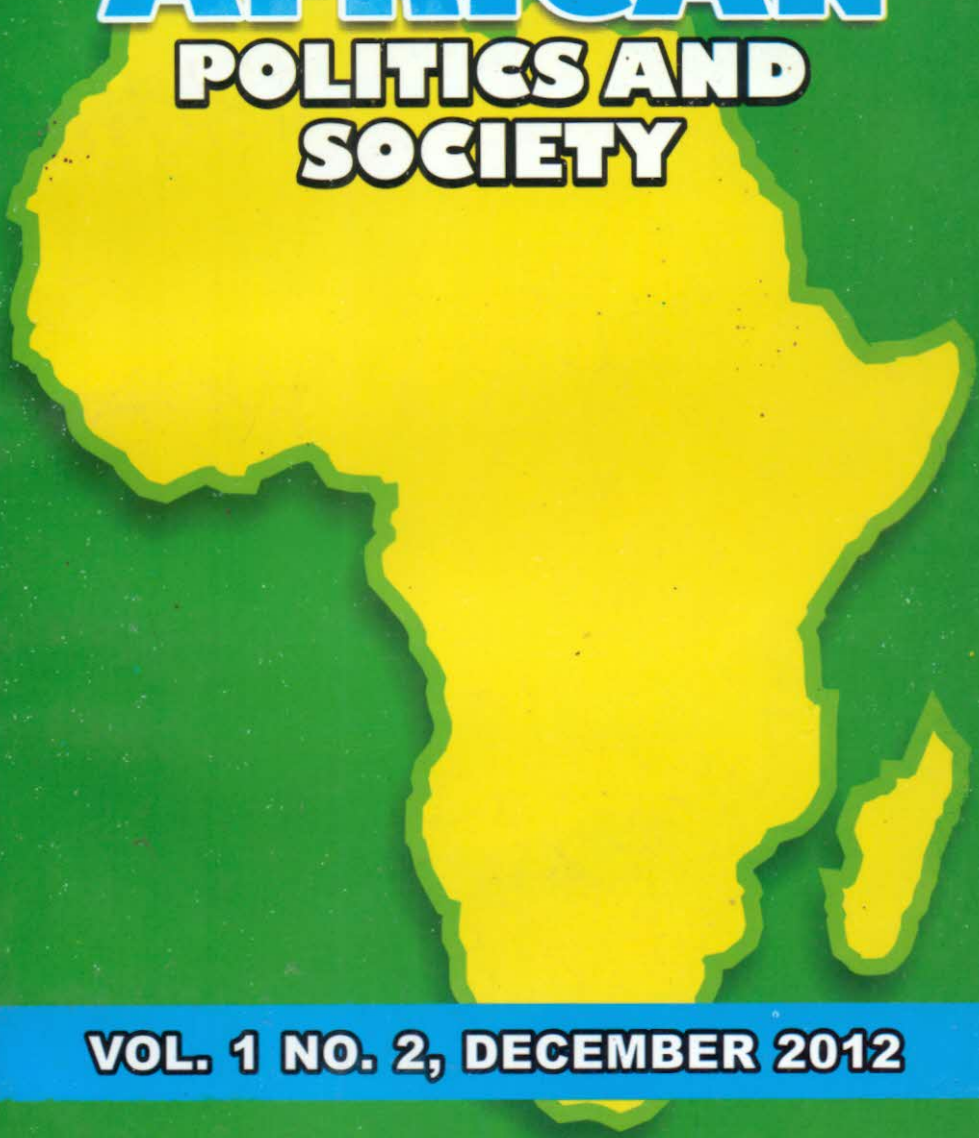
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NIGERIA'S POLITICAL EXPERIENCE, 1960-1997 IN DÚRÓ ADÉLÉKÈ'S *AṢỌ ÌGBÀ*. A SOCIO-SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE

Adeosun, Hezekiah Olufẹmi*

Abstract

This paper addresses Nigeria's political experience since the country's independence in 1960 to the military administration of General Sanni Abacha, using Dúró Adélékè's poetry book, Aṣọ Ìgbà (1997) as illustration. The poems for analysis are selected based on their thematic preoccupation and discussed within the socio-semiotic approach. Socio-semiotics examines semiotic practices, specific to a culture and community, for the making of various kinds of texts and meanings in various situational contexts (i.e., field, tenor and mode of discourse) and contexts of culturally meaningful activity. The findings in the work are that the poet's field of discourse centres on the plight of the Nigerian masses that requires the attention of the Government, imbalance and marginalization of some groups in governance. The tenor of discourse exhibits unpalatable social relations between the government and the citizens. The mode of discourse is the rhetorical mode of warning, advising and the use of metaphorical expressions couched in wordplay. The context of culture portrays the use of cultural symbols, folktale, proverbs and song. The study concludes that the employment of the contexts of situation and of culture to analyse the text gives an opportunity of decoding the selected poems exhaustively to mean what the poet has used the language to mean in a given situation.

Introduction

The socio-political situation in Nigeria today is rooted in its colonial history. According to Girigiri (2006:14), by 1862 when the colony of Lagos was ceded to the British as a Crown Colony, European imperialism and colonialism had begun to exert their influences on the people of Nigeria. With the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern parts of the country in 1914, British colonialism fully entrenched itself. The colonial administration was intent on destroying every facet of the people's heritage that did not support British exploitation. Much of Nigerian heritage became decimated

* Adeosun Hezekiah Olufẹmi, Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages, University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, hezekiahadeosun@yahoo.com

under colonial political, economic, religious social and educational manipulations. The journey to political instability started as far back as the 1960s, a few years after independence. This was subsequently reinforced by series of failure of constitutional democracy and long years of military dictatorship in the country. The stage was set in January 1966 when as a result of deep ethnic tensions, unbridled political rivalry and lack of trust among the post independence leaders, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa government was violently overthrowned in the military group headed by General Aguiyi Ironsi (Goje, 2006:26). Unfortunately, those who took over power ostensibly to bring about corrections to the perceived mistakes by the political class committed the same if not more serious errors leading to another coup that brought General Yakubu Gowon to power in 1966. This event led to a civil war in Nigeria between 1967 and 1970.

In July 1975, General Murtala Muhammed took over power from General Gowon and one of the major items on his agenda was the setting up of a political transition programme that would return the country to democratic governance by October 1979. However, his assassination in a failed military coup on February 13, 1976 prevented his continuation and his successor, General Olúṣẹ́gun Ọbásanjọ́ had to implement the transition programme by handing over power to a democratically elected government under Alhaji Shehu Shagari on 1st October, 1979. In December, 1983, the military, under the leadership of General Muhammadu Buhari, overthrew Alhaji Shagari's democratic government. However, Buhari's government was shortlived as it was overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida in August, 1985.

General Babangida who headed the country for eight years (1985-1993), initiated many programmes of military disengagement from politics but they never materialized. As rightly observed by Goje (2006:26), following the adoption of the 1989 constitution, series of elections were held at various levels up to the governorship, but in June 1993, after the presidential election was held, the military government cancelled the results halfway through their official announcement. With that, Chief M.K.O. Abíọ́lá, the leading Presidential candidate under the Social Democratic Party (SDP), who was poised to win the elections, was not permitted to take up the mandate and this precipitated the June 12 crisis.

Consequently, General Ibrahim Babangida stepped aside in August 1993 under a most difficult circumstance. The appointment of Chief Ernest Shónẹ́kàn as the Head of Interim Government was also short-lived as he was removed, three months later, by his Secretary of Defence, General Sani

Abacha in November 1993. This development also incurred the wrath of Nigerian masses as there were crises all over the country, especially the South West. Although General Abacha initiated a political transition programme, it faced a crisis of legitimacy. There was serious suspicion that General Sanni Abacha wanted to succeed himself as civilian President. According to Dáramọ́lá (2007:2), these events did not only attract attention, comments and reactions from individuals inside and outside Nigeria, but they also incurred wrath, condemnation and, in the world of subjectivity, support from some highly placed and influential politicians and bureaucrats. Responses poured into the country from Nigerian groups abroad, the American, Canadian, British, Australian and European governments as well as political and economic experts.

During the period under review, struggle by various human right organizations, including writers, to ease the military out of the Nigerian political scene was therefore intensified as soon as it became obvious that the military would not go unless the nation rose up against it. The pro-democracy struggles of the 1990s were intense, while the path to civil rule was tortuous. However, Nigerians were prepared to make all the necessary sacrifices, (not minding military brutalization, humiliation and incarceration) to facilitate the enthronement of democratic government in the country and the release of the acclaimed winner of June 12, 1993 election, Chief M.K.O. Abíọ́lá. It was during this period that Dúró Adélékè wrote his poetry book, *Aṣọ Ìgbà* (Garment of the time) which is examined in this study.

Theoretical Framework:
Socio-semiotics

Socio-semiotics is a branch of the field of semiotics, which investigates human signifying practices in specific social and cultural circumstances, and which tries to explain meaning-making as a social practice. It focuses on social meaning-making practices of all types, whether visual, verbal or aural in nature (Thibault, 1991:1). Social semiotics, as noted by Hodge and Kress (1988), can include the study of how people design and interpret meanings, the study of texts, and the study of how semiotic systems are shaped by social interests and ideologies, and how they are adapted as society changes.

Harris (2006:4) posits that socio-semiotics is an approach inspired by Halliday's systemic functional linguistics, which emphasizes the importance of context, both context of situation and context of culture, in reconstructing the meaning of a text. The socio-semiotic approach views

language as the embodiment of the social process in a society. This view consequently shows that context is very important in the understanding and interpretation of a text. All texts written in language are context dependent. There is no text which can stand alone, therefore, to understand a text, the context of the text must be reconstructed.

The level of context, therefore, is the phenomenon, which determines the 'contextualization' of a text. That is, any text will be principally governed by any one of the levels of context, context of situation, context of text and context of culture. The selection of linguistic structure depends on the predominating level of context, which in turn is strongly motivated by language medium (Leckie-Tarry, 1995: 3).

Context of Situation

The context of situation is the immediate environment in which a text is actually functioning. This notion is used to explain why certain things have been said or written on this particular occasion, and what else might have been said or written that was not. The term 'context of situation' originated from the anthropologist Malinowsky (1923, 1935) cited in (Halliday and Hasan 1989:5). To Malinowsky, language usage has a context. The 'textual' features enable the discourse to cohere not only with itself but also with its context of situation. He, therefore, analysed the context of situation into three components, corresponding to the three metafunctions. These components serve to interpret the social context of a text, the environment in which meanings are being exchanged. The three components are the field, tenor and mode of discourse.

These are certain principles that we can use for choosing an appropriate way of describing the context of a situation of a text. Therefore, in this study, Malinowski's three components of interpreting the social context of texts are employed because they are all encompassing for and relevant to our analysis.

Field, Tenor and Mode of Discourse

Field is the total event in which the text is functioning, referring to inherent features of the situation and the events taking place with the emphasis on institutional areas of activity and function. The physical setting and its inherent features and activities, participants, world knowledge and semantic domain constitute both variable and invariable elements of the field of discourse (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:22). Arena/activities refer particularly to the locations of the interaction, both in terms of their inherent features, and in terms of the social institutions which determine them. The

arena and the activities which take place are the most basic elements of context, motivating the possible range of selections in other elements of field, and in elements of tenor (Leckie-Tarry, 1995:36).

Participants, according to Leckie-Tarry, refers to inherent features of the participants, that is, their physical and mental attributes and the knowledge they bring to bear on the setting and events. Such attributes include characteristics such as race, gender, class, wealth, age, appearance, intelligence, cognitive and educational level, occupation, etc., and also the background knowledge which the participants bring to bear on the situation: cultural knowledge, including intertextual knowledge, linguistic knowledge, situational knowledge and textual knowledge.

Semantic domain refers to the broad domain, the general subject matter or content of the specific language event. The two variables of arena and participant will have a considerable predetermining effect on semantic domain. The arena/activities will tend to narrow the range of possible events/subject matters, which will be further constrained by the participants.

Tenor refers to the participant in the social event, the characteristics of the participant, the status as well as the social role which he/she holds (Harris, 2006:3). Halliday and Hasan (1976:22) define tenor as "the type of role interaction, the set of relevant social relations, permanent and temporary among the participants". The elements of the category of tenor are related to and motivated by aspects of field. While field refers to the inherent characteristics of the situation, tenor refers to the non-inherent features – elements which vary according to the social interactions taking place. Wales (2001:388) posits that tenor involves the relationships between participants in the situation, their roles and status. This will affect the kind of language chosen, particularly in respect of the degree of formality.

Mode refers to what part the language is playing, what it is that the participants are expecting the language to do for them in that situation: the symbolic organization of the text, the status that it has, and its function in the context, including the channel (is it spoken or written or some combination of the two?) and also the rhetorical mode, what is being achieved by the text in terms of such categories as persuasive, expository, didactic, and the like (Halliday and Hasan, 1989:12).

Context of Culture

The context of culture is a large and complex knowledge system

spread among the various members of a particular culture, and hence consisting of many sets of knowledge, including, in particular, the institutional and ideological. In any given interaction, that is, a particular context of situation, the context of culture is accessed by means of the knowledge systems which the various participants bring to bear on the situation, where the knowledge is triggered by aspects of the context of situation.

Halliday and Hasan (1989:46) posit that the context of situation, however, is only the immediate environment. There is also a broader background against which the text has to be interpreted: its context of culture. Any actual context of situation, the particular configuration of field, tenor, and mode that has brought a text into being, is not just a random jumble of features but a totality – a package of things that typically go together in the culture. People do these things on these occasions and attach these meanings and values to them: this is what a culture is. All these factors constitute the context of culture, and they determine, collectively, the way the text is interpreted in its context of situation. It is helpful to build in some indication of the cultural background, and the assumptions that have to be made if the text is to be interpreted in the way poets intend.

Analysis of Data and Discussion

Adélékè is one of the foremost poets who wrote during the military government. The four poems selected from *Aṣọ Ìgbà* are "Ṣáágo Ń Búgò" (Birds of a Feather), "Báṣa Bàṣa" (Unreasonable/Uncordinated), "Oníkàn Yìí Rọra" (Beware, You this Garden-egg owner), and "Ogo Ni Àb'ófò Ni?" (Is it Glory or a Loss?).

Field of Discourse

Adélékè's main subject matter, that is, the field of discourse is the plight of the common man which he wanted those in positions of authority, be it military or civilian, to pay attention to. In his poem "Ṣáágo Ń Búgò" (Birds of a feather) (pp. 6-8), he says:

Olè gbé e
Ọlọ́ṣà gbà á
Ó tán n bókù?
Tandi ní n jó
Tá a ní ò mọjó jó
Tàndi bẹjó tán
Gbogbo rẹ wá rí tàndì tandi

Alágbádá ló fagbádá kágbada
Agbada yíí dandé
Agbada dànù...
Àgbà alágbádá kẹ́fí alágbàá
Ó fòru bojú bọ́ gbangba...
Ọwọ́ alágbà àlágbàá lagbára wà

Kànràn kálágbàá forí ṣèlú
Agbára káká lalágbàá ń lò

Bẹ́ẹ̀ ètò ìṣèlú kò gbagbára...
Igbe ìlú kò fararọ ni láyé alágbádá
Ìbòsí ọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ ò tòrò ni lásìkò alágbàá...
Ohun gbogbo ló le koko
Ó le mọ́ ará ilé
Ó le márá oko...

Àṣé késekése n tayé alágbádá
Ìlú ò mọ pé kàsàkàsà ni talágbàá...

Ta ni kò ṣàìmọ̀

P'áṣàá gbé e
Àwòdì tún fò fẹ̀rẹ̀ gbàá lọ́rọ̀
Ọrọ̀ ọ̀hún ń kọ́?

Kò ṣé ṣáágo tí ń búgò (pp. 6-8).

(A thief stole it
Another thief collected it
What else?
Tandi was dancing
We all complained of his unskilled way of dancing
Tàndì requested for a chance to dance
Request granted and all became disorganized

The man in agbádá attire touched the pot (agbada)
with his garment
The pot somersaulted
The pot fell down...
The big man in agbádá sighted a manufacturer of cannon
He ran away...
The manufacturer of cannon thus hijacks the
power of governance

Instead of the manufacturer of cannon to rule with sense
He resorts to force
And governance does not require force...
Cry of unease during the reign of the man in agbádá attire
Cry of uncalmness in the reign of the manufacturer of cannon...
Everything becomes difficult
Difficult for all and sundry...
We now realize that the time of the man in agbádá
was fairer compared to the time of the
manufacturer of cannon which is worse
Who does not know
That hawk takes it
Falcon then collects it
What do we now say?
Are they not birds of a feather?)

The extract above is a revelation of the poet's state of mind towards the problem of governance in Nigeria which is the arena of interaction in the text. The poet expresses his concern for the innocent poor masses whose fates have been mishandled by the 'locusts' who constitute the crop of Nigerian leadership. The metaphors used such as 'olè, ọlọ́ṣà, tandi, tàndi 'alágbádá, alágbàá, àṣà, àwòdì, ṣáágo, ìgò symbolize both the civilian and military leaders. On the one hand, "olè, tandi, alágbádá, àṣá, ìgò" stand for the civilian leaders. On the other hand, "ọlọ́ṣà, tàndi, alágbàá, àwòdì, ṣáágo" represent the military. The use of these metaphors will be explicated under the mode of discourse. The field of discourse encapsulates the insensitivity which characterized the responsibilities of the government to her citizenry.

Another relevant poem which attests to the foregoing is "Báṣa Bàṣa" (Uureasonable / Uncordinated) (pp. 73-74). Adélékè lampoons the military government headed by General Sanni Abacha in a rhetorical fashion thus:

Àbàṣà irú èwo rèé?
Kí ló lè fa báṣa bàṣa
Ẹ má fàbàṣà bà 'lú jẹ́
Ẹ jẹ́ kódẹ̀dẹ̀ dùn
Kílùú má dàbí ìgbẹ́...(p. 73)

(What kind of mess is this?
What could have caused this mess
Do not infect the people with the mess.
Make the community be habitable
Lest the community turn to a desert...)

This is a picture of the socio-political event in Nigeria under the military leadership of the late General Sanni Abacha. The poet's expectation is to expose the excesses of the military government, and perhaps advise the rulers to embark on people-oriented programmes. The following extract is instructive:

Ẹ báni sọ f'óníkàn yìí
Kó rọra
Ẹ kìlọ̀ fún un
Kó má ṣàṣejù
Ẹ sọ fún un
P'ájọni wa ni
Bàbá gbogbo wa ló parapọ̀ pàjùbà...
(Oníkàn Yìí Rọra, p. 46)

(Help tell this garden-egg owner
To be careful
Warn him
Not to over-do things
Tell him
That it belongs to all of us
Our fathers came together to prepare the farm-land...)

The socio-political construct of Nigeria is vividly presented in the preceding extract to show the degree of selfishness on the part of the participant (Oníkàn) and the feeling of alienation of other participants. The three major ethnic groups in Nigeria are the participants. These are Hausa, Ìgbò and Yorùbá. The poet refers to one of the participants, Hausa, as 'oníkàn' (garden-egg owner). In political history of Nigeria, Hausa has been the major ethnic group that has governed the country more than the other groups of Ìgbò and Yorùbà. The selfishness on the part of the Hausa regarding issue of governance informs the poem "Oníkàn Yíí Rọra". 'Ikàn' (garden-egg) is a crop cultivated in the farm. 'Oníkàn' is one who possesses the crop. The poet is cautioning the Hausa ethnic group to tread softly because the country belongs to all the three ethnic groups. The

activity that takes place in Adélékè's "Ògo Ni Àb'ófò Ni?" (Is it glory or a loss) (pp. 53-54) is the socio-political situation in Nigeria, a country with diverse tribes and culture. The field of discourse expresses a situation where a certain group protests against imbalance and marginalization in governance, an event that resulted into bloodletting. The cruel way of dealing with the agitators is emphasized by the poet, hence he condemns the barbaric manner in which the military government handled the case of the Niger-Delta in Nigeria. This is evident in the extract below:

Wọ́n gbalẹ̀ lọ́wọ́ onílẹ̀
Wọ́n tún mọ́mọ onílẹ̀
Wọ́n fi wọ́n bọlẹ̀ lọ́sàn-án gangan...(p. 53)

(They confiscated other people's land
They even arrested the owners of the land
They were used for rituals in daylight...)

Tenor of Discourse

From the examined extracts, it can be inferred in relation to the tenor of discourse, i.e. social relations that the poet is essentially addressing a polarized society – the government (military and civilian) on one side and the citizens, the masses on the other side. The relationship between these two groups can be said to have been severed by the actions of the former. It can also be deduced that the stance of the poet is sharing the feelings of the masses, by identifying with them. The accusative tone employed by the poet buttresses this claim. This is illustrated in the following extracts:

Ohun gbogbo ló le koko
Ó le mọ́ ará ilé
Ó le márá oko
Kò dẹ́rùn fẹ́ni wà lọ́dẹ̀dẹ̀
Tẹ́rú tọ́mọ ni dúngún
Tèwe tàgbà ni dúnrò...(Ṣáágo Ń Búgò, p. 7)

(Things are extremely difficult
It is difficult for those in the towns
It is difficult for those in the villages
It is neither easy for those at home
Both slaves and free-borns are complaining
Both old and young are grumbling...)

(b) Bàbá alábàṣà
Ẹ ṣayée re
Ẹ pàjùbà sílẹ̀ de lọ́lọ́
Kẹ ẹ jórúkọ
Tó dùn sílẹ̀ dọmọ
Ohun a ṣe lónìí
Yóó dìtàn bó dọ́la...(Báṣa Bàṣa, p. 73)

(Messy man
It is advisable you turn a new leaf
Do a remarkable thing
Bear a name
That your children can be proud of
Whatever is done today
Shall become history tomorrow...)

(c) Ọ̀kánjúà ni ó pa oníkàn yìí
Bóó ti ń fọ́tún kó
Ní n fòsì kó
Kò sì fẹ́ mọ̀
Bébi ń pọmọ ẹnìkọ́ọ̀kan
Kó sá ti yó bámúbámú...
Sànnnú yìí sánjú
Sànnnú kò náání Kedú
Sànnnú yìí sánjú
Sànnnú kò rántí Akú...(Oníkàn Yìí Rọra, p: 47)
(It is greed that will kill this garden-egg owner
As he collects on the right
So he does on the left
And he does not care
If anybody is hungry
His concern is for him to be well-fed...
This Sànnnú is heartless
Sànnnú does not care about Kedú
This Sànnnú is heartless
Sànnnú does not remember Akú...)

The first extract from "Ṣáágo Ń Búgò" (p. 7) is directed towards Nigerian leaders, both military and civilian, to consider the plight of the masses and alleviate their suffering. The second, "Báṣa Bàṣa" (p. 73), is targeted specifically towards the military dictators who impose themselves on the people and put them in perpetual hardship. The third extract from "Oníkàn Yìí Rọra" (p. 47) refers to the Hausa ethnic group the poet accuses of holding to political power at the expense of other two major ethnic groups in the country.

In "Ògo Ni Àb'ófò Ni?", the social relations between the participants, i.e., the military government and the people of Ògònì in the Niger Delta, is unpleasant based on the treatment meted out to the latter by the former.

Mode of Discourse

Due to the nature of this work, the paramount channel taken by the language of these texts is written. In "Ṣáágo Ń Búgò", the symbolic organization of the poem is the very short witty lines which have been used to convey the thought of the poet. Also, the use of poetic devices like metaphorical expressions has proven to be a most effective medium of making a goal-ended presentation as evident in the following:

Ta ni kò ṣàìmọ̀
P'áṣàá gbé e
Àwòdì tún fò fẹ̀rẹ̀ gbà á lọ́rọ̀
Ọ̀rọ̀ ọ̀hún ńkọ́?
Kò ṣe ṣáágo tí ń búgò (Ṣáágo Ń Búgò, pp. 7-8)
(Who does not know
That the hawk steals it
The falcon then collects it is the case
What do we now say?
Are they not birds of a feather?)

The metaphors here are "àṣá" (hawk) and "àwòdì" (falcon) on the one hand and "ṣáágo" (a kind of bottle) and "ìgò" (bottle) on the other hand. *Àṣá* and *àwòdì* are same family of birds that specialize in the stealing of chicks. In a situation where *àṣá* accuses *àwòdì*, its co-thief, of stealing, thus the saying "ṣáágo ń búgò" meaning birds of a feather. Other metaphors used in the poem are "olè / ọlọ́ṣà, tandi / tàndi, alágbádá / alágbàá. These

metaphors symbolize both the civilian and the military leaders. While 'olè', 'tandi' and 'alágbádá' stand for the civilian leaders, 'ọlọ́ṣà', 'tàndi' and 'alágbàá' represent the military leaders. Syntactically, 'olè' and 'ọlọ́ṣà' belong to the same lexical category. They are both thieves. Phonologically, 'tandi' and 'tàndì' have three syllables each but carrying different tones. While 'tandi' has mid-tone, 'tàndì' carries low-tone. It is the tone that brings about difference between them, the former is more subtle than the latter. Though, 'alágbádá' and 'alágbàá' have same syllables, yet they are different in terms of meaning. 'Alágbádá' is a person in 'agbádá' attire, 'alágbàá' is a person manufacturing cannon. A cannon is a weapon used in war front. Ordinarily, one would have preferred a man in 'agbádá' attire to a man manufacturing cannon. The import of this effect is that the military lacks moral right to accuse the civilian of corruption since both of them are culprits.

The rhetorical mode in the poem titled "Báṣa Bàṣa" (pp. 73-74), is the poet's warning to the addressee against an impending doom if he refuses to listen to the yearning of the masses. He puts it thus:

Bágbára jẹ́ tìẹ lónìí
Tó o kọ̀
Tó o ò díyà mẹ̀kúnnù
Tó o níwà aṣa lò ó hù
Tó fiwà aṣa káṣa tirẹ
Tó o dájú bí àṣá kenke
Tí kò sóròmọdìẹ tó ò le kì
Àṣá lè ṣe bẹ́ẹ̀
Kó fara káṣá ìlàsà lóko ìlasa
Òkòkó aṣa a sì jẹ́fun àṣá... (p. 74)

(If power belongs to you today
And you refuse
To alleviate the suffering of the poor
If you insist on your wickedness
And you remain adamant
Like a heartless hawk
Who does not spare any chick
Through that
The hawk may experience gun shot

And the wicked hen will end up eating the hawk's intestine...)

The wordplay poetic device in the poem is a mirror of the magnitude of mess and insensibility the poet accuses the addressee of. The poet carefully selects words that imitate the name of the then military head of government, Abacha, and plays on these words. The words are *aṣa* (uncultured/untutored) as in "tó fìwà aṣa káṣa tìrẹ" (that you combine uncultured attitude to your wickedness) and *àṣá* (hawk) in "tó o dájú bí àṣá kenke" (that you are as wicked as a heart-less hawk). Other words played on are "fara káṣá ìlàsà lóko ìlasa" (experience gun-shot in an 'ilasa' okro farm) and "òkòkó aṣa a sì jẹ̀fun àṣá" (a wicked hen will end up eating the hawk's intestine). The effect of the wordplay in this text is to let the addressee know what may likely be the consequence of his wickedness. Even the discourse mode in terms of organization of the poem is a mutation of the title "Báṣa Bàṣa"(unreasonable/uncoordinated). The song which opens the poem depicts the rhetorical mode of lampooning the addressee and his style of governance. The symbol inherent in the poem is a picture of political disorder, confusion and disorganization of the social order of the society leading to the pauperization of the masses. Military rulers are portrayed as rough, dirty, unclean, disorganized, confused and destructive in their arts of governance. This is evident in the use of wordplay on 'báṣa bàṣa' in the following lines:

Àbàṣà irú èwo rèé?
Kí ló lè fa báṣa bàṣa
Ẹ má fàbàṣà bà 'lú jẹ́
Ẹ jẹ́ kódẹ̀dẹ̀ dùn
Kílùú má dàbí ìgbẹ́...(p. 73)

(What kind of mess is this?
What could have caused this mess
Do not infect the people with the mess.
Make the community be habitable
Lest the community turn to a desert...)

The use of 'báṣa bàṣa' is deliberate in order to play on the name of Abacha and his act of governance. The poet could as well use words like

'rádaràda', kántankàntan, kátikàti' in place of 'báṣabàṣa' but he chooses not. The effect is to portray the destructive way of Abacha's governance. Hence, the poet pleads with them to revert their actions and policies so that the masses would have, at least, a minimum comfort. They should not turn the country to a 'desert'. "Desert" here means a situation of dryness, political dryness, social and economic stagnation leading to poverty, where people are hungry and sad. The poet pleads with the rulers to tread softly.

However, the mode of discourse i.e. rhetorical mode in the poem "Oníkàn Yìí Rọra" (Beware, you this garden-egg owner) is confrontational. At certain points, declarative statements are made to achieve this as in the following:

Ajá kan ò fẹ́ ṣakápò Ẹkùn mọ́
Akú àti Kedú ò joyè abẹ́ṣin-káwọ́ mọ́
Sànnnú kò fẹ́ Kedú lọ́ba
Sànnnú kò fẹ́ Akú lóyè
Ọ̀fọ̀n-ọ̀n ti tọ́ ọ́ gbẹ̀girì
Kẹ́lẹ́kọ́ kẹ́kọ́ ẹ̀ lọ́wọ́
Kí kóówá gba sarè e bàbá ẹ̀ lọ
Ọ̀ràn-an-yàn kọ́ làṣepọ̀ (p. 52)

(Nobody is willing to be a hang-on to his contemporary
Akú and Kedú are fed up with living as slaves
Sànnnú does not want Kedú as king
Sànnnú does not want Akú as chief
Now the game is up
Each person should hold on to what is his
Each person should go to his father's farmstead
Living together is not compulsory).

The use of *ajá* (dog) and *ẹkùn* (leopard) on the one hand, and *Akú, Kedú* and *Sànnnú* on the other hand is symbolic. *Ajá* and *ẹkùn* have same mission, i.e. hunting. When the leopard always takes the larger portion of the hunting proceeds, the dog tends to react. Also, *Akú, Kedú* and *Sànnnú* represent the three major tribes in Nigeria. These words are derived from the way the three Nigerian major tribes exchange greetings. *Akú* is from the Yorùbá greetings such as "A kú àárọ, a kú ọ̀sán, a kú alẹ́ (Good morning, afternoon or evening). *Kedú* and *Sànnnú* mean "how are you?" in Ìgbò and

Hausa respectively. From the foregoing, it is inferred that *ajá* (dog) symbolises Yorùbá (Akú) and Ìgbò (Kedú) while *ẹkùn* (leopard) that possesses domineering role represents Hausa. It is believed that the Hausa tribe has marginalized the other two tribes in governance, hence the call by the poet who is a member of one of the marginalized group (Yorùbá) that "ọ̀fọ̀n-ọ̀n ti tọ̀ ọ́ gbẹ̀gìrì, kẹ́lẹ́kọ̀ kẹ́kọ̀ ẹ̀ lọ́wọ́ (Now the game is up, each person should hold on to what is his). This is a Yorùbá proverb that declares one's intention that one is no more interested in something. *Ọ̀fọ̀n-ọ̀n* means rat while *gbẹ̀gìrì* is a type of soup prepared to eat *ẹ̀kọ̀* (pap). In this case, however, the rat has urinated inside the soup, what remains is for the owner of the pap to hold on to his pap and look elsewhere for another thing to eat his pap. The poet's ideological stance is clearly stated here that no tribe is willing to be a hang-on to another tribe since the country belongs to all, and that if being together is a problem, the solution should be secession.

In "Ògo Ni Àbófò Ni?" the rhetorical mode is a condemnation of the killing of the nine Ògònì leaders. The poet employs very short lines, coupled with metaphorical expressions and rhetorical questions to achieve this feat. These are illustrated in the following:

Èwo lèwo nínú rẹ̀
Ògo ni, àb'ófò ni?
Kí ni ká ti gbọ́

Pádàá ṣíṣẹ́ ṣíṣẹ́
Kò rérè igbó jẹ
Kí ni ká ti sọ
Péyà ni torogùn ọkà
Bó ti rò tó lápẹ
Ọmọ orogùn kò jàmàlà
Èwo ni tìgbákọ
Tọ́mọ aráyé tún fálá téníténí...(p. 53)

(Which is which between the two
Is it glory or a loss?
How should it be reported
That the cutlass tilled laboriously
Yet it did not benefit from the forest
How should it be said
That there is nothing left for 'ọmọ orogùn'
used for turning yam-powder
No matter how long it stays in the pot

It does not retain yam flour turned with
hot water for food
What do we say of a ladle
That is licked clean after use...)

The metaphorical expressions used in this extract are "pádàá ṣíṣẹ́ ṣíṣẹ́, kò rérè igbó jẹ" (that the cutlass tilled laboriously, yet it did not benefit from the forest), "ọmọ orogùn kò jàmàlà" (wooden instrument used for turning yam-powder when it is being prepared on the fire does not retain yam flour) and "èwo ni tìgbákọ tọ́mọ aráyé tún fálá téníténí" (what do we say of a ladle that is licked clean after use). The nine killed Ògònì leaders and the people of Ògònì are symbolised as *àdá* (cutlass), *ọmọ orogùn* (wooden instrument used for turning yam-powder) and *ìgbákọ* (ladle). These objects are used to achieve certain purposes, yet they do not partake in what they laboured for. The title of the poem itself is symbolic. It plays on the word 'Ògònì' as 'Ògo ni' as in the form of a rhetorical question 'Ògo ni àbí Òfò ni?'. The poet likens the death of the nine Ògònì leaders, in particular, and the suffering experienced by the people generally, to a great loss. It is a loss because the petroleum which is the major natural resource of the country is found in their land, yet they were not treated fairly, and when the agitations were made, the result was the killing of nine of their leaders.

Context of Culture

The understanding of the poet's use of cultural metaphors such as *àṣá* and *àwòdì* on the one hand as well as *ṣáágo* and *ìgò* on the other hand in the poem "Ṣáágo Ń Búgò" can be located through a background knowledge of the Yorùbá culture.

Olè gbé e

Ọlọ́ṣà gbà á
Ó tán n bókù?
Tandi ní n jó
Tá a ní ò mọ́jó jó
Tàndi bẹ́jó tán
Gbogbo rẹ̀ wá rí tàndì tandi
Alágbádá ló fagbádá kágbada
Agbada yíí dandé
Agbada dànù...
Àgbà alágbádá kẹ́fí alágbàá
Ó fòru bojú bọ́ gbangba...

Ọwọ́ alágbà àlágbàá lagbára wà
Kànràn kálágbàá forí ṣèlú
Agbára káká lalágbàá ń lò
Bẹ́ẹ̀ ètò ìṣèlú kò gbagbára...
Igbe ìlú kò fararọ ni láyé alágbádá
Ìbòsí ọ̀dẹ̀dẹ̀ ò tòrò ni lásìkò alágbàá...
Ohun gbogbo ló le koko
Ó le mọ́ ará ilé
Ó le márá oko...
Àṣé késekése n tayé alágbádá
Ìlú ò mọ́ pé kàsàkàsà ni talágbàá...
Ta ni kò ṣàimọ̀
P'áṣàá gbé e
Àwòdì tún fò fẹ̀rẹ̀ gbàá lọ́rọ̀
Ọrọ̀ ọ̀hún ń kọ́?
Kò ṣé ṣáágo tí ń búgò (pp. 6-8).

(A thief stole it
Another thief collected it
What else?
Tandi was dancing
We all complained of his unskilled way of dancing
Tàndì requested for a chance to dance
Request granted and all became disorganized
The man in agbádá attire touched the pot (agbada) with his garment
The pot somersaulted
The pot fell down...
The big man in agbádá sighted a manufacturer of cannon
He ran away...
The manufacturer of cannon thus hijacks the power of governance
Instead of the manufacturer of cannon to rule with sense, He resorts to force
And governance does not require force...
Cry of unease during the reign of the man in agbádá attire

Cry of uncalmness in the reign of the manufacturer of cannon...
Everything becomes difficult
Difficult for all and sundry...
We now realize that the time of the man in agbádá was fairer compared to the time of the manufacturer of cannon which is worse
Who does not know
That hawk takes it
Falcon then collects it
What do we now say?
Are they not birds of a feather?)

Àṣá and *àwòdì* are birds of the same specie. They are known for stealing chicks. This is why the poet likens both the military and the civilian leaders to hawks and falcons whose preoccupation is to steal. Moreover, among the Yorùbá, *Ṣáágo* and *Ìgò* are the same bottle family. *Ṣáágo* is a kind of bottle used to keep palmwine, and it is bigger than the normal bottle. Thus, the Yorùbá use the phrase 'Ṣáágo ń Búgò' (Birds of a feather) to discredit two or more people when they do the same thing that is condemnable by the generality of the people. Similarly, the choice of *alágbádá* for political leaders and *alágbàá* for the military is deliberate. While the Yorùbá fondly call politicians *alágbádá,* the poet calls the military leaders as *alágbàá.* The military are charged with the responsibility of manufacturing cannon called 'àgbá' that is used at war front, hence the name given by the poet as 'alágbàá'. Due to their military training, they are stronger than the so-called *alágbádá.* Therefore, according to the poet, both are thieves who aid and abet criminality. The effect of this device is to pinch, and even punch the psyche of these leaders.

Again, still within the context of culture, the poet is seen as a mouth-piece of the common people by condemning the attitudes of the players in the Nigerian politics. He condemns the military, who he refers to as *àṣá* (hawk), *ṣáágo* (a kind of bottle), and *alágbàá* (a manufacturer of cannon). He sees them as worse than the civilians they accused of corruption and other social vices, hence the title, 'Ṣáágo ń Búgò' (Birds of a feather). This title itself is symbolic. It signifies incompetence, corruption, and ineptitudeness in this context. Thus, the intent of the poem is to condemn both the military and civilian leaders. The semantic

domain in "Ògo Ni Àb'ófò Ni?" could be further explained from the perspective of the Ogoni's ideological context of culture. At a point in time in Nigerian history, there were series of agitations from different groups because of the imbalance in governance, marginalization of a tribe, and so on and so forth. These agitations, at times, brought about protests and demonstrations which resulted into bloodletting. During the military regime, on November, 10, 1995, Ken Saro-Wiwa, the president of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), and eight other Ogoni leaders were hanged by the General Sanni Abacha regime. This is the event that informed "Ògo Ni Àb'ófò Ni?" (Is it glory or a loss?). Ògònì people are Niger Deltans of the oil-rich Rivers State. Their cardinal demands then included; the struggle for political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people, control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development, and the right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation. As reported by the *Tell Magazine,* of 13 November, 1995, p. 11, the Ogoni people demanded for political autonomy within the context of a federal Nigeria, in which environment they could control a fair percentage of the royalties accruing from oil exploitation, and then link up voluntarily with other equally autonomous political groups for the purpose of development. However, these demands did not go well with the Abacha led military government, as the result was the hanging of these leaders. Thus, this is the socio-political context that makes the poet ask the rhetorical question 'Ògo Ni Àb'ófò Ni'? Furthermore, the cultural metaphors such as 'àdá' (cutlass), 'orogùn ọkà' (wooden instrument for turning yam powder), and 'ìgbàkọ' (large wooden ladle) on one hand, represent the people of Niger Delta while 'ọmọ aráyé' (human being) on the other hand, represents the military government. From our background knowledge which is very crucial in this text, 'àdá' (cutlass) is an instrument used to cultivate the land, it is also used during harvest season, yet it does not partake in the gains of the harvest. The same thing goes for 'orogùn ọkà'. It is a wooden instrument used for turning yam flour in a cooking vessel. There is hardly a day that it will not be used in some homes. Also, 'ìgbákọ' accompanies 'orogùn' in food preparation. Moreover, 'ọmọ aráyé' as used in the text has authority over the items mentioned. The effect of this device is to symphatize with the oppressed group, and also to condemn the act of negligence and 'judicial murder' of some members of this group.

The poems "Bá̀sa Bà̀sa" and "Oníkàn Yìí Rọra" are both located in the Yorùbá folk song and folktale respectively. The poem "Bá̀sa Bà̀sa" opens with the folk song:

Mà ta sómi wẹ́rẹ́wẹ́rẹ́
Mà ta sómi wẹrẹwẹrẹ
Só ma tá
Awóyá woyà woya
Abásá basà bansa
Ewúré ilé rẹ
Sàlámọ̀tù
Àdùkẹ́

Làwa ń bá ṣeré
Olówó - ẹyọ
Àdùkẹ́
Làwa ń bá tayò
Olówó - ẹyọ (p. 73)

(Mà ta sómi wẹ́rẹ́wẹ́rẹ́
Mà ta sómi wẹrẹwẹrẹ
Só ma tá
Awóyá woyà woya
Abásá basà bansa
The goat in your house
Sàlámọ̀tù
Àdùkẹ́
Is who we are playing with
One who has cowries
Àdùkẹ́
Is who we are playing 'ayò' game with
One who has cowries)

This folk song is usually sung by the Yorùbá children when they are gathered to play. This poets adopts this technique to prepare a stage to satirize Abacha and his government. In "Oníkàn Yìí Rọra", the folktale song used in the opening of the poem has a lead and response structure as in the following lines:

Oníkàn yìí rọra
Terejìngín
Oníkàn yìí rọra
Terejìngín
Ìwọ́ ká
Èmí ká

Terejìngín

Tèmi ṣe leè dìjà
Terejìngin
Bó dìjà bó dìta
Èmi ò níí sá
Terejìngín...(p. 46)

(Beware, you this garden-egg owner
Terejìngín
Beware, you this garden-egg owner
Terejìngìn
You plucked
I plucked
Terejìngín
Why should mine cause a fight
Terejìngín
If it turns a fight
I will not run
Terejìngín)

The import of this poem is declaring a confrontational stance against the Hausa ethnic group that arrogates political power to herself at the detriment of the other ethnic groups of Ìgbò and Yorùbá. Here, the ideological position of the poet is clearly stated that Nigeria should be an egalitarian society. No ethnic group should see the issue of governance as her birth right.

Conclusion

This work has studied Nigeria's political experience in both the military and the civilian administrations in Dúró Adélékè's *Aṣọ Ìgbà* (The Garment of the Time), using the socio-semiotic approach as theoretical framework. The field of discourse in Adélékè's poems centred on the plight of the Nigerian masses, which he wanted those in position of authority to pay attention to. Emphasis was also placed on the imbalance and marginalization of some groups in Nigeria which always resulted to crises and bloodletting. From the field of discourse encapsulated in Adélékè's poems, the social relations that existed between the government and the citizens not palatable based on the way the issue of governance was handled. Under the mode of discourse, Adéléké's use of metaphorical

expressions proved to be most effective media of communicating his intentions. The rhetorical mode in his poems included warning, confronting, condemning and advising. Under the context of culture, the cultural import of some of Adélékè's poems and his ideological stance would be understood through the readers' background knowledge of the Yorùbá culture and the Nigerian socio-political terrain.

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