESISTANCE IN HALIMA AMALI'S / I WANT TO JOIN THEM

There had been high hopes that with the attainment of independence on 1st October, 1960, Nigeria will assume a major force amongst the comity of nations due to her huge human and material resources. Sadly, decades after, Nigeria is battling multiple issues negating her development. This has given rise to Nigerian literature known as post-independence literature of disillusionment. With this, high percentage of Nigerian writers illustrate the anomalies.

In the opening poem entitled "We shall pull them down", the poet persona calls on the masses to destroy the oppressive tendencies against them:

.... These men with no humanness,
Battering life off the have-nots
Gallivating with swollen stomachs
Habouring stole wealth
From the hearts of the les privileged
And offering a poverty-ridden people

We shall pull them down
These men of no business
Pulling them to the hearth of hell
Where they belong
And deflate their affluent frames

We shall pull them down
 Giving them pain
 For us to have joy
 We shall pull them down
 From their intimidating towers of oppression
 These men that deserve no life (10-11)

The last line implying that the bard and the people cannot fail to end their subjugation. For it will be disastrous for the people to allow the continuation of the oppression. Rather, resisting unjust situation will help them recover and claim back their humanity.

In the poem entitled "My Country 2", the poet lash against corruption in the society. The protagonist believes corruption is endemic in Nigeria. He wishes for the people to revolt against corrupt elements in the society:

.... In my country
 Criminality is pride
 Thieves are nationalists
 As water reservoirs are retagged
 And transform to reservoirs of stolen wealth
 Pipelines of our treasuries
 Reroute into corrupt leaders
 And a hatchery of Naira is born

One day
 Some day
 In my country
 These thieves
 Scavengers of our lives
 Shall be renamed:
 Enemies of God
 Betrayers of Heaven and Earth
 Gardeners of evil
 Owners of hell
 Haters of good
 And they shall see no tomorrow (43 – 44)

In the poem, "Unyielding hopes", the poet inveighs against the unyielding lies of the political elites who often deceive the masses to vote for them but after electing them, the masses are made to suffer effects of bad governance:

See them in flies
 Seeking political heights
 From where they shall build heaven on earth

For electorates, for the have-nots
As they vow
With honey-coated tongues
Giving these less privileged uncertified hope

.... Next comes the honourable
In cushioned flesh
Enriched with unlimited vitamins
Gulped in one mouth from many mouths
Standing tall and huge
Overfed from our food reserves

.... Where lies our hope
For a better home
Where lies the joy of the poor
As we pant in anguish
Of our castrated hope
Where our leaders
Lead us to unyielding desires. (40-41)

This is a clear demonstration of literature serving as mirror of the society. Here, the poet persona is educating the masses to reject crumbs from the post-independence rulers who are dedicated to continuously perpetuate evil deeds against the people.

Post independence literary writers had tried to expose exploitation and exploration of the people. While the political rulers justify their oppression and exploitation of the people, writers especially committed writers with revolutionary ideology inspire the masses to reject their sorry predicament. These writers not only express theme of disillusionment in their literary works but also advocate resistance. Note the assertion of the poet persona in "My Country 1):

.... My Country
Where black is white
And white is red
Where good is bad
And bad is good
Learned men transform to learned rogues
Lawmakers descend to lawbreakers
Parents become hawkers of our siblings
Ministers robe stench of stolen wealth
Hmmm
My country stinks

.... Beware!!
 Men without honour
 When the loot stomachs will bloat out
 And burst the stench to expose you
 Your anuses will purge fire of hell
 And you shall be carcasses
 For the vultures to devour
 In our cleansing ceremony (23 – 24)

In the poem, "My sister", the poet laments the death of her sister due to infrastructural decay in the hospital. Nigeria's abundant human and material resources have been crippled by years of poor governance and irresponsible leadership. Note how her sister died amidst the rottenness of the health care system:

She watches my gait
 In sharp looks at me
 Smiling and hugging
 While my eye-balls roll
 In pains of worry
 Dropping balls of tears

The mind is difficult
 No compass reveals thoughts
 In troubled moments
 I gaze into the sky
 Unto my sister I hang my pains in trust
 And yearn for pacification

The world is a scene
 Of actors and actresses
 A true actress
 Offering me sympathy to my face
 Stabbing me in the back
 And prides in happiness
 Over my plight
 In betrayal of my trust (14)

Halima Amali presents a problematic country in her poems. The oppressive elites cause the citizens much trouble by keeping them oppressed. The lack of stable, responsive governance demonstrates the failure of post-independence Nigeria. Although the citizens wish for a better country, the irresponsible leadership of the country reveals Nigeria is created to fail. This raises question about the benefit of independence.

Besides, the attainment of independence is not the end of struggle. Because Nigeria is founded on injustice; Nigerian state destroy the lives of her citizens. Independence failed because the black people who assumed rulership positions immediately after the exit of the colonialists are demonic rulers. This oppressive relationship is a counter example of what responsive leadership and rulership should be. Like in other parts of Africa, there is also failure of leadership in Nigeria. The oppressive rulers treat the masses like slaves rather than fellow citizens. Indeed, both the rulers and the citizens relationship break up when it became clear the ruling elite are enemies of the people. The author of *I Want To Join Them* encourage the readers to free themselves from oppressive entanglement and assert themselves as free people as seen in the poem, "Seats of oppression":

.... We decry their seats of oppression
Cordoned by theft and illicit deals
Depriving the rich a feeling for the poor
As they roll in affluence
For showers of fraudulent deals

We shall deflate these men
From their seats of oppression
Puncturing their ballooned bodies
Filled with our wealth
And revamp our treasury

We shall hijack their stands
Pulling off their seats
From underneath
Their unholy-wealth inflated buttocks
And incise their money-carrier veins
To recall our wealth
We shall converge in the area
For a dance of revenge
Spiting their being (31).

There are also various themes of suffering, poverty and loss of human life in the poetry collection. See the poem, "who can fight my country?"

.... Young girls have turned life spinsters
As able bodied men no longer live
With flying bullets hovering over their heads
Striking down the living
For bullets to sell
And terrorism reigns

Who can fight my country
 Eaten deep by corruption
 Hands of men in government soiled
 And stinking in the mud of theft
 Smeared with the blood of our fathers
 Who can fight my country
 For its respite? (30)

The suffering is intense, the poet persona echoes further in the poem, "There is pain".

There is pain
 In the hearts of orphans
 Whose lives have been castrated to misery
 By the filthy and hands of the rich
 Stalling budget allocations to orphanages
 And waylaying donations to them
 From donor nations.

.... Indeed there is pain
 In the life of my nation
 Bedeviled by robbers in legislative robes
 Sitting in filling chambers
 Smeared with stolen wealth of our sweat
 Snapping dry our reservoir of survival

There is pain
 In the soul
 The heart
 The body
 There is painful pain
 In my nation
 In the hearts of men (79 – 80).

In the poem "Guards of our treasury", the poet again targets the impudence of rulers and make passionate appeal to the masses to resist their subjugation. The poet underscores the importance of resistance against evil rulers, emphasising the need for responsible leadership from the political elites. Rather than looting the common wealth of the people, the political elites should utilize the wealth of the nation for the general good of the people. Note how the poet advocate for resistance of the people:

They come in scores
 Honey-tongued
 With promises of pious vows

To guard our treasuries
And yield our economic desires

.... But
Here they go
In tall mobile four wheeled houses
In jeeps, they pride high
And from the top looking down
They spit on us the downtrodden
While smiles open on their faces
In fulfillment of their victorious sins against humanity

.... Woe unto these thieves
With fat bellies creamed in
Unpaid salaries of teachers
Stolen funds of pensioners
Earned allowances of vigilantes
Constituency funds
And benefits of widows
Maganetized into their pockets

I say to you these vultures
Woe unto you
We await the day of reckoning
When eyes shall bulge and potrude
When eyelids shall shy away from containing eyeballs

Woe unto you
As we await
The day of truth
When your souls shall be rubbished
Exposing you as the monster of our time

We shall see
The large bellies filled with our wealth
Burst and expose the loot
We shall see our deprived rights
Purged out of your enlarged anuses

We shall see
Your carcasses
Lie in the open
For vultures to guard
Defecating onto your carcasses (34 – 35).

In the poem, "Unholy pilgrimages", there is a rising consciousness of the people to resistance. Passive oppression of the masses is rampant. In this poem, the masses are seen as prisoners, slaves of the ruling class. Dispossession of the poor, massive looting of resources is a common feature of post independent Nigeria. The poet maintains that except the masses resist, revolt against their oppressors, their quest for freedom will be a mirage. The poet encourages the people to thwart instruments of oppression perpetuated against them and endeavour to say no to intolerable circumstances. See the second part of the poem:

Granting it an unviable trillion naira look
While my people
Wallow in pains of hunger and misery
And watch these unholy men
On unholy pilgrimage
To the State House
To mourn the bastard ostrich

Unholy pilgrimage
Rise my people
Cast the die
Pull your swords
Draw the battle line
For the President's own
To die no longer
For our treasury to remain
And unholy pilgrimage cease

We shall rise
My people
For our nation
For the downtrodden
We shall devour them
These vultures of men
And castrate unholy tenets out of them
To cast away unholy pilgrimages
For holy pilgrimages to thrive (37).

This second part of the poem "Unholy pilgrimages" show the poet persona calling for revolution of the people unlike the first part of the same poem where he was disillusioned with events in the polity. Note:

They troop in
In large numbers
Stepping from left to right
North and South, East and West
Their bodies rotten
From unholy wealth
In pride they move
In another opportunity
For an unholy pilgrimage
A condolence to Mr. President
His pet dog is dead.

The nation shakes
As radio stations pronounce
And print media stands overflow
With free readers of the news:
"the first Lady's kitten has breathed its last"
These women in their numbers
Move in human chains
For a condolence to the State House
Each chain preceded by tonnes of gift items
Generated from the public treasury
Built from the pains of our fathers
And we are left with no "thank you"
As these women of little faith
Go on this unholy pilgrimage to the State House
In condolence over the death of the first kitten

The first son's ostrich is gone
A call for its burial
Ministers cordon the First Home
With chains of naira pulled around its chest (36)

Halima Amali's poetry collection *I Want To Join Them* explore the relationship between the oppressors and the oppressed. In the poem "Salute to ASUU", the socio-political themes include: inequality, greed, exploitation, corruption. The poet lampoons the ruling class for mistreating university lecturers:

In large hearts

You dish knowledge
Working in harmony
For a well-built nation
Rolling out balls of sweat
In your strive
To capture illiteracy

Resolutely you strive
Bearing the unbearable
Bedeviled in poverty
In pursuit of truth
That education must live
Against odds in governance

ASUU
I salute you
A sacrificial lamb
Undaunted in your struggle
Forcing government to reason
For a better Nigeria

Many have gone
In your sincere struggle
For true education
Debunking ill-gotten wealth
And neglect of scholarship
For a true Nigeria
I salute you

ASUU
Focused on truth
Armed with poverty and knowledge
Yet in slim pockets of no respite
Withered and hollow
Gazing into emptiness
And bewilderment (18)

The characteristic traits of deception, chicanery insincerity and duplicity of politicians in Nigeria are adequately focus on in the poem "I hate them". Politicians in Nigeria visit the electorates before elections, seeking for their votes but immediately after the elections, they become aloof from the voters, enriching themselves, driving

posh cars, enjoying ill-gotten huge salaries and constituency allowances. They become devilish, irresponsible, wicked to the people. The poet persona has words of advice for the thievery politicians: the people are wiser now, very soon, they will resist, revolt against the looters:

Our thieving leaders
These thieves at the top
Daily climbing our towers of hope
And pouncing
Onto our reserves of life
Devouring the produce
Like the red monkey in a maize farm
I hate them

I hate them
These first ladies of no honour
Daily in tours unnecessary
Claiming to attend to the needy
Their necks adorned with jewels
Built from the gold towers of Rome
As our fate hangs in the wild
While our blood streams
Are sucked dry
Fueling their journeys of deceit

I hate them
These scavengers in government
Daily on pilgrimages of loot to our treasuries
Battering our stronghold to life
As allocations for national survival
Are bulldozed
And these men of no shame
Gallivant in pride
With grabs of our wealth
Tucked into their elastic bellies
Bloated with theft to no elastic end
As they take all we own

I detest
Where many live
Unsure of tomorrow
Hospitals remain complexes for rats

School buildings crumble
 Teachers wallow in hunger
 Universities degenerate to play grounds
 Yet
 These stakeholders of corruption
 Shower in lead
 In diamond
 In silver
 In gold
 And their skins glitter
 I hate them

I warn
 From where illicit happiness is derived
 Shall sadness flow
 I warn you
 That we have a bet
 And tomorrow shall tell
 I hate them
 These men of d-i-s-h-o-n-o-u-r. (38-39).

In the poem "It is not ours", the poet takes a swipe at corruption of the electoral system in Nigeria. To win an election in Nigeria, you must belong to the motley crew of evil doers. The tortuous bureaucracy inherent in electoral processes and the draconian requirements for vying for elective positions frustrates genuine individuals from contesting election. To complicate issues, the electorates are forced to vote against their choices, elections are massively rigged to favour the thievery mafiaso gang. The lapses described above are symptoms of the deception and endemic corruption prevalent in Nigeria:

It is not ours
 To yearn to be on a cushioned seat
 Receiving favours
 And snatching rights due to others
 As accorded the first man
 For we are the downtrodden

It is not ours
 To adorn our necks with ivory jewels
 Realizing not that there are people
 Worthy of adorning jewels as well
 As designed for the first lady
 For we are teachers

It is not ours
To desire to be in water-walled residences
Relaxing and snoring in affluent sleep
Building the path to body-freshness
As architected for the first family
For we are peasants

It is not ours
To desire to be royal brides
Riding in golden carts
In oppressive and intimidating wears
Meant for the first daughter
As we are girl-slaves

It is not ours
To fly in the air of jeerers
Or walk on the surface in silver shoes
Costing others' desired medications
As reserved for the first son
For we are unworthy Nigerians

It is not ours
To be oppressive to the oppressed
Snatching from their mouth their dues
And adoring all that is theirs
Because we are no politicians

It is ours
Ours
To be pious
In appreciation of life
To forfeit all vanity
For a peaceful abode beyond
And be spiritually uplifted
To journey back gracefully to the Most Gracious
To our God
In Peace
That is ours (25-26).

Halima Amali's poetry identifies with the oppressed people of Nigeria. The poet yearns for the collapse of oppressive tendencies prevailing in the polity, she

consciously elaborate the ills of the country as well as advocating change of status quo. The author could be seen as social reformer and also a social realist. Omafume Onoge (1985:36) depict social realist as the person who “shows the world as changeable.... His prospective vision is a positive statement on behalf of the revolutionary aspirations of the exploited classes”. No doubt Halima Amali has shown her reproof of dictatorship while affirming resistance as the only solution to the exploitation of the masses.

Conclusion

Thus far, this study has been an elucidation of Halima Amali’s *I Want To Join Them*. In her writing, the poet establishes the parameters within which responsive leadership functions. To begin with, the literary work is populated with brutal oppressive tendencies of the rulers against the ruled. Throughout this poetry collection, Halima Amali’s foundation is the impression that oppression is innate-that there is an abiding tendency for African nay Nigerian rulers to behave irresponsibly and docility of the people breeds continuation of their subjugation, to allow oppression is not in itself a fundamental part of human nature.

I Want To Join Them depict Nigerian state as authoritarian and her rulers as brutal. It is also a commentary on bad governance of the country and the citizen lack of revolutionary ideas to salvage the country from tyrannical rulers. It is important to state that satire is a tool with which Halima Amali hit at the multiple problems of political leadership in Nigeria and Africa.

Post independent Nigerian literature is basically structured on disillusionment which rolled out from what Onookome Okome (2002:163) characterize as “the political ineptitude of those who took power after independence in Nigeria”. Halima Amali on her part believe in the ability of the people to instigate change by resisting against the oppressors. She is in solidarity with the oppressed people to undertake total revamping of the country leadership structure.

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