

Supremacy of Idealism and the Idea of Leadership in Abubakar Gimba's *Innocent Victims and Footprints*

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Abstract

Nigeria's quest for independence is to release itself from the shackles of colonialism and its attendant evils. This paper examines the quest for self rule and its aftermath, the problems that surrounded the new generation of Nigerian leaders (black elite) vide leadership failure characterised by corruption, students demonstrations, misuse of power, retardation, stagnation, lack of focus, etc as orchestrated by visionless leadership that bedevilled the nation. It further explores the role of fictional characters and various institutions in saving the nation. It equally reveals how bad and corrupt leaders overuse their power at the expense of the led to derail any positive measure for good leadership and governance. The paper further advocates the entrenchment of visionary leaders in the country whose sole interest and concern would be to establish an effective leadership and governance structure that can benefit the generality of country's citizens.

Key Words: Ideology, Supremacy, Leadership, Corruption, Governance and Development

Introduction

The quest for independence and self-rule by the Nigerian political elites was to provide effective leadership. The leadership was to afford Nigerians a say and participatory role with a view to providing more purposeful development in the country. According to nationalists, development under the colonial administration was not enough in view of the nation's abundant human and natural resources.

After independence, the colonial administration's development structures continued for just a short period before such started dwindling as the emerging leaders began to deviate from patriotism to self-centredness. These ugly tendencies started manifesting negative trends like corruption, incessant military coups, ethno-religious crisis, maladministration, political crisis and a host of other social ills. This trend brought about social, economic and political instability in the country.

On the whole, the failure of the new leaders to carry their people along as well as provide the enabling environment for and provide enabling environment for sustainable development gave rise to the emergence of contemporary writers or what writers called post-colonial writers. These writers concern

themselves with the failure on the part of government to satisfy the aspirations and desire of the people. It is observed that many factors contribute to the apparent conflicts and contradictions that bedevilled the Nigerian political leadership. To the apparent conflicts and contradictions Nigeria found itself. The problem of incessant military incursions into politics and government, absence of visionary leadership corruption at all levels (social, political and economic), inability to maintain law and order or ensure security of lives and properties, problem of intra-ethnic clashes, tribalism and religious intolerance, etc all constitute the bane of the nation's attempt into self-rule. Determined to institute positive changes in the country, writers started using literary ideology to depict the ugly situation. Writers of this trend have come to regard the new rulers as no better than the oppressive colonisers.

Furthermore, Fajenyo and Sunde, equally agree with this observation as they stress the reoccurring theme of leadership in the following words:

The problem of leadership, for instance, which is a common theme in modern African literary expression, has attracted to itself the possibility of



inexhaustibility, as a result daily-emerging qualities which have straight atavism as its feature. African leadership, especially in independent nation is a constant theme in modern African literature and is often fleshed out in its multifariousness, its very quality of deeply experienced multiplicity (86)

The first generation of writers in Nigeria such as Soyinka, Achebe, J.P. Clark, M.T Aluko as well as contemporary writers such as Festus Ijayi, Abubakar Gimba, Adamu Kyuka Usman and a host of others have examined the problem of leadership and power in different perspectives. While most of them tend to discuss the phenomenon and allow their readers to give interpretation to their stories, there are quite a few of these writers who sometimes engage in non-fictional commentary on their areas of concern. Achebe, for example, ascribes the problems in Nigeria to bad leadership. Achebe, in his *The Trouble with Nigeria* declares that:

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility to the challenge of personal example which is the hallmarks of true leadership Nigeria can change today if she discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision (1 – 2).

It is worthy to note that this comment comes from a writer whose fame was principally as a result of his early novels, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, which were written to reverse the European impression on African primitivism and depict them as capable of handling complex issues of leadership in pre-colonial times. The high hope of independence and a modernised lifestyle, however, eluded Nigerians and most other Africans shortly after the European colonial masters left the African soil. The first set of indigenous leaders who took over leadership soon

plunged the nation into the evils of corruption, ethnicity, greed, nepotism and ineptitude. The condition further degenerated into military dictatorship as the military attempted to rescue the drifts, and this consequently led to the worst form of maladministration. Achebe's later novels, *A Man of the People*, *No Longer at Ease*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, adequately deal with this stage of affairs in political leadership. Achebe's fiction identified various factors responsible for the deplorable state of affairs. Ojinmah sums up the various factors responsible for these deplorable factors in Achebe's fiction as follows:

The lack of an adequate moral and ethical monitoring yardstick for the actions of the people in politics, private greed, society's apathy, lack of political vision, personal responsibility and direction on the part of leaders (63).

The direction of literature in any society is determined by the movement of events in that society. The basic nature of literature has been and is still to monitor and artistically portray, present and report the society. Since literature does not exist in a vacuum, it mirrors the human society in which it flourishes. Most literary works carry messages concerning burning issues in the society from the perspective of the writer. Modern African literature has been, in fact, a commentary in all stages of political, leadership and governance development in post-colonial African nations. The political imperative of African fiction is certainly not in doubt, particularly to the latest generation of African writers. Commenting on this development, Linfors, in Olaniyan and Quayson remarks that:

The novel remains their major literary outlet, but they use it now as a vehicle for strong political satire. Instead of continuing to reconstruct the dignity of the past, they turned their attention to the ugliness of the present and began to point the finger of blame on Africans



themselves instead of
Europeans.⁽²⁵⁾

Many contemporary Nigerian writers also discuss the issues of leadership in their various works. A writer like Festus Ijayi in, *Violence* looks at the problem of leadership and power, from the Marxist perspective and accuses the leaders and those at the helm of affairs of greed, struggling for quick wealth and power, moral decadence, maladministration, divide and rule, and other social vice at the expense of building an ideal and egalitarian society. The violence is portrayed not as a physical phenomenon but as a circumstance in which followership is oppressed by the leadership.

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to consider the components of good governance as thus: improved public sector management, robust legal framework and information availability, transparency, respect for the law and human rights at all levels of government and others. It is in this regard that the World Bank Report on Third World in Ladan treats good governance as "...synonymous to with sound development management" (10).

Consequently, governance in Nigeria has suffered negative tendencies as a result of self-centeredness, greed and lack of vision, on the part of our leaders and lack of focus on the side of the followers. The number of issues in our Political system that has negatively affected the country includes lack of fully participatory, transparent and accountable system of governance. However, experience has shown that popular participation is not always effective. Their mandate is often not reflected and their views not effectively tapped for policy formulation and implementation. This is as a result of high level of corruption that bedevilled the country. This phenomenon has remained the greatest obstacle to Nigeria's development.

It is a fact that Nigeria is one indivisible nation that binds all as one people regardless of ethnic, religious and political inclination. What Nigeria needs is a leader that loves Nigeria, sees all regions as his home. Achebe, worried by the tragic situation in Nigeria, argues that whenever two Nigerians meet, their conversations will

sooner or later degenerate into a litany of our national deficiencies. The trouble with Nigeria has become the subject of our small talk in much the same way as the weather is for the English (3).

Today in Nigeria, through selfish and bias attitudes, leaders use their positions negatively to siphon national treasury of the nation. Thus, despite the abundant human and natural resources in the country, these leaders use politics and ethno-religious sentiments to fuel crises and schisms among the people rather than uniting them as one indivisible entity. That is why each part of Nigeria is bedevilled by one religious crisis or tribal and political problems. These and other critical issues posed serious concern to literary writers such as Achebe, Soyinka, Okediran, Gimba and a host of others to write at various times on the state of leadership in Nigeria.

Consequently, Abubakar Gimba as one of the contemporary writers, committed and concerned with the state Nigeria and its people bearing in mind the socio-political and ethno-religious tendencies has churned out many literary works that reflect the ugly phenomenon. Two of such works are *Innocent Victims* and *Footprints*. The central theme that dominates the works of Abubakar Gimba is the disillusionment of a great number of Nigeria citizens who have been suffering in the hands of irresponsible political leaders and public office holders. Hence, Gimba uses his works to provide meaningful and constructive panacea to the nation's fundamental leadership problems and underdevelopment.

Leadership and Idealism in *Innocent Victims*

Innocent Victims showcases leadership imbalance in our society. It explores how leaders deviate from the expectations of the led to abuse their power to suppress them. Gimba presents to the society how ideal clashes with supremacy, good interest clashes with evil interest. In the novel, Haj. Faruk Kolo is seen as patriotic, committed and dedicated citizen that represents the good interest, progress, development and the expectation of the society. On the other side, we see Za'alim as a sycophant, envious and mischievous who always stand against Faruk



Kolo using the supremacy of power to achieve his ends. He represents the evil side of the society which is always against the ideal and expectation of the society. Gimba explores the themes of public affairs, governance and human development through leadership. The progressive minded characters that represent the innocent were framed up by the evil minded characters using the influence of power though at last these innocent ones were exonerated.

In the novel, Gimba laments the failure of the government through the civil service to provide an enabling environment and the necessities of life to its citizens. Furthermore, apart from the politicians who are policy makers, we came face to face with the civil servants who implement the policies. This include provision of social amenities such as well equipped schools, functional and standard medical centres, portable drinking water, stable power supply, and other conducive environment for comfortable and sustainable existence.

The major thematic preoccupation in the text is on leadership crisis and problem characterized by corruption, envy, bad governance maladministration and other related vices that derailed or hinders the progress and development of our country. The text further highlighted the predicament and consequences of leadership problem. Gimba explicitly presents to us the clash of interest between the protagonist represented by Faruk Kolo and the antagonist represented by Haj. Zaalim.

Faruk is presented as hero, a patriotic citizen who has national feelings and interest. Though he made frantic efforts to change the civil service for better, the society resists and sublimates. Mamman stresses Faruk's moral attitude by describing him as one who never allow opportunity pass and always guide everybody about doing good things. He maintains that they hold the society in a way no other institution does, stressing that much is expected of them, that is why they are examined by different kinds of lenses. He states that:

Only in this manner can be
effectively check the onslaught of
any squadron leader or any one

with the inclination to use power arbitrarily. Meanwhile, must endure what we have brought upon ourselves. Our critics are launching their attacks from a much firmer moral ground (56).

The theme of corruption is treated as a serious issue and as a matter of concern but in a new dimension. In this direction, this serious and blood sucking disease is treated in form of ethnicity, bigotry and abstractions such as gossiping, fabrication and willful distortion of information for some purpose. This element is depicted in the character of Mamman Sanda, Faruk Kolo and Zaalim whereby Mamman's innocence is manipulated to the detriment of Faruk Kolo. Unlike Faruk, Zaalim is corrupt by been dishonest, insincere, and selfish. His protest against ills in the service is born out of every and contempt for Faruk's success and seeming importance corruption in this novel is therefore expressed in the form of felling his envy, backbiting and a host of other efforts to tarnish one's personality and working records.

The other form of corruption is explored when Faruk's moralistic values were expressed. This had made Faruk think of abandoning his mission without any accomplishment, as he thinks of quitting the system alongside his two subordinates, Binta and Mamman. His justification for this action is morality. According to him:

After all he was more guilty than either of his aids got caught up in the whole drama by their association with him. In truth, they were guilty of nothing. But he was guilty or so, said the Justice Nuru Panel, rightly or wrongly. Surely, they were victims of circumstances, innocent victims. And if they should both quit their jobs, he would quit too. Haj. Zaalim laid a plot to get rid of him, and in that sense, he was truly a victim. But some of the questions he was asked by the panel now set him thinking a new; he thought of

his thousands of hectares of land and the heads of cattle. Would he have procured them, had he not been Director-General? The advantage of his office did it. An abuse of office (137).

As the system goes, the truth is that he has never, deliberately used his office to secure any favour as he testifies before the panel. But he strives to be just and honest; the society does not support him. Thus, it is possible he was accorded some of these services because he was a Director General, although he did not request for. Yet, he believes there are offenses he committed in the service as related them with Ben. Ali, that he unconsciously commits some offences in the services. We admit that he is not an angel but, admonished that he must set high level of virtues. He consents that most of the gifts from office most especially from contractors which he collected or were given as appreciation of service he rendered to them were gratification.

Gimba explores the high level of indiscipline and laxity in our leadership through our civil service. This act of indiscipline and laxity drain the progress of our nation which by implication affects the entire society developmentally. Lack of punctuality as well as closing before time has become the bane of our national habits. In his address to the workers in the Department of Food and Animal Production, Samah Solomon (The Military Overseer) states that "Let that clear...I am aware of your civil service mentality, slow, sluggish and stupid. I vest can't stand your ways: ⁴⁶. He further advises them that "And one thing I hate is lateness, or for someone not to be on seat when he is supposed to" ⁽⁴⁷⁾.

Corruption as one of the leadership problems that bedevilled the country is treated in a new perspective. It takes the form and shade of ethnicity, bigotry, and abstractions such as gossiping, fabrication and wilful distortion of information for some purpose. This element is projected in Mamman Sanda, Faruk Kolo and Za'alim whereby Mamman's innocence is manipulated to the detriment of Faruk Kolo. Za'alim is corrupt by being dishonest, insincere

and selfish. His protest against ills in the service is born out of envy and contempt for Faruk's success and seeming importance. Corruption in this novel is therefore, blackmail and a host of other efforts to smear one's personality and working records.

In conclusion, Gimba's concern about the leadership problem in a society where the expectations are high and multiple is clearly shown in the novel. These include his concern for order, loyalty, objectivity, tolerance and equality in the leadership approach, this if applied will transform the society to the highest peak. He appeals for humbleness in all our dealings and to be honest and sincere in the dispensation of our administration tenants.

Failure of Leadership in *Footprints*

Footprints is Abubakar Gimba's sixth novel that captures national consciousness and concern like his other works. Gimba is considered as one of the contemporary writers that centred his thematic preoccupations on leadership failure and under development that bedevilled not only Nigeria as a country but the whole of African countries.

Sani Abba Aliyu *et al.* in *Creative Writing, Writers, and Publishing in Northern Nigeria* (1997) consider Gimba as a Nigerian novelist whose works create national consciousness and awareness to the readers or audience and directed at different segments of the society. His subject matters centre on the excesses and stupidity of the urban middle class, the armed forces and their role in politics. They added, thus:

For Gimba, literature is a mirror of life, and this position is vividly reflected in his attempts to discuss different aspects of his complex society. Often, the plot structure of Gimba's novels revolves around socio-economic themes.⁽⁴⁹⁾

The above statement gives a general overview of Gimba's works and implies that his themes are universal and cover various aspects of Nigerian life including governance, issues of leadership, underdevelopment, etc and directed to the various



segments and people in the society but the shortcomings and failure of followership has not been given much emphasis.

Gimba in *Footprints* depicts the failure of leadership and moral decadence in our society characterized by abuse of power, maladministration, corruption, ethno-religious crisis and other related social vices, such that affects the development of our society. Commenting on Gimba's *Footprint*, Isma'ila and Fajenyo observes that:

Gimba's *Footprint* is largely a political work. It paints a gory picture of African politics, creating characters and situations which fully illustrate this atmosphere. We find a life of contradictions, arrogance, intolerance, pride, haughtiness, insensitivity, false sense of heroism, violence, detentions, imprisonment, hatred, envy, suspicious. We see misuse of power, corruption, strike by workers, rape, gansterism. There are also cases of inferiority complex, irrationality and evil propaganda. (51).

This explicitly portrays *Footprints* as a political work painting the gloomy picture of Nigeria and African politics that lack visionary leadership coupled with the interplay of power and greed by leaders and those entrusted with the public trust. Other issues common with bad governance and misapplication of power common in post-colonial African countries are also enumerated. The emphasis and blame is on the leaders and those on the helm of power, portraying them as bad but the followers good and free from blame.

The issues raised, discussed and highlighted in the novel are numerous. It may not be wrong to assume or accept the opinion of some critics that recognizes the novel as "a political commentary that throws more light on contemporary African society" conveyed crafty through the experience of the two families. Also, it may not be farfetched to consider the novel which directly examines contemporary state of affairs in Nigeria by contrasting social existence and political practices

under both the civilian and military administration.

Commenting in an article "The Tyranny of Ambiguity", Tanimu Abubakar, qualifies the issues raised, and the manner in which they are presented by Gimba as "lamentations of the putrefaction of Nigeria" (3) and the whole story as that which "questions and interrogates the extent to which Songhai is capable of transforming itself or being transformed into a modern nation-state" (3). Similarly, Tanimu, considers Gimba's projection and depiction of Nigeria as mourning Nigeria's diversion from the path of progress by a combination of social, political and ideological factors..." (3).

The attack on the ideological and leadership status portrays Gimba's anger and disappointment at the behaviour of the neo-colonial black elite, which apparently, he shares with probably the majority of African writers. This concern about retardation, stagnation and inability to progress or develop due to poor vision and mission of the ruling class, probably influenced Gimba to choose the title of the novel as *Footprints*. The novel therefore, laments the loss of the opportunities represented by independence and the great possibilities of nation building. He shows this lamentation, thus:

... Yes, there are people, politicians who want to serve to leave a footprint in the sand of time, to make a name, for recognition, or driven purely by their conscience to serve out of conviction... But here? Such people are far, very far. In fact, such politicians are an endangered species, endangered by the judgment of the electorate who pay less attention to men of principles than to men who spend fortunes to get elected, and must recover their principals... (104).

Form the aforesaid statement; it indicates the moral aridity of leadership in Songhai as opposed to what obtains undeveloped democracies. The statement is clearly suggestive of lack of guidance and good records for other generations. Therefore, there is a disease culture of "rulership"



which cared less for posterity, transparency and sincerity. The sad situation of reasoning laments that:

...It's very long journey before us, yet we keep on going forward and backward. I only greatly disturbed and concerned for the children. We are leaving confused footprints for them to follow. They wouldn't know which direction is the way forward.⁽³⁰⁷⁾

Abubakar Gimba, particularly uses the title *Footprints* and the inherent concept within it to emphasize the state of the Third World, and using the life of Haliyfah to show that the youth, symbolic of the future, have been left without any vision, let alone for them to discover and accomplish a mission. When at first, Haliyfah adored the uniform of Major Bakri, it was out of naivety so that he could command respect. He says: "Good soldiers. I like the soldiers, Mum. They make the teachers to obey the president".⁽⁶⁸⁾

Haliyfah's tribulations as a child in primary school to his eye in secondary school and his trauma in the hands of the military, and subsequently in the hospital, portray glimpse of what the next generations, the future would be like.

We see Haliyfah becomes the spokesman for his class on many issues, so much so that "He became the de-factor class monitor and when he exposes the English teacher's evil plans, he attains a celebrity status. Therefore, he "became a model of sorts, a symbol of a crusader", not only noticed by his family members but by the associates of his sister. Gorge, a school teacher and symbolically, an intellectual, and elite, the recognition of Haliyfah is a plus. He says to Farah, that:

With students like him, there is hope for the future of this country ...with children, the Haliyfah...intelligent, and socially conscious even at their young age, I believe the deterioration will abate or even stop...⁽¹⁶⁷⁾.

This testimony accepts and confirms the lamentation of the wasted generation, and further illuminates the theme of degeneration as children by their nature tend to want to follow the footprints of their father. But through the betrayal of Haliyfah's character, Gimba seems to suggest that even if the decadence in the society is unrestrained like a powerful cascading down river, the future belongs to the like Haliyfah. And if good traits begin to manifest themselves in the children, the future looks hopeful.

So Haliyfah's physical and mental growths are made known to us by other characters in the novel to further confirm the theme of posterity and purposeful leadership. For instance, Jeffy, another associate of Jibrán, beckons him and states "My God... you are as fall as myself. You seem to grow daily these days"⁽¹⁶⁹⁾. This growth is not only physical but also mental. The teachers now call him with various names, such as "Our future redeemer"⁽¹⁷⁰⁾, "Our leader"⁽²⁷⁸⁾. This indicates that, the older generation, and apparently, youth like Haliyfah are the only hope, thus:

...the issues at stake concern the future of the country. And the future belongs to the young ones like him (Haliyfah)...if the older generation cannot discharge its responsibility to younger generation, we must not dissuade them or even discourage them.⁽¹⁸⁵⁾

However, while thorough Haliyfah's life we see potentials of the ideal leader, and possibly an answer to current dismal life Soughai nation, the novel equally assesses the relevance of the types of rulerships, whether military or civilian. The general submission as contained in the east chapter whereby the Jibrán family, through whom most issues of the novel are discussed. The first submission by Jerry is that:

...there is dynamism in these children that the word succession doesn't quite bring out they have absorbed our confused values quite fast...and so the children have learnt from us. A focus on multiple issues at once...pursuit of

perfection...A chronicle of an unhealthy culture of impatience and intolerance (279).

This lack of a coherent, well-focused and purposeful leadership is rolled up with an advocacy by Gimba where he suggests reconciliation, using Jibrán, thus:

The point I'm giving at is that we need to do a lot of soul searching. Let's remember that our leaders, civilians or military, were not carried out of stones or wood. Nor were they dropped from the sky...This society produced them. And this is their environment. So, the environment has to change for the fruits to remain fresh and the followership therefore has the responsibilities: It's not just leadership that has responsibilities... (282).

In conclusion, the novel is concerned with political empowerment, the right to rule and be ruled and also examines the various roles institutions such as the family exemplified by the two key families – the Jibrán and Mukhtar, the union teachers, bankers, road users, students, the military, police, etc. Primarily, the highlight of the novel is corruption or lack of progress. Rather, it is the lack of a central think tank of decision makers who could digest the new nation into great heights. Furthermore, the Haliyfah's play reveals the English teacher's sexual harassment incident the rampant riots, demonstration, flagrant likes in fuel and many episodes of misdeeds that fill the novel while the theme of human fragility, human nature highlight guilt, personal grief and disillusion are also abound in the novel. Gimba seems to suggest that the Songhai state's problem is a post-colonial legacy arising from poor culture and non-continued system of political transition.

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