

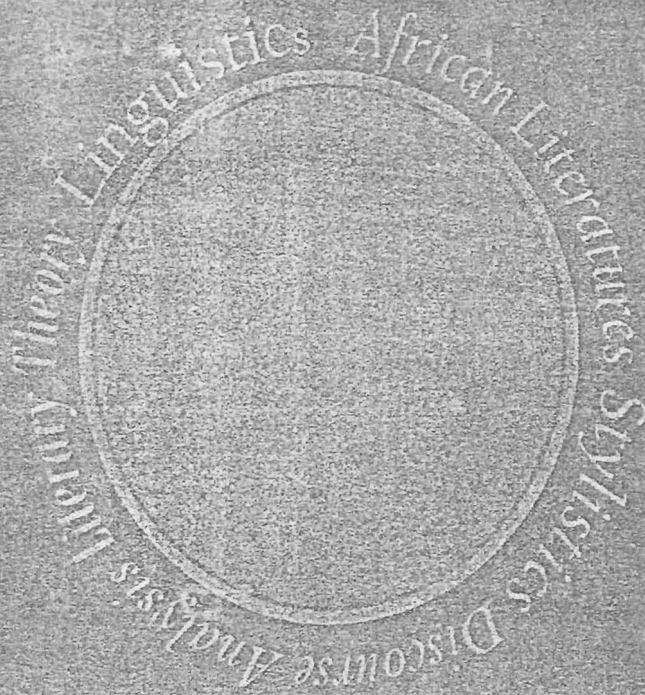


PAPERS IN ENGLISH AND LINGUISTICS

(PEL)

Vol. 7 & 8, 2007

ISSN: 118-5902



PAPERS IN ENGLISH AND LINGUISTICS



OLAS Ventures: 01-878 1309, 0802 346 6916

The Linguistics Association
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

The Qkà Tone System - *Georgina Maduagwu*

The Influence of Syllable Complexity on the Performance of Senior Secondary School

Three Students in Stress Placement on English Words — *Godwin Ikumapayi Oyeniya*

'People of the City': Politics and the Urban Experience in Contemporary Nigerian Literature

Gbemisola Adeoti

Department of English, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria

Abstract

Contemporary Nigerian literature, a by-product of urbanisation, has contributed considerably toward the construction, dissemination and popularisation of metropolitan ethos. Whether in the narrative mode of the novel, the performative mechanism of drama / theatre or in the euphony of poetry, literature is a socio-cultural space where the subalterns of contemporary metropolitan centres find their voices and negotiate their marginality. It is also the means through which wielders of politico-economic power construct realities of their dominance on those living on the fringes of urban existence. Interestingly, both the powerful and the powerless are claimants to and keen contestants for the urban space. That is much evident in the framework of conflict, characterisation, subject and narrative techniques of contemporary Nigerian literary art, as evident in the works of Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Femi Osofisan, Buchi Emecheta, Zulu Sofola, Ahmed Yerima, and others.

The paper is essentially motivated by the need to navigate the contours of urban experience in post-independence Nigeria as well as the dimension/texture of its politics through the corpus of imaginative literature generated by this experience. It focuses on the complex manifestations of the urban phenomenon beyond the social, economic and political disciplinary framework. Quite clearly, literature inscribes the experiences of dislocation and that is a recurrent feature of the post colonial state. It is our contention that ordinarily, the city is supposed to be the driving engine and the centre piece of modernisation and development. It is a human space with its own ethos of collectivity and well being. However, in the case of contemporary Nigeria, the city has failed in this responsibility, just as the dreams of modernisation and development remain deferred from one political dispensation to the other. To understand the extent of post colonial predicament, one needs to take a conceptual look at the cities. This much is captured in many writings and it forms the crux of textual illustrations in the paper.

Introduction

I have lived in this Lagos for fifteen years.... Lagos is a bad place for a young man. If you follow its sweetness, you will perish.
- Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*. (74-75)

You've got to be clever and smart if you must live. I learnt the lesson trudging the streets of Lagos. You must have your wits about you all the time...to bargain in the market; brains to avoid the policeman on the prowl for bribes; brains to outwit the con man on the trail of a fast deal.

- Ken Saro Wiwa, *"The Transistor Radio"*. (19-20)

In recent times, many scholars have studied the concept of urbanisation from the perspectives of planning and ecology (Onokerhoraye, 1995; Fernandes, 1998; Bentley, 1999; Tibbalds, 2001), economy (Adeniji, 1985; Olayiwola, 1985; Budd and Whimster, 1991; Simon, 1992; Monlaert and Scott, 1997), history, (Falola, 1981), sociology (Sennett, 1969); politics (Labinjoh, 1991) and psychology (Ainley, 1998). With specific reference to Nigeria, Guyer et al (2003) is quite illuminating in its focus on the survival patterns adopted by inhabitants of Ibadan, a city of over three million people, against the backdrop of economic depression consequent on the structural adjustment programmes embarked upon by the military regimes in the 1980s. These include resort to imported second hand goods dignified as *tokunbo*, proliferation of *miracle centres* that fill people with the hope of escape from the octopal hands of poverty, using under-aged children as traders, *okada* (motorbikes) as a popular means of transportation and engaging in money-making rituals. Participating in fraud, unofficial currency exchange, tax evasion and smuggling of goods across borders, with connivance of government agents (Customs, Police, Immigration and the Army) are also features of the era.

From the foregoing, it is clear that urbanisation has inspired a considerable amount of scholarly efforts. However, the dimension of literary representation and mediation of city experience is one area of scholarship that requires more attention. Literature provides the analysis of Nigeria's socio-political predicaments in a manner, and to an extent, that cannot be ignored.

Admittedly, contributors to Adelugba et al. (2001) are out to celebrate the historical, political and cultural import of Ibadan as a foremost city in black Africa. Though there are efforts to creatively capture the experience of the city through anecdotal essays and poetry, more still needs to be done in terms of analysis and re-conceptualisation of the history and politics of this city and others. We need to interrogate the urban experience and the changing socio-political contexts through the epistemology of literary art in a scope, depth and direction beyond what extant literature offers.

Ordinarily, the city, in a conceptual sense, is a product of civilisation and it is supposed to remain the icon of that civilisation. According to Raymond Williams, "On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light..." (1975: 9). The city presupposes the existence of a robust culture, what Tejumola Olaniyan calls "civis", a term that encodes the ideas of "cities, citizens, citizenship, and civilization or community" (2004: 93). The city provides an appropriate arena for the integration of citizens of various kingdoms and ethnic communities conquered by the colonialists in the late 19th and early 20th century. Naturally, its heterogeneous composition and diversity demands a political order that would recognise individual freedom of action and provide opportunities for self realisation. Heterogeneity is a plus since the enormous diversity of talents and resources available in the city can be mobilised to rise above developmental constraints. However, there is a fifth and sixth characteristic in the case of Nigeria and its cities.

The Nigerian city is the hall-mark of all that is wrong with the nation; the repository of post colonial anomy. To understand in depth, the socio-economic and political crises confronting the nation is to closely examine life in the city in its multiple dimensions. Thus, we agree with Olaniyan when he holds that Nigerian cities (especially Lagos) present a good illustration of "aborted civis" (107). The reality of most Nigerian cities today is that they attract more than they can cater for. As a result, the opportunities to "make it big" are far fewer in relation to the multitude of people that are hunting for them. The situation creates a dichotomy between the rich few who have access to the good things of life and the less privileged ones. Aside from population explosion, the urban centres are menaced by lack of proper planning, pollution, unemployment, insecurity, violent crime, illicit drug trading, ethno-religious crises and ethnic militia insurgence. Thus, there is a genuine anxiety that urban life is diminishing in quality and value, notwithstanding official statistics to the contrary. It is important to note that the idea of subversion of the "civis" in the cities has been well represented on the canvass of Nigerian Literature in various colours and strokes. This much is clearly demonstrated in our study of selected texts.

Urban Imperative and Nigerian Literature

Since the colonial era, the drift of people from rural areas to city centres especially Lagos, has remained on the increase. The city holds a confounding attraction for many Nigerians who seek a place on the train of modernity, economic well being, self actualisation and other dreams that are aptly summed up in the pidgin expression "chopping good life". Olaniyan writes of Lagos:

Of all the cities in the country, it was the most populous and the most heterogeneous in composition and the one in which modern class distinction were sharpest and most visible, especially in its spatial arrangements extensive slums ring a few exclusive and rich neighborhoods. (2004: 89)

Many reasons have been adduced in popular and scholarly literature for the preference of youths who constitute a larger part of the urban population for deserting the villages and joining the army of unemployed people in the cities. For instance, apart from offering freedom from traditional constraints of local taboos and superstitions, the city promises bottomless opportunities to access easy life of power and pleasure with flashy cars, expensive habitats, fine clothes and other mouth-watering indices of a "better life".

Urban dwelling was not a strange culture in some parts of Nigeria, prior to colonialism. For example, Oyo, Benin, Sokoto, Kano and Ilorin were important political, commercial, religious and cultural centres. To date, they are still locations of power and economic interactions in addition to those that assumed their historical import subsequently from the encounter with the West, like Lagos, Abeokuta, Lokoja,

Calabar, Port Harcourt, and so on. Colonialism accentuated urbanisation with the creation of convenient administrative centres to facilitate political control, easy access to raw materials and unimpaired trading relations with the hinterland. In the administrative centres were located the legislative, executive, adjudicatory, defence and other aspects of colonial rule. The bureaucracy and other apparatus to service this dispensation drew people to the cities, away from farming, fishing, weaving, smithery and other traditional occupations in the rural areas.

The city provides better access to alluring products of European economy. It also offers Western ways of entertainment and recreation. Consequently, radio and television houses, bars, hotels, theatres and cinema houses are features of urban "right life". It is not surprising that cities like Lagos and Ibadan, apart from being the centres of decolonisation struggles before and after independence, play home to popular musicians like Bobby Benson, Bala Miller, Tunde Nightingale, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, King Sunny Ade, and Sonny Okosun, all of whom fuse indigenous rhythm with Western tempo. The cities also accommodate practitioners of Yoruba travelling theatre like Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola and Moses Olaiya (see Clark, 1979 and Jeyifo, 1984). The presence of higher educational institutions which offer training and/or employment to many of the foremost names in Nigerian literary arts in these cities is a factor worth noting. Writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, J.P. Clark, Christopher Okigbo, John Munonye, Ken Saro Wiwa, Flora Nwapa, Mabel Segun, Odia Ofeimun, Femi Osofisan and Niyi Osundare were educated at the University of Ibadan. Some took employment in that city or in others after graduation.

The formation of Mbari Club in the early 1960s at Ibadan by Soyinka, Clark, Ezekiel Mphahlele and other artists, with the collaboration of the German scholar Ulli Beier, is quite significant in considering the urban dimension to the literary development (see Soyinka, 1994). Along with this, one can consider the phenomenon of Onitsha Market literature. This is a tradition of pamphlet narrative that thrived in the Igbo commercial city of Onitsha in Eastern Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s. Even the contemporary video film tradition, popularly called "Nollywood", is nurtured in the city. Though the stories may be sourced in folk culture and the recording done in rural areas, producers still require the services of editing and production studios as well as major marketing outlets located in Lagos, Aba, Onitsha, Ibadan and Kano. From the foregoing, one can say that the urban centre is a strong factor in the development of Nigerian letters.

In the post-independence years, urban centres were created to increase access to political power and economic resources by the elites who champion the agitations. In a country where, as Saro-Wiwa (1987: 155) puts it, "politics is the quickest and surest way to wealth", holding political power at the state or local level means more access to revenue from oil, the mainstay of Nigeria's post-civil war economy. Each new state means additional hands in the civil service, judiciary, legislature, law enforcement, et cetera. Even sectors like banking, insurance and telecommunication would require additional manpower to register their presence in the new centres. Consequently, the three regions at independence have given way to thirty six states at present, and

agitations for more are ever strident. This is in spite of the fact that the state capitals are still striving to cope with the demands of urbanisation. The creations have taken place mostly under the military regimes. And the autocratic ethos of the military has impacted on the administration of the centres, so that their developments are hobbled by militarism as it has happened to the whole nation.

Long years of military rule witnessed economic recession which had an impact on the psychology and social life style of the people, as evident in the patterns of contemporary urban life. Under the military, especially from the 1970s to the 1990s, the economy came under the strong pull of reforms and structural adjustment propagated by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, resulting in what some scholars have described as "re-colonisation" or "neo-liberal globalisation" (see Lewis, 1996; Guyer et al. 2003; Jeyifo, 2006). The structural adjustment dispensation under the military, according to Guyer et al, is marked by "rising levels of corruption and governmental inefficiency" (2003: xxviii). Structural adjustment means cutbacks in government spending on social utilities, hence, the negligible expansion in public infrastructures to cope with expanding demands, and the utter neglect of existing ones.

The unicentric order of military regimes which concentrate much political power and oil revenue in the central government inhibited efforts at the lower tiers of government to address the problems of the cities. Every level of government depends on the Federal government for finance and the limited resources at lower levels oftentimes frustrate initiatives that could have helped in transforming the cities. The situation is compounded by an ineffective and unaccountable system of taxation which condones tax evasion and consequently makes locally generated revenue grossly inadequate.

All the issues highlighted above are captured in many works by Nigerian writers, especially those that choose the urban centres as their spatial setting. The writers as participants or first hand witnesses of the struggles for existence represent the variety and complexity of city life. In any case, the city has remained a recurrent setting in Nigerian literary productions, while city dwellers have provided interesting characters whose daily experiences generate conflicts in the texts. From Amos Tutuola's bewildering "bush of Ghosts" in *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and D. O. Fagunwa's frightening "forests and mounts" in *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* and the transitory Umuofia in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, there has emerged a corpus of literature of the cities drawing from experiences of city dwellers whom Cyprian Ekwensi calls "People of the city" in his pioneering novel of that title. The idyllic peace and communal ethos in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* vanish in the season of migration to the cities by descendants of Okonkwo and Ezeulu. These are the educated civil servants like Obiajulu Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease* and politicians like Odili Samalu and Chief the Honourable M.A. Nanga in *A Man of the People*, who are pitched in battle against the odds of modernity as expressed in the politics and economy of the cities.

Written during Nigeria's transition from a colony to a sovereign nation, Ekwensi's *People of the City* presents issues and characters that are still relevant today. The intriguing secret of living in the city, as portrayed by the writer, runs through the whole gamut of corruption, from prostitution to fraud. Some adopt desperate means like kidnapping and using human beings as sacrifice to attain wealth and influence.

Amusa Sango, the protagonist of the novel, is a crime reporter with the *West African Sensation*. Like many youths in an unnamed West African city, he is in the city "to chop life" (p. 57). The ever rising cost of living takes its toll on his income as a journalist. He supplements this with earnings from musical entertainment. He leads a band that plays regularly at a night club. From his encounters, the readers come across different character types and various strategies for survival. He often confronts people who constitute obstacles to the realisation of his dreams. In this category is Lajide, the exploitative landlord whose insatiable appetite for women is only rivalled by his greed for money. He shares the predicament of other youths who are victims of the city, like Aina, a beautiful young girl, who is jailed for stealing. After serving her prison sentence, her life is altered for the worse. She is more desperate and ruthless in quest of money, the only language understood by the city. Dupch Martins is a vendible sex object, like Beatrice who leaves her village for the city to enjoy life only to become a victim.

Beatrice had disclosed that she came to the city from the Eastern Greens...She made no secret of what brought her to the city: 'high life'. Cars, servants, high-class foods, decent clothes, luxurious living. Since she could not earn the high life herself, she must obtain it by attachment to someone one who could. (p.53)

However, the city, personified in Mr. Grunnings, consumes her innocence, leaving behind for her a hollow life "wrapped up with so much unhappiness" (p. 33). As Kofi laments when she dies, "she threw her life away. The city eats many an innocent life like hers every year. It is a waste of our youth" (p. 112). Filia Enu, the female protagonist of *Iska* (a sequel to *People of the City*), suffers the same fate as Dupch's and Beatrice's, as she is raised, reinvented and ruined in Lagos.

Clearly, Sango represents those youths whose hopes gradually recede into despair as the city remains an enemy that prevents him from enjoying the good things of life which it promises. He gets caught up in the web of intolerance that characterises the politics of the era. His band accepts to play for the Self Government Now (SGN) party which is in rivalry with the Realization Party (RP). For accepting to play for a party in a polity where the opposing party is regarded as "the enemy", he loses his accommodation. Later, his musical band's performance right at the All Language Club is withdrawn. To homelessness, he adds joblessness, as he is soon sacked from his job as a journalist, thus joining the streets already overcrowded with unemployed youths. Ekwensi sums up his frustration: "Now he was well and truly up against the city which

attracted all types" (108). He can only dream of a new life and new opportunities in another land - Gold Coast.

The city as a graveyard of aspirations also features in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. The novel presents the story of Obi Okonkwo, an educated Igbo youth, described as a "Youngman of great promise" who gets involved in the game of sleaze in Lagos. His conviction marks the collapse of a youthful dream. Obi takes to bribery, to meet up with the rising financial demands on his legitimate income even as a high grade level civil servant. There are mounting bills on electricity, insurance and income tax, apart from socio-cultural obligations to be fulfilled. Though reluctant at first, he succumbs to the temptation to extract financial benefits from his official position in the scholarship board and that brings about his fall.

Corruption as a coping strategy in the city echoes in James Ene Henshaw's sombre comedy, *Dinner for Promotion*, which is set in the house of Senka on Number 12, Koloro Street in another nameless large West African city. However, if Obi's corruption in *No Longer at Ease* is shocking and proves fatal to his career, that is because it happened long before the oil boom era of the 1970s when every one wanted to have a "piece of the pie". In the post-independence era, especially under the military regimes of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, corruption was more prevalent, and it was euphemistically referred to as "settlement". It lost its capacity to generate much shock and tension, as it does in the universe of *No Longer at Ease*. Instead of tragic pathos, it evokes cynical mirth as dramatised in Ken Saro-Wiwa's "*The Wheel: A Farce in Six Situations*". From the highly placed General Manager (GM) of a corporation to the ordinary Gate Man (GM) of the same establishment, corruption is shown as cutting across social strata. Private favours are extracted from official positions and the feeling of guilt is suppressed by mirth in the concerned characters who are largely recognisable types on the social landscape - top politicians, middle level bureaucrats, professionals and unskilled labourers.

In the opening Situation, the Chief Minister is savouring his electoral success and thinking about the financial cost of the success. He is approached by a Parliamentarian who wants to become a Minister. In the negotiation that ensues, the Parliamentarian parts with 200,000 soldiers (euphemism for money) to secure a slot in the post-election cabinet. Now the Minister for Commerce and Industry, he is in turn approached in Situation 2 by a Company Director who wants to be made the Chairman of the National Supply Company. The appointment is sealed with 100,000 cigarettes. When the Director becomes the Chairman, he also extracts six-ton truck-loads of biscuits as bribe from an Executive Officer who wants to become the General Manager of the Corporation. By the next turning of the wheel, the newly appointed General Manager begins to recover his earlier investment from a Chief Clerk who desires the post of Personnel Officer. The value of gratification is measured in temporal terms (8,000 minutes). The Personnel Manager in the next situation finds his own victim in a poor applicant who wants to work in the office as a Security Guard. He secures the job having offered "kola" (bribe). But "the wheel" turns its full cycle at the end when the Security Guard rudely prevents a visitor from entering the office to see the Personnel

Manager. Angling for a bribe from the visitor who turns out to be the Chief Minister of the first Situation, the Security Guard does not allow him in until he parts with two Naira. The experience, ironically, makes the Chief Minister realise the need for ethical revolution in the country. The play shows that to secure a job, keep it and advance on it, corruption oils the wheel of success, a situation which the General Manager renders cynically in a parody of biblical axiom: "That's the way it was in the beginning. That's the way it is now. And that's the way it shall be for ever more" (p. 69).

Ken Saro-Wiwa is one writer whose works generally address the malaise of urban life. After his education at the University of Ibadan, he worked in major cities like Lagos, Port Harcourt and Enugu. His writings document in breezy, often satirical style, the survival stratagems of city dwellers. His characters are ambitious young men about town, like Basi, Alali, Josco and Dandy, who pursue millions under false pretence in "The Transistor Radio". (This radio play was later developed into a popular Television series "Basi and Company" on the National Television network). The characters also include the relentless rent seekers like Madam, and ostentatious young ladies in search of cash and connection like Segi.

Equally notable are fraudulent but powerful magnates like Alhaji, the Managing Director (EMDEE) of Acapulco Motel in the short story "Acapulco Motel". Alhaji is a self-made entrepreneur who smartly rises from a mere draughtsman to become an owner of a brick factory, a land speculator and a "motelier". He is a con man, the type called "419ner" in contemporary popular parlance. He has mastered the art (or is it science?) of selling "a single piece of land to as many as three or four buyers" (p. 86). His character trait is worth recalling:

It was the job of the likes of Alhaji to find three or four unsuspecting developers. And more. The likes of Alhaji also ensured that each buyer had his piece of land properly registered with the Government Lands Registry. And the likes of Alhaji made sure that when the buyers all went to court to sort out the tangle, the case was so complicated and went on so long that either all four contestants despaired or died, or the judge who sat on the bench got transferred to a different corner of the earth.

The main beneficiary of the entire procedure was, of course, Alhaji. Because he worked on a commission basis. A commission from each buyer of the land. Ten Percent. A commission from the land owner for each payment by each buyer. Ten Percent. A commission from each buyer to represent his true interest when the case went to court. Ten percent. ... And a commission from the judge to ensure that one of the buyers proved willing to buy the judgement whenever it was to be handed down. Negotiable. (pp. 86 – 87).

The con man thrives in a network of fleecing involving officials of the state. One therefore, agrees with Tejumola Olaniyan when he remarks that "Lagos has always been like the accomplished magician with a bagful of tricks; you may not like many of them, but you surely will succumb to one." (2004: 88).

"The Transistor Radio" is set in Basi's hovel in Lagos, a single room, later to assume the elevated status of a "palace" in a delusion of grandeur typical of Basi as he relentlessly clutches his hope of becoming a millionaire. Basi has been jobless for ten years and he is sharing his hovel with Alali, a tramp rescued from Iddo Park. For his unpaid rents, Basi is constantly harassed by Madam. He and Alali suffer starvation without any hope of food. They pass their time pulled either way by hope or despair, as they reflect on their ordeal of living in the city. They speak of a faulty reward system in which money making is not directly proportional to the amount of hard work deployed. "I could name a hundred people in this city who make millions each year for doing nothing. Absolutely nothing" (p. 13), claims Basi.

The promotion of Saro's beer by Dandy, offering a transistor radio as reward for an empty bottle punctuates their reflections. The offer kindles a battle of "wits, brains, and logics" as Alali and Basi outsmart Madam in using her bottle to claim the reward. Josco poses as a licensing officer to dispossess them of the unlicensed radio or extract money for a fake licence. Basi turns into a fake police sergeant to outwit Josco. The anxiety generated by these incidents opens Alali's eyes to their plights. He is disenchanted with "the wretchedness of our life. The hunger, the joblessness, but above all, the meaninglessness of our situation" (p. 30). He decides to call it quits with the city and returns home:

BASI: But Lagos is the place for you, man. With a job, without a job, this is the place of hope. The future lies here man. I tell you, we'll make it here. Suddenly without warning. And then our lives will be transformed

ALALI: No, Basi. I'm disenchanted with all that. I'm going where I won't have cause to be either a fake or a fraud.

BASI: Good bye then. I'm here for keeps: for the excitement and pleasure... There may be hunger, but after hunger, there are the bright lights, money and music, and who said we couldn't have part of it? (p.31)

However, like the tramps at the end of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Alali cannot go as he is held back by what the city is good at offering – hope, this time, of winning a million naira through Niger Pools. As an aside, quick riches through lottery/gambling are part of the realities of a Structural Adjustment economy. With fewer opportunities available for legitimate wealth, lottery offers hope, and producers of goods and services take the advantage of the reality to promote their products.

Ahmed Yerima explores this phenomenon in *The Lottery Ticket*, a play in Pidgin English. Everyone is caught in the web of anxiety, to win one or two things from items on promotion, from the rich Landlord to Mama Liza, Liza her daughter, Danger and Baba Tailor. Even law enforcement agents, like Yellow Fever and the Police Sergeant, are not excluded. The greed of these characters unleashes the confusion at the end, resulting in total loss of the prize of one hundred thousand naira by all the hopefuls. Even Baba Tailor who has the winning ticket cannot claim the prize.

A younger version of Saro-Wiwa's Alhaji, the EMDEE of Acapulco Motel, exists in Femi Osofisan's *Who's Afraid of Solarin?*, an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. He is Isola Oriebora, the city boy who turns up at a suburb council headquarters, escaping prosecution for his crime in the city. He swindles the local council Chairman, Chief Dada Gbonmiaiyelobiojo, and members of his cabinet. The cunning and smartness often associated with the city are on display in the play. The Chief Medical Officer, Councillors for Education and Works, Co-operative and Agriculture, Price Control Officer, and the Chief Magistrate have all diverted council's funds into private use. They are all gripped in the anxiety of a probable probe, with the impending visit to the council by the anti-corruption crusader, Tai Solarin, the Public Complaints Commissioner. Isola Oriebora, a criminal, appears in the council coincidentally, and he is embraced through a mistaken identity as the Public Complaint Commissioner. The Council Officials treat him with awe, to his surprise. He explores their ignorance and greed to his advantage, extracting bribe from each of them, to forestall their prosecution for corruption.

Clark is a poet sensitive to the urban environment. This much is evident in his poem titled "Victoria Island Revisited" which satirises the endless battle to reclaim the land from the ocean for public buildings. The surge of the sea often attended with disasters signals the financial reward for some people. Victoria Island is an area of Lagos where rich business men, diplomats, top civil servants and politicians reside. The Bar Beach is long host to high rise public buildings.

... this structure with a bottom so patently false and rotten it can
not but founder one day? (p. 26)

To show that town planning and housing policies are also attended by sharp practices, Clark remarks:

Next they will be drawing upon the public purse to **sal age** the
hulk. (p. 26)

In "Ibadan", the poet depicts the juxtaposition of gleam and squalor, order and chaos that have become the enduring feature of the largest city in West Africa:

...running splash of rust and gold – flung and scattered among
seven hills like broken china in the sun (p. 57)

Ibadan, a city founded in the 19th century according to Guyer et al. (2003: xxiii), "has many characteristics of the new urbanisation in an interestingly unusual combination for comparison with a wide range of other cities, both in Africa and elsewhere. Like many cities that have been swelled by recent migration, Ibadan is very large". Its heterogeneity and huge population often tax the maintenance of law and order. The social combustion daily witnessed in Ibadan is more eloquently portrayed in a traditional poetic cha :

...This is the town in which the thief is innocent and the owner
of property is guilty.
Here peace is lying exhausted on the ground and belligerence
dances on his back ...
Nobody is born, without some kind of disease on his body.
Riots in all the compounds is the disease of Ibadan.
You may look at this town whichever way you wish
You will see nothing but war.
(Ulli Beier, 2002: 55)

And how true is this oriki, for everywhere you turn, it is the fierce struggle of survival by traders, artisans, academics, youths and politicians. Femi Osofisan corroborates this when he writes about the origin of the city: "The beginnings of the town were nothing as idyllic, or peaceful. The presence of soldiers of fortune from various ethnic communities, with their competing goals, unstable allegiances, and mercurial tempers, meant that life in the town was more or less a story of continual civil strife." (2001: 4)

The urge to stay afloat during a period of economic recession in the city has also spawned phoney clerics, instant miracle workers who profit from people's gullibility. (See Ajayi 2003: 259-270) They are depicted in Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* and *Jero's Metamorphosis*. These pious impostors exploit the gullibility of citizens like Chume who seek succour in religious quarters at the bar beach. Lagos bar beach is thronged daily by tourists, fun seekers, lovers, petty-thieves, and pick-pockets. It also attracts members of traditional African churches (White garment faith) who erect collapsible shafts as their places of worship on the beach. They recruit their congregation from people who desire supernatural solutions to existential problems. Thus, the likes of Brother Chume, Member of Parliament and the penitent Woman in search of fertility, fall prey to charlatans in *The Trials of Brother Jero*.

Religious hypocrisy is also the focus of Tanure Ojaide's "God's Medicine Men", a short story set in Warri and Benin cities. In these two cities, the traditional cohabits with the modern, both well mixed in astounding confusion. There, fakes strangely abound, all striving to make ends meet. With a twist of irony, Ojaide juxtaposes the Christian clergy with the traditional African priest. Depending on which side of the coin one adopts, Bishop Jeremiah Efe, a Christian cleric, is as hypocritical and deceitful as Pastor Odele who is a traditional priest. Curiously, the latter solves the problems of Efe, one of which is the provision of juju for the enlargement of the

Bishop's congregation. He also cures U.C.'s daughter, through traditional healing methods, of an ailment that has defied miraculous solutions in the church.

A corollary of momentary prosperity on account of the oil boom of the 1970s was violent armed robbery and to curb this, the government resorted to public execution of armed robbers at the Lagos bar beach. However, the crime defies a military solution. Osofisan in a sociological dissection of this problem contends in *Once Upon Four Robbers* that the problem lies squarely in the pseudo-capitalist economy being operated and the increasing militarisation of the polity. Military solution, like public execution, only begets more violence and tragedy as the experiences of *Soldiers* (Sergeant Corporal) and *Robbers* (Major, Hassan, Angola and Alhaja) show.

The argument is further pursued in *Aringindin* and *The Night Watchmen*. The failure of the state to guarantee the safety of its inhabitants and provide adequate security against violent robbery gives rise to communal self-help measures evident in the formation of "vigilante" groups. This is a kind of community policing outside the state's law enforcement and crime-prevention structures. As the play shows, the tendency of these "vigilante" groups to exploit people's anxiety defeats the objectives of their establishment. They curtail or even openly assault people's fundamental human rights. Represented by Aringindin and his men, the "vigilantes" often turn into a problem to be solved rather than being a lasting solution to a social malaise. Osofisan, perhaps, anticipates the recent conflict between the state and ethno-cultural organisations like the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and the Bakassi Boys which have taken on the role of combating crime in the South Western and South Eastern cities of Nigeria respectively. They try to fill the vacuum created by wide disaffection for the official police force that is hampered by neglect, corruption and inefficiency.

Under the pressure of urban economic imperatives, traditional African family values are open to assault through the use of children for alms begging and hawking of goods on the streets. Besides, prostitution in different forms becomes an option as demonstrated by Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana's Daughter* and Festus Iyayi's *Violence*. In the latter, Iyayi re-presents the psycho-social alienation experienced by the urban poor typified by Idemudia and Adisa, his wife. They are confronted with privation in a society without any social security system to ventilate their lack. They compromise family ethos of fidelity by engaging in extra-marital affairs that are contracted with financial reward in view. Idemudia has to sell (donate) his story for money to upkeep his family, just like Osaro his friend. Benin City where the story is set is a world of inequality where acute poverty co-exists with opulence. The rich few like Queen and the man "in a big Mercedes car" are the ones who enjoy "the good things of life", while Idemudia, Adisa, his wife and Osaro operate on the rough edges of city life.

Soyinka celebrates the dwellers of the cosmopolis fringe in his plays, giving voice to the silenced. These are the lorry park touts (Professor, Samson, Salubi and Say Tokyo Kyd) of *The Road* and the Area boys (Sanda, Area Two One, Boyko, Barber and Trader) of *The Beatification of Area Boy: A Lagosian Kalcidoscope*. The Area boy is a phenomenon of Lagos under military rule and has continued to date. Mostly unemployed or unemployable, the area boys are disempowered, but they are contesting

the authoritarian, might-is-right space that subsists on exclusion. Rather than being active participants in politics and governance, they get recruited as political thugs, bouncers or paid combatants in quarrels of rich elites. Ironically, in Soyinka's *The Beatification of Area Boy*, they discover their voices in violent exploitation of fellow citizens, regardless of their social background. Under Sanda's leadership, the area boys re-invent themselves in the image of soldiers and law enforcement agents. Their modes of operation are as arbitrary as the ways of the military in power. The play is, therefore, an important sociological study of the dynamics of urbanisation and its challenges.

It is equally important to note that the changing roles of women and the gender dimension to the urban living have been depicted by some writers. Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* is an example. But the metropolitan centre for the Ibuso-Delta born protagonist, Adah, does not stop at Lagos. It extends further to London. The "modernity" of Lagos and London affords the author an opportunity to reflect on the fate of the woman in the contemporary era against the backdrop of patriarchy, a theme she further advances in *Joy of Motherhood*, another novel.

In terms of language, some of the writers, in addition to Standard English, adopt the Pidgin English. In reality, it is a language of social and economic interactions in the cities necessitated by communication problems imposed by ethno-cultural and linguistic diffusion. Pidgin, as Olaniyan puts it, is

the language of the multiethnic masses on the street... As a potent denativizing and transethnic mass language, it disciplines both the foreign and the local languages within the seething cauldron of sprawling urbanization... It is experienced – and welcomed – as a language of cosmopolis that is larger than the domains of one's native tongue but that nevertheless bears the imprint of local agency unlike English, which has yet to shed its image as an imposed alien language. But pidgin also bears an unmistakable class stamp as the language of the working masses. (2004: 92)

The country has about 250 languages, most, if not all, of which are represented in the cities. Pidgin English is the language of daily interaction among the semi-literate in the market, at political rallies and among the tenants of a "20 room face-me-I-face-you" apartment typical of the high density areas of a city like Lagos. Saro-Wiwa's *The Transistor Radio*, Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Soyinka's *The Jeri Plays*, *The Road* and *The Beatification of Area Boy*, and Ahmed Yerima's *The Lottery Ticket* illustrate the efficacy of pidgin in stage dialogue to realistically capture the nuances of urban experience.

Summary and Conclusion

The paper shows how Nigerian writers, most of whom grow up, get educated and earn their living in cosmopolitan centres, have fictionalised urban experience and represented the subversion of the idea of the "civis" embedded in the city. It instantiates from literary texts the phenomenal juxtaposition of centre and margin, privilege and deprivation, power and powerlessness, inclusion and exclusion, prosperity and penury, hope and despair which are inherent in the urban experience. It also provides insight into how the city in turn has exercised a considerable influence on the form and content of Nigerian literature. On the whole, the paper contends that there is a link between the realistic experience of city dwellers and the imaginative representations in literary arts.

As evident in the paper, Nigerian written literature is largely a product of the administrative, commercial and political centres, even when it draws its materials from traditional arts and rural life. The writers are knowledgeable about the cities where they acquire their education, live and work. So, in different genres and forms, they have depicted the various problems militating against urbanisation in the contemporary era, from the rolling-back-the-state ethos of structural adjustment economics to the liberalisation and down-sizing imperative of privatisation, from the absolutism of military governance to the exclusions in the democratic dispensation. The paper also highlights various survival strategies adopted by city dwellers in the face of the problems identified above.

Without doubt, the corpus of literary works that deal with city life is quite vast. However, the paper has provided insight into the discourse of urban life as fictionalised in literature. It has also demonstrated the utility of literary arts in seeking a greater understanding of the complex nature of urban experience in the ever-changing socio-economic and political context of Nigeria. The development of a nation can be measured from the development of its cities, just as the well-being of the cities is crucially connected to the well-being of the nation. Unfortunately, the trend in the discourse of development in the contemporary era is to privilege the country. Much advocacy has been made for the prioritisation of the "grassroots" in tackling the problems of development. It is our submission that the problems of the cities, as highlighted in literature, will be given equal attention in all genuine attempts to achieve a better condition for people of the city.

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua, 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann
 1960. *No Longer at Ease*. London: Heinemann.
 1964. *Arrow of God*. London: Heinemann.
 1966. *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann.
 Adedun, Dapo et al (Eds.) 2001. *Ibadan Mesogog: A Celebration of City its History and People*. Ibadan: Bookraft.

- Adeniji, Kunle 1985 "Urban Transport System in Nigeria" in ODU. A Journal of West African Studies 28 July: 81-97
 Ainley, Rosa 1998. *New Frontiers of Space, Bodies and Gender*. London: Routledge.
 Ajayi, Ademola 2003. "Prosperity Churches in Nigeria: A New Phenomenon in a Depressed Economic Setting" in Jane Guyer et al. Eds. *Money Struggles and City Life: Devaluation in Ibadan and Other Urban Areas in Southern Nigeria 1986-1996*. Ibadan: Book Builders. 259 - 269.
 Beier, Ulli (trans.) 2002. *Yoruba Poetry*. Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies Series.
 Bentley, Ian 1999. *Urban Transformation: Power, People and Urban Design*. London: Routledge.
 Budd, Leslie and Whimster, Sam 1991. *Global Finance and Urban Living: A Study of Metropolitan Change*. London: Routledge.
 Clark-Bekederemo, J.P. 1967 "Ibadan" in Donatus Nwoga, Ed. *West African Verse*. London: Longman. 57.
 1985. "Victoria Island Re-visited" in *The State of the Union*. London: Longman. 26.
 Clark, Egun 1979. *Hubert Ogunde: The Making of Nigerian Theatre*, London: Oxford Univ. Press.
 Ekwensi, Cyprian 1963. *People of the City*. London: Heinemann.
 1981. *Iska*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
 1985. *Jagna Nana's Daughter*. London: Heinemann.
 Emecheta, Buchi 1974. *Second Class Citizen*. London: Fontana.
 Fagunwa, D. O. 1968. *Forest of a Thousand Daemons*, Wole Soyinka, Trans. London: Thomas Nelson.
 Falola, O.O. 1981 "The Political Economy of Ibadan C1830-1900". Ph D Thesis, Ile Ife: University of Ife.
 Fernandes, Edesco 1998. *Environmental Strategies for Sustainable Development in Urban Areas: Lessons from Africa and Latin America*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
 Guyer, Jane et al (Eds). 2003. *Money Struggles and City Life: Devaluation in Ibadan and Other Urban Areas in Southern Nigeria 1986-1996*. Ibadan: Book Builders.
 Henshaw, James Ene 1980. *Dinner for Promotion: A Comedy in Three Acts*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
 Iyayi, Festus 1979. *Violence*. London: Longman.
 Jeyifo, Biodun 1984. *The Popular Yoruba Travelling Theatre of Nigeria*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.
 2006. "The Unfortunate Children of Fortunate Parents: Reflections on African Literature in the Wake of 1986 and the Age of Neoliberal Globalization" in Gbemisola Adeoti and Mabel Ewvwerhoma. (Eds.) *After the Nobel Prize: Reflection on African Literature, Governance and Development*. Lagos: Association of Nigerian Authors, 21-37.
 Labinjo, Justin 1991. *Modernity and Tradition in the Politics of Ibadan 1900-1975*. Ibadan: Fountain Pub.

- Lewis, P. 1996. "From Prebendalism to Predation: The Political Economy of Decline in Nigeria". *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 34: 79-103
- Mondraet, Frank and Scott, Allen (Eds) 1997. *Cities, Enterprises and Society on the Eve of the 21st Century*. London: Pinter.
- Ojaije, Tanure 2003. *God's Medicine Men and other Stories*. Lagos: Malthouse Press
- Olaniyan, Tejumola 2004. *Arrest the Music!: Fela and His Rebel Art and Politics*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press.
- Olayiwola, L.M. 2005. "A Case for the Renewal of Traditional Markets in Ibadan" in ODU: *A Journal of West African Studies* 28 (July): 81-97.
- Onokerhoraye, Andrew 1995. *Benin: A Traditional African City in Transition*. Ibadan: Krafi Books.
- Osofisan, Femi 1978. *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* Ibadan: Scholars Press.
- 1991. *Once upon Four Robbers*. Ibadan: Heinemann.
- 1991. *Aringindin and the Night Watchmen*. Ibadan: Heinemann.
- 2001. "Ibadan and the Two Hundred Snails" in Dapo Adelugba et. al., (Eds.) *Ibadan Mesogogo: A Celebration of a City, Its History and People*. Ibadan: Bookcraft.
- Saro-Wiwa, Ken 1986. "Acapulco Motel" in *Forest of Flowers*. Port Harcourt: Saros International Pub.
- 1987. "The Candidate" and "The Party Secretary" in Basi and Company: *A Modern African Folktale*. Port Harcourt: Saros International Pub., 135 – 172.
- 1989. "The Transistor Radio" and "The Wheel" in *Four Farceful Plays*. Port Harcourt: Saros International Pub., 9 – 31, 57 – 78.
- Sennett, Richard (Ed.) 1969. *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities*. New York: Meredith Corporation.
- Simon, David 1992. *Cities, Capital and Development: African Cities in the World Economy*. London: Belhaven Press
- Sofola, Zulu 1977. *The Sweet Trap*. Ibadan: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Soyinka, Wole 1973. *Collected Plays 1*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- 1988. *Six Plays*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- 1994. *Ibadan: The Penkelemes Years*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- 1999. *The Beatification of Area Boy: A Lagos Kaleidoscope*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
- Tibbalds, Francis. 2001. *Making People - Friendly Towns: Improving the Public Environment in Towns and Cities*. London: Spon Press.
- Tutuola, Amos. 1954. *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. London: Faber and Faber
- Williams, Raymond. 1975. *The Country and the City*. London: Paladin
- Yerima, Ahmed. 2002. *The Lottery Ticket*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.