

Poetic Representations of Nigeria's Political Transition in Selected Poems of Kola Eke

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Abstract

This study interrogates the poetic representations of notable political transitions in Nigeria. Through the portrayal of national history from Kola Eke's perspective, the study describes the nature of transition in the Nigerian post-colonial political atmosphere as depicted in the selected poetry of Kola Eke. The paper adopts a content analysis approach wherein the poetry texts are qualitatively evaluated based on the postcolonial theory with the specific focus on Frederick Jameson's Third World theory (Jameson, 1976). Frederick early describes the literary works of former colonies of Europe with Third world status as "National Allegories" that address socio-economic and socio-political problems that befall them. Through the dependence on history as the backdrop of Modern African literature, Eke's poetry exposes the nature of transition in the civilian governments of Nigeria's First Republic and the Fourth Republic, and some notable military regimes. The paper concludes that transitions in post-independent Nigeria are not straight forward and are burdened with military intrusions, attempted civil interferences, dictatorial injustice, corruption and abuse of social and political rights.

Key words: Transition, Contemporary, Poetry, Military, Third World

Introduction

History serves as a significant framework in Nigerian poetry, offering poets a canvas to explore and depict cultural, social and political experiences. It provides a source of inspiration, allowing poets to delve into the past to illuminate timeless human experiences, reflect on historical events, and capture the ethos of different eras. Through poetry, history becomes a living narrative, connecting readers to the collective memory of humanity and fostering a deeper understanding of our shared heritage. This paper focuses on Eke's depiction of Nigerian history.

Nigeria, as a nation, faced a tedious journey towards self-actualisation. The events leading up to independence on October 1, 1960, have continued to act as a significant reference point in trying to assert a trajectory of Nigerian history. From regional politics to national politics, to census and the coups and counter-coups; it is not difficult to argue that the Nigerian state has faced many challenges and continues to face many till date. A survey of Nigeria's political history is relevant to the understanding its political trajectory. Nigeria, the most populous black nation in the world over the past six decades, has been described as a deteriorating state which has not been able to maximise its natural and human resources to its advantage. Nigeria, only sixty-three years as an independent state and sixty years as a republic, has witnessed several political sagas that have affected the nation's political, social and economic spheres. This socio-economic and political mayhem has placed Nigeria in the Third World status as one of the poorest nations of the world. Statista reports that in 2023, nearly 12 percent of the world's poorest population lived in Nigeria, considering the poverty threshold at 1,90 US. Dollars a day. (Statista.com).

Achebe (1984) further points out the problem of Nigeria in the following words:

The trouble with Nigeria is and squarely a failure in leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. 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 examples which are the hallmarks of true leadership. (p. 1)

To understand the conundrum of the Nigerian political experience, it is pertinent to recall that through an act by the British government, Nigeria became an independent state on October 1, 1960, with Nnamdi Azikiwe installed as the governor-general who was a representative of the British monarch as head of the state which was mere ceremonial. Tafewa Balewa emerged as the democratically elected parliamentary prime minister. The federal government was a Northern People's Congress (NPC) and The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) coalition within the first three years after independence. The former was nationalist, Christian and populist, while the latter was regionalist. The census crisis of 1963 was already a pointer to the troubles ahead for the young nation. Divides along ethnic and religious lines were already deepening as the Eastern and Western regions outright refused the census results, accusing the Northern region of vastly inflating the number. The First Republic quickly disintegrated, with corruption and impunity being the order of the day. These would eventually lead to the first coup in Nigeria's history on 15 January 1966, led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu. This coup, tagged an "Igbo coup", further drove a deep divide between Nigerians across ethnic lines. In this coup, the prime minister, Tafawa Balewa, and the Premier of Northern Region, Ahmadu Bello, were killed. This set into motion a dangerous trajectory of bloodshed in the Nigerian state.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis is anchored on the postcolonial theory with emphasis on the Frederick Jameson's Third World concept of the nation. Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin (1995, p. 11) explain that "the idea of postcolonial literary theory emerges from the inability of European theory to deal adequately with the complexities and varied cultural provenance of postcolonial writing". For Ashcroft et al., Postcolonialism presents and explores the conditions of colonised states and engages concerned notions about them. It involves studying to understand and analyse works from former colonies of Europe. Postcolonialism involves the psychological, physical, and cultural effects of the contact between the colonisers and the colonised. It also highlights the recurrent and novel cultural issues faced in the newly formed independent state. (Balogun 2014). Nealon and Giroux (2003, p. 141) describe Postcolonialism from the point of periodisation and timeline as "the period after the heyday of colonialism". Ashcroft (2009, p. 20) argues that postcolonial "does not mean 'after colonialism' but refers to how colonised writers and cultural producers engage the imperial discourses to which they are subject". He argues further that the actual postcolonial period "begins with colonialism, not with independence. Indeed, 'postcolonial' does not refer to the state of being at all but a way of reading, way of talking about those engagements" (pp. 20-21).

The Third World refers to all countries, often used to roughly describe the developing countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Third World countries are classified by various indices, including Political Rights and Civil Liberties, the Gross National Income (GNI) and Poverty of countries, the Human Development of Countries (HDI) and Freedom of Information within a country. (Srivastara n.d.).The concept of the Third World serves to identify countries that suffer from high infant mortality, low economic development, high levels of poverty, low utilisation of natural resources and heavy dependence on industrialised nations. Third World nations tend to have economies that are dependent on the developed countries also known as First World countries. They are generally characterised as poor, with unstable governments and having high rates of population growth, illiteracy, and disease. It involves impoverished millions in a vast lower economic class and a small elite upper class controlling the country's wealth and resources. Most Third-World nations also have substantial foreign debt. In order to study third world literature, one has to clearly understand the conditions of oppression, racism, dependence, and colonialism that Third-World writers have struggled against for years. What also distinguishes third-world literature from First and Second-World literature are the themes portrayed. While the First-World nations focus on sci-fi and technologically advanced futuristic and detective themes, the Third-World literary works represent their continents' socio-political and socio-economic perspectives.

Fredric Jameson first used the concept of the Third-world theory in his 1986 article titled "Third-world literature in the era of multinational capitalism", where he affirms that the first and second worlds are defined in terms of their production system like capitalism and

socialism, while the third world is "defined purely in terms of an experience of externally inserted phenomena." (Aijaz, 1992, p.100). Jameson notices a recent trend among third-world intellectuals on "an obsessive return to the national situation itself". Jameson's observation comes from a place where nationalism has moved from the reverence for one's nation and has reached the level of exposing the ills of society through literary works of art and economic and political commentaries. The issues they engage range from political apathy, transition, corruption, dictatorship, inter-tribal wars, extrajudicial killings, economic crunches, hypocrisy, massive poverty rates, terrorism, militancy, and neocolonialism. Jameson (1986, p. 69) argues further that:

all third-world texts are necessarily... allegorical, and in a very special way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly Western machineries of representation, such as the novel.

He also posits that Third World countries dwell on neocolonialism which heralded the birth of sheer disillusionment, and these writers "bearing the passion for change and social regeneration which has not yet found its agents... The newer leaders may of course throw off their masks and reveal the person of the Dictator, whether in its old individual or newer military form" (p. 81). Writers in a bid to foster change, social transformation and reconstruction which were not felt by Africans during the colonial era, agitated the need for Africa to become independent and replaced colonial officers with African rulers who had seamless connections with the external controlling forces and eventually became worse than the colonialists. These new crops of leaders were dictators who were representatives of military and civilian governments without any regard for democratic rule.

Critical Appraisal on Nigeria's Post-colonial Political Trajectory

Nigeria has undergone and is still undergoing several political, historical, and economic changes. Virtually all Nigerian poets draw inspiration from history. After the Nigerian Biafran civil war, the generation of poets known as the Second generation poets emerged and witnessed successive coups leading to political instability, anarchy and a decline in the country's economic status. Nwahunanya (2007) explains that the second generation poets "carry his audience along, first by refusing to be esoteric or rejecting totally the linguistic legacies of the indigenous traditions" (p.92). Hence, the poet selects a clear and easy mode of expression that can accommodate every audience by demystifying it. Poets like Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, Tanure Ojaide, Funso Ayejina, Nmimmo Bassey are outstanding Second generation poets whose works acknowledge concern for the downtrodden in the society.

However, a third generation of poets has emerged and these poets like the Second generation poets paint pictures of the socio-economic situations in Nigeria. These poets like the second

generation poets adopt the Marxist style. In tone, they are forceful, assertive, combative, fearless, confrontational, defiant and penetrative. Eke as a contemporary poet, belongs to the Third generation of poets that have emerged in the second decade of the twenty-first century as he outrightly exposes the economic and social injustices meted out to the helpless victims through poetic devices.

Furthermore, through the deliberate naming of his collections of poems after notable historical events shows his commitment to his refractivist concern about the Nigerian socio-political and socio-economic quagmire. This is why Diala (2015) informs us that history is the essential province of the Nigerian writer, and to transform the texture of the common life through their text is a crucial aim of their endeavour as literary artists. The voice that the contemporary Nigerian poet heeds is invariably the voice of the people, that is, the downtrodden and pauperised masses (p. 6). Diala assigns the poet the role of the mouthpiece for the marginalised and oppressed in society by exposing the shabby treatment meted out to the poor. The poet aims to metamorphose society into a habitable atmosphere. The choice of contemporary poets to attack political corruption is emphasised by Ogundiya (2009, p. 291), who tells us that "of all forms of corruption, Political corruption has remained a major obstacle to national progress in Nigeria".

In a similar vein, Tadi (2010, p. 17), in his reading of Okinba Launko's poetry, explains that his poems entail outright rejection of "cruel, authoritarian, exploitative tendencies of postcolonial rulers and espouses humanitarian, democratic values... it reflects the tragic, the complex and bitter experiences of the nation". From the above, it is evident that what Launko and Eke's poetry have in common is the outright rejection of bad leadership in the postcolonial era. The poets have similar thematic concerns but differ in style as the titles of Eke's collection stand out and pre-inform the reader about his dedication to the portrayal of factual political history.

Ojaide is another poet whose poetry expresses national concerns regarding the Niger Delta degradation. Okome, in his reading of Ojaide's poetry, permeates that:

Ojaide's poetry draws on the many but capricious maps of the Nigerian state since independence, when politicians took over briefly only to be replaced by the neo-messiahs, the military overloads. Not long afterwards, it became obvious to this poet that the Neo Messiah's who blasted their way to power were no more than more brigands (Okome, 2002, p. 14).

Okome reveals the post-colonial reality in the Nigerian state by exposing the deteriorating state of political structure which has resulted into successive military dictatorship and worst still, democratically elected governments. The term "neo messiahs" refers to the indigenous political leaders who have only come to perform more woefully than the colonialists.

Akingbe (2017, p. 28), in his reading of Femi Fatoba's collection of poems from the point of history, says that *They Said I Insulted the Government* is a successful attempt at bearing witness to "the bizarre, depressing anomie bedevilling Nigeria between 1993 and 1998". Akingbe explains further that the "anomie was ruinously orchestrated by the power-hungry military, who annulled the free and fair presidential election won by Chief M.K.O Abiola" (p. 28). Also, the collection indicts the General Sani Abacha regime, which was plagued by incessant killings in Nigeria.

Fatoba's collection of poems provides an indirect or fictional portrayal of history. The collection published in 2001, shortly after Nigeria's return to civilian rule is written in non-direct historical reference. Eke's collections adopted for this study relate to Fatoba's collection as both poets portray the political history of Nigeria. But Eke goes further to adopt a confrontational style by boldly referring to military heads of state, civilian presidents in his poems. The poetry collections; *February 1976 and Other Poems*, *June 12 and Other Poems*, *October 1960 and Other Poems*, *May 29 and Other Poems* (2019), allude to Nigeria's independent and post-independent periods.

Representations of the Nigerian Political Transition in Eke's poems

Political transition involves changing from one political system or regime to another. This can occur through various means, including elections, negotiations, settlements, revolutions, and external intervention. Political transitions in Nigeria, in most cases, involve the military leaders handing over to the civilian leaders after military interruptions. Nigeria has experienced various political transitions since gaining independence in 1960. Some cogent reasons for the inevitable transitions include, military rule, return to democracy, democratic transitional elections, ethnic and regional dynamics, corruption challenges, economic mismanagement, electoral participations and competitiveness in the form of electoral malpractices, resource and power distribution, civil society and activism.

Pondering on the failures of transitions in Nigeria, Musa (2022, p. 25) reveals that "the attempts at democratic governance in Nigeria over the years had been characterised by failures. Perhaps one could out rightly attribute the failure to the inherent character of Nigerian politicians and the general misconception of what democratic governance means in the first place". In other words, the transitions that have produced the four republics in Nigeria's history have been marred by poor and inefficient democratic leadership. The military regimes in Nigerian history all claimed to have taken over as a result of the inability of the civilians to effectively rule the Nigerian state.

One significant theme in Eke's poetry is the nature of transition in Nigerian politics. He explores the complex changes within the country's social, political and cultural background. Eke delves into the historical shifts, independence struggles, and significant post-colonial

changes in the Nigerian government. The exploration of transition in his collections extends to communal levels, capturing the aspects of change, growth and depression in the state. These transitions over the past five decades after independence have created subject matter for literary representations to depict the political atmosphere of post-colonial Nigeria.

Eke revisits the transitions before and during the military years by portraying the problematic constitutional and authoritarian transitions from one government to another. The transition in the Nigerian political climate faces challenges such as corruption, ethnic and religious tensions, electoral irregularities, and issues related to governance and infrastructural development. Achieving a smooth and inclusive political transition requires addressing the complex issues above to ensure stability and democratic progress. This section will discuss transitions in Nigeria under three distinct types, which include, constitutional, repressive and democratic.

Like other First, Second and Third generational poets, Eke does not fail to dissect and reflect on the unstable nature of politics in the first five decades after independence. His poetry collections encapsulate the political shortcomings and dismal conditions of the military and civilian systems of government. However, the reverse had always been the case as instead; more brutal regimes enmeshed with cataclysmic agendas came into power. Political transitions in Nigeria have been constitutional, repressive and democratic in nature. One underlying feature of these respective transitions has been their inability to bring revolutionary change to the Nigerian state. Nigeria's postcolonial experiences reveal the sad realities of stagnancy and with each new transition; hopes were kept alive that successive governments were expected to usher in new rays of hope. Awhefeada (2009, p. 227) reinforces that "while recreating the nation's unenviable history and the disillusionment it has fostered, the poets also strive to recreate alternative ethos that can help in reclaiming the initiative for the nation's wholesomeness". This is the essence of Eke's poetry.

Some poems in this study reflect Constitutional transitions that are marked by constitutional replacements or significant reforms in government and are often more difficult in heterogeneous territories. Since 1960, when the colonialists returned the mantle of power to Nigerians at the time of independence, conflicts concerning transition began. The transition from the colonial officials to the First Republic leaders was not entirely a smooth one as the process involved negotiations, constitutional conferences, and political discussions. However, challenges arose, along ethnic and regional lines, which later contributed to periods of political instability and military coups in the country's history. The transition marked a significant moment, but Nigeria was enmeshed in diverse. The problems of Third World country began to affect the Nigerian state. Some of these ills include the after-effect of colonial rule on the newly independent Nigerian nation, the inability to maintain a constitutional government, and the sudden change to a republican state in 1963 which

eventually led to tribal wars and crises. Also, the corruption by the elite upper-class in the First Republic only worsened the already struggling government.

In the poem "October 1960", Eke mirrors the Nigerian state from the time of independence to several years after and decries the transitional problem faced. The poet carefully takes the reader through the historical experiences by lamenting on the problems faced in the wake of a new October in 1960. He laments, thus:

Today is Independence day
This a wonderful day
As days progress
As months progress
As years progress
Independence without sovereignty (p.13, October)

The foregoing are clear pointers to the forlornness and disappointment the Nigerian populace have felt for over five decades and Eke also criticises the Nigerian state by referring to it as an independent state without sovereignty which is ironical since an independent state ought to have sovereignty. Eke laments on the sixty-three years of independence because of the deteriorating state of the nation. The poet's justification for the description of Nigeria as a non-sovereign state is expressed below:

Because the captain still takes orders from his superiors
Because the baby still sucks breast from her
Because the servant still serves her masters
Independence without sovereignty
It is like giving out a
Woman to an impotent man. (October, 13)

The excerpt above reveals a distressing perspective on the idea of independence without sovereignty. Eke creatively does this by drawing parallels with a captain taking orders, a baby relying on her mother's breasts and servants serving a master. In the context of political transition, it suggests that despite the formal declaration of independence, there is still lingering dependence on Britain, thus alludes to post-colonial situation where former colonies maintain ties with former colonial powers. The analogy of giving a woman to an impotent man further emphasises the perceived futility and inadequacy of the independence achieved. It reflects a critical stance on the extent of true autonomy in the face of external influences or dependencies in the political transition. Consequently, in the second stanza the poet exposes the consequent effects of the unending reliance on external interference. He recounts:

Independence that gave birth to regionalism
Triggered tribalism

Nurtured nepotism
Independence that laid eggs
Of rigged results
Independence that decreed
Beautiful allowances
Independence that fertilized the
Womb of looting
Independence the harbinger
Of illicit commission contracts (October, p. 13).

In the foregoing, the poet paints a critical picture of the Nigerian political atmosphere during the First Republic, highlighting the negative consequences of the transition from colonial rule to indigenous leadership. The poet's reference to regionalism and tribalism indicates that instead of fostering national unity, the early post-independence period saw the rise of regional interests and ethnic tensions. This resulted from the way power and resources were distributed among different regions, contributing to a fragmented political atmosphere. Put in an emphatic manner, James and Udem (2023) describe the First Republic as a period of “escalating inter-ethnic politics of vandalism, cut-throat politics, lack of spirit of give and take, politics of winner takes all, politics of rancour or acrimony perennial wrangling, antagonism, suspicion among different ethnic groups, accusations and counter-accusations, dog-eat-dog economy, discrimination, among other evils (p.1). The First Republic leaders were largely unaccountable. Furthermore, the expression “Nurtured nepotism” (p. 13) refers to prevalent cases of favouritism and the “womb of looting” (p. 13) characterises the depth of corruption that became entrenched in the political system. Nepotism reinforces favouritism towards relatives or close associates, further indicating a deviation from merit-based governance. The poet's reference to “looting”, points towards corrupt practices in handling public funds. He further refers to rigged results which portray electoral malpractices, undermining the democratic processes of the time. This indicates a lack of transparency and fairness in the political system, potentially eroding public trust in the newly established democratic institutions. Consequently, with favouritism and tribalism, illicit commission contracts are imminent. The poet's exposure of the “illicit commission contracts” depicts corrupt practices in awarding contracts, reflecting a misuse of public resources for personal gain. This further emphasises the grave issue of corruption and mismanagement in the allocation of government projects and funds. This reckless mismanagement was one of the factors that led to the end of the First Republic through the bloody January 15, 1966 coup.

Repressive transitions involve transitions that are dominated by authoritarian influence and do not give room for proper democratic processes. It involves various levels of intrusion which range from determining the outcome of democratic elections, declaring election results as null and void, restricting the civic rights to challenge outcomes of elections. Babangida's

1993 transition is a typical example of a repressive transition. Military interruptions are generally considered detrimental to the principles of democracy, as they subvert the will of the people and undermine the established processes from peaceful and democratic transfer of power. Obadere (1999, p. 202) avers that “the process of transition in a large majority of African states has been accompanied by widespread instability”. In describing the Babangida regime's transition as repressive and violent, Obadere adopts Salami (1994)'s definition of repressive violence to mean:

Repressive violence corresponds to the deprivation of basic rights other than the right to survival and protection from injury. Repressive violence to three groups of fundamental rights: civil, political and social right... political rights refer to the degree to which citizens can participate democratically in the political life of their region, or country (right to vote, holding of elections, freedom to meet and to form associations or parties, freedom of speech and opinion, and freedom of the press) with respect to social rights, one of the most usual forms of repressive violence is that which prevents people from creating or belonging to a trade union, or from going on strike. (pp. 20-21)

The outcome of the June 12, 1993 elections is in line with Salami's definition of repressive violence towards the Nigerian populace before, during and after the 1993 election. Babangida's intrusion in the June 12, 1993 election almost threw Nigeria into the verge of another civil war as a result of massive protests.

In “June 12 I”, Eke replicates the historical experiences of the Babangida-led military regime in the early 1990s, its transition process and the consequent impediment to democratic rule. The poet through the use of symbols presents Babangida's interference in the June 12 elections. Thus, he reports in the following lines:

The bean weevil
Infected the presidential
Elections
Lays his eggs on
Ripening pods of
Free and fair elections (June, p. 13)

The excerpt reveals the poet's conception of Babangida's antic which he symbolically likens to the infestation from a bean weevil. In this metaphoric expression, the bean weevil represents the corruptive influence of the military on the democratic process through the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections. The ripening pods represent the hopes and dreams of the Nigerians who saw the June 12 elections as an opportunity to restore Nigeria to its glory days by giving democracy a fair chance. The poet's use of laying eggs on ripening pods of free and fair elections foregrounds the manipulation and corruption of the electoral system by the

Babangida's regime. The metaphorical hatching of larvae on free and fair elections exposes the highhanded or external invasion of the democratic process. Also, the imagery of the larvae eating into the cotyledons of free and fair elections underscores the extent to which the interference damaged the foundational principles of democracy. The figurative cotyledons, which are vital for the growth of a healthy democratic system, are being consumed by the destructive impact of the military involvement. By employing the symbol of the bean weevil, Eke effectively conveys the idea that Babangida's actions succeeded in eroding the integrity and fairness of the electoral process, marking a troubling transition from military to civilian leadership in Nigeria's Third Republic. In the concluding stanzas of the poem, the poet calls for formidable change in the political systems in Nigeria. He advocates for the fumigation of the entire political environment, thus emphasising the necessity of cleansing and purifying the political backdrop for justice to prevail and electoral victories to be nurtured. In the context of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections in Nigeria, the poetry lines referenced that systematic corruption and interference must be eradicated for a just and democratic system to take root.

“June 12 II” continues with the description of the negative effects of Babangida's intrusion into the democratic process. Eke employs a meteorological image to describe the origin of his intrusion. The poet employs the metaphor of the “dry north-east wind/ Blowing from the Sahara / Towards West African / Coast (June, p. 14) to expose the negative and destructive force that the wind erupts. The expression “blowing up our votes” suggests that the actions of Babangida have not only manipulated, but also scuffled the electoral choices made by the electorates during the June 12 elections. The poet bewails in the second stanza:

Has blown up our
Votes
Has blown up
The people's choice (June, p.14)

Eke's reference to “The people's choice” is a symbol for Chief M.K.O Abiola who emerged as the winner of the June 12 1993 presidential election. Abiola was a symbol of hope for a proper democracy devoid of interference as Nigerians willingly gave him their votes. The climax of Babangida's regime's interruption of the democratic process and peaceful transition was the annulment of the June 12 presidential election which led to the quagmire that befell the political transition in Nigeria's politics. (Musa, 2013).

Furthermore, the poet's repetition of “dry and dusty” in connection with the wind underscores the harsh and unfavourable nature of Babangida's interference. The mention of the wind being angry refers to Babangida's unruly actions during the June 12 elections. The wind blowing up the people's hope and democratic victory suggests the impact of political interference on the aspirations of the citizens for just and democratic governance. The poet concludes the poem

with a charge to the citizens of Nigeria to reject, fight and overcome any dictatorial domination through any means necessary. Hence, he implores in the stanzas below:

Next time
People must
Be prepared to defend
And protect their votes

Next time
We must be prepared
To defend our votes
Through bloodshed

Next time
We must fight
Fight against
Dry and dusty wind (June, p. 14)

The poet conveys a sense of urgency and determination on the electorate in response to the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections by General Babangida. The repeated phrase “next time” emphasises a call to action and preparedness for future electoral challenges. Eke advocates for people to be prepared to “defend /And protect their votes” (June, p. 14) in the face of political interference. The use of the term “defend” suggests recognition of the vulnerability of the electoral process and a commitment to safeguarding its integrity. The poet's suggestion of “bloodshed” indicates the seriousness of the poet's call to action, ensuring a willingness to make sacrifices, even if it involves personal risks, to ensure the protection of the democratic process. This could be interpreted as a metaphorical stance, emphasising the importance of resolute and unwavering commitment to democratic principles. Furthermore, the idea of fighting against the “dry and dusty wind” reinforces the earlier metaphorical use of the wind in the poem as the dictator, Babangida and all other interferences in the forms of military and civilian leaders. In essence, these lines convey a message of resilience and determination in the face of dictatorial injustice, urging citizens to be proactive, resolute and willing to take a stand to ensure the protection of their votes and the integrity of the democratic process.

An apt representation of the Babangida regime is also depicted in the poem, “Association for better Nigeria” where Eke satirises the behaviour of the politician Arthur Nzeribe who on June 10, 1993, tried to stop the June 12 elections, relying on a court order which his group “Association for Better Nigeria” (ABN), got from a midnight ruling from late Justice Bassey Ikpeme of Abuja High court. ABN was known to be a Pro-Babangida group. (Human Rights Watch, 1993). The poet exposes Nzeribe's sycophancy thus:

To truncate transition
To teleguide transition
To torment transition
To trespass transition

Our musician
Releases a new album
Association for better Nigeria

Our chameleon
Performs a new dance
Association for better Nigeria

Babangida- must- stay
Rhetorics
Babangida- must- stay
Fanatics (June, p. 15)

The first stanza exposes the sycophancy of Nzeribe towards his role as a member of the Pro-Babangida group. The stanzas show his outright rejection for the transition to civil rule in 1993 and in order to “truncate, torment, teleguide and trespass” transition, he creates the ABN to show support for the military regime led by Babangida. The foregoing lines also reflect the complex and challenging nature of the transitional period, alluding to the controversies and struggles surrounding the June 12 elections. The poet uses these four expressions to convey a realistic narrative about the challenges and the dynamics of that pivotal moment in Nigeria's history. Eke also refers to Nzeribe as a “Chameleon” known for its ability to change colour. This adaptive characteristic is primarily used for communication, thermo regulation, and camouflage. The poet's choice to refer to Nzeribe as a chameleon stems from his fanatical and sycophantic behaviour towards the Babangida regime which was characterised by corruption, infringement and vandalism of human rights; abuse of power. To analyse further, the poet's reference to a “chameleon equipped / with local adverts / with foreign adverts” (June, p. 15) may symbolise Nzeribe's political manoeuvring or adaptability during that period. The use of “local adverts/ with foreign adverts” (June, p. 15) suggests a strategic alignment or association with different interests, perhaps reflecting Nzeribe's political alliances and connections. The notion of the chameleon aiming “to dislocate transition” (p. 15) implies a disruptive or unsavoury role played by Nzeribe and his ABN movement in shaping the political environment during the Third Republic.

Another poem that reflects the nature of transition in the Babangida regime is “The Coach Wears Make-up”. The poetic stanzas highlight the problem of transition during the regime.

The poet's use of the expressions, “Cries for a carpet sweeper / Pervade everywhere / To clean up the / Corridors of power” (May 27, p. 17) indicate a call for a thorough and transparent process in the transition to civil rule. The poet's reference to the “Never-ending transition agenda” (May 27, p. 17) in the second stanza reflects the prolonged and uncertain nature of the transition period under Babangida. Babatope (1995) reveals that the transitional programme was amended sixty-two times and these amendments involved extensions three times and disqualification of gubernatorial aspirants by the Babangida controlled National Electoral Commission (NEC) two weeks before the 1991 intra party primaries. This hindrance is also seen in the poem when Babangida “declares / Thirteen political associations / Unfit for the match / Transition stretches into / Infinity / Coach himself declares only / Two associations fit for the match”. (May 27, p. 17). The reference to the coach declaring only two associations fit for the match underscores the manipulation and control exerted over the political space and further depicts a selective and possibly, arbitrary approach to political inclusion. From a historical perspective, these lines capture the ambiguous and selective approach to political transition by Babangida, along with the apparent lack of genuine leadership which contributed to the sense of political instability and dissatisfaction. Consequently, this resulted to the intrusion into the June, 1993 election by selecting only two parties. The regime interfered in the transition by funding and creating and registering two political parties which was an imposition on Nigerians and which produced the National Republican Convention (NRC) with Bashir Tofa as the presidential candidate and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidate as Abiola. This interference sets the stage for the controversial annulment of the election results, further intensifying political tensions and marking a critical moment in Nigeria's history. The poet clearly criticises the lack of a clear and decisive coach (leadership) with “Frontal lobes” (May 27, p. 17), a metaphor for rational decision-making. Furthermore, the last two stanzas lament the predicament of a transition process lacking genuine leadership and depict the frustration with the elongation of the transition period. The poet's reference to the need for “genuine leaders/ Not apes / Only apes write/ Constitutions for political parties” (May 27, p. 17) is a critique of the political framework and its manipulations, indicating a lack of sincerity and democratic principles.

Transitions in Nigeria have also been characterised as democratic in nature. Democratisation involves a process where authoritarian rulers are replaced by leaders selected in a free, open and fair election (Huntington, 1991). However, Linz and Stepan (1996) posits that it is not enough for an authoritarian regime to give way to elected democratic, it must be complete and consolidated. The Abubakar transition to democratic rule in 1999 according to Badmus (2017) was as a “result of military disengagement from politics, not of their own volition, but because of pressure from civil society organisations, pro-democracy groups, democracy promoters, and the push by the international community for political liberalisation” (p. 44). However, the Abubakar regime showed interest in the return to democracy.

The poem “Pluses and Minuses” x-rays the transitional process of the Nigerian political phase from the military to the civilian rule, (1998-1999) in particular. General Abubakar played a crucial role in Nigeria's transition to democracy. As the military ruler from 1998 to 1999, he initiated political reforms and paved the way for democratic elections. Abubakar oversaw the drafting of a new constitution, established the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), and set a timeline for the transition. In 1999, Nigeria held elections, marking the return to civilian rule. Olusegun Obasanjo emerged as the elected president, signaling the successful transition from military to democratic governance. Despite the much applauded swift response of Abubakar towards transition to democratic rule, critics of his transition programme have pointed out several issues. One major criticism is the perceived haste in the transition process, with concerns that the timeline for elections was too compressed. It can be argued that a more extended and inclusive transition period would have allowed for better preparation and broader participation. There have been speculations about the credibility of the 1999 elections. (Special Report Series, 1999). In the poem “Pluses and Minuses”, Eke creates a balance between the positive and negative sides of the Abubakar military regime and its transitional process. The poem presents a subtle portrayal of his overseeing of the transition to civilian democratic rule, highlighting both the negative and positive aspects of his brief regime. The recurring motifs of “White moustache”, “Moustache / As white as snow”, “Moustache / Pure white in colour” (February, p.146) serve as symbolic representations of his leadership. Eke acknowledges Abubakar as a “military democrat” recognising his role in steering the country towards democratic governance as against Babangida's government. The phrase “handed over power” (February, p. 146) depicts a peaceful transition, emphasising Abubakar's commitment to midwifing the democratic process. The poet portrays him as a hero. Despite criticism, he is seen as a positive force in unlocking the “democratic / Padlocks” (February, p. 146) and breaking away from military rule. The poet presents a stark contrast between Abubakar's white moustache, a depleted foreign reserve and vandalised revenue to expose the fact that the outward appearance of a leader may not necessarily reflect a positive state of the nation. In the poem, Abubakar is accused of presiding over a regime marked by crimes, including siphoning of public funds and the awarding of frivolous contracts, issues of corruption and mismanagement. The repetition of “Contracts never executed” (February, p. 146) underscores allegations of inefficiency or corruption in the handling of public projects.

In the sixth and seventh stanzas, the poet reflects on the people's perception about Abubakar as:

But people considered
Pluses and minuses
Of his brief rule
Tagged him a democrat

Dressed all in
White moustache
Wears the garb of
A saint. (February, p. 146)

From the above, the poet captures the irony of public perception as Abubuakar is both criticised for his alleged involvement in corruption and hailed as a democrat as a result of his willingness to support the smooth transition to civil rule. The mention of “pluses and minuses” (p. 146) suggests a weighing of his actions during his brief rule indicating a complex evaluation by the people.

The motif of a democratic transition runs through Eke's poem “Second Coming” which clearly recounts events surrounding the Olusegun Obasanjo civilian rule which introduced the Fourth Republic in Nigeria and the uncertainty in the future of democracy in Nigeria. Obasanjo as the military ruler from 1976 to 1979 like other military leaders had been accused of being corrupt and authoritarian in nature. The first civilian rule in the Fourth Republic was described to have witnessed the following:

Second coming
Baba was like a
Stretcher-bearer carried the
Country off on a stretcher

The country
Almost dead
Looted funds here and there
Stolen funds here and there

Baba came back
Recovered looted funds
Recovered stolen funds
Recovered fraudulent properties
Baba came back
Released his syringe (May 29, p. 71)

The stanzas of the poem recount Obasanjo's presidency during the beginning of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, particularly emphasising his role in addressing corruption and governance challenges. In the metaphorical context, “Baba” a term often used to respectfully refer to an older person or leader is portrayed as a “stretcher-bearer” who carries the country on a stretcher, indicating a state of crisis or distress that came with the previous political administrations. Obasanjo's second coming comes with a glimmer of hope. The poet's

mention of “looted funds, stolen funds and recovered looted funds” adumbrate the prevalent issue of corruption in previous regimes. Obasanjo's return to power is likened to as a “second coming”, as if on a rescue mission. The poet's reference to Baba infecting his syringe into law enforcement chieftain and administering drugs on two prominent governors suggest a forceful and decisive approach in dealing with corruption within law enforcement and political cycles.

The transitional stage of the end of military rule after twenty-nine years and the beginning of the Fourth Republic was smooth and positive owing to the steps Obasanjo took in order to restore the Nigerian nation to a better state. The last five stanzas of the poem takes a different turn to criticise the later activities of Obasanjo as the president because of his second tenure agenda which involved selfishly trying to amend electoral acts in order to secure a third term in the presidential office. The poet recounts:

Baba began to
Chase another term
Baba was
Chasing his downfall (May 29, p. 72)

The extract suggests a critical perspective on Obasanjo's attempt to extend his presidency beyond the constitutionally allowed two terms, commonly known as the 'Third Term' bid. The expression “Baba met his waterloo” indicates a significant defeat or failure, referring to the ultimate halt of Obasanjo's ambitions for an extended term. Eke criticises Obasanjo for his neglect and selfish attitude towards democratic and constitutional principles which is evident in his display of power drunkenness. The poet's use of the proverb “The dog that chases a /lizard could hit his /head against a wall” (P. 72) implies that pursuing a third term was a risky and selfish endeavour for Obasanjo. The comparison to a dog chasing a lizard insinuates a pursuit that may lead to negative consequences or backlashes. The subsequent lines emphasise that Baba's pursuit of another term was tantamount to “Chasing his downfall” (May 29, p. 72). The attitude of Obasanjo towards a transition relates to Babangida's attitude. The only difference is their approach towards it, while Babangida uses the military power as a tool to achieve his aim to remain in power, Obasanjo goes through the constitutional route by trying to move for a third term bid which was eventually rejected by the Nigerian Senate and House of Representatives. This rejection ushered in the Yar'adua and Jonathan government in the year 2007. From the discourse, one can clearly understand the issues of transition that has continued to trail the Nigerian political experience. Military and civilian regimes have failed to rescue Nigeria from the pitfalls of bad leadership.

Conclusion

Adopting the post-colonial theory and Third World concept, this paper has explored the nature of political transitions in Nigeria as reflected in Eke's poetry. Through the reference to

notable authoritarian military regimes and civil leadership in the Nigerian political landscape of the First, Second, Third and Fourth Republics, the analysis demonstrates the depiction of Third World countries that suffer from unstable governments which often times lead to ineffective and negative transitions consequently leads to political corruption, military intrusion in electoral processes, dictatorial injustice, inter-tribal wars, abuse of social and political rights as can be seen in the poems selected for this study. Conforming to Jameson's assertion that all post-colonial texts are national allegories that expose the societal ills of former colonies of Europe, Eke's poetry reveals the unpalatable political climate of post-independent Nigeria.

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