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James Aboi Dominic and John Kwasu Katung
Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

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James Aboi Dominic is a Nigerian writer, essayist, cultural critic, visual artist, and editor. He holds degrees from universities in Zaria, Nigeria, and Cambridge. His scholarly and creative interests include creative writing, literary theory, African and African American literature, and contemporary literature that explores peace and conflict resolution, history, visual art, and the environment. He currently teaches in the Department of English and Literary Studies at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

dominicjamesaboi@gmail.com

John Kwasu Katung is an educator, researcher, and certified teacher trainer pursuing a PhD in English and Literary Studies at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. His research examines the re-narration of experience in diaspora women's writing, with a particular focus on identity, memory, and literary representation. A British Council Master Trainer, he has led professional development programs for teachers, digital education initiatives, and creative writing workshops across diverse educational settings. His professional experience includes educational research, monitoring and evaluation, curriculum development, and program design, with collaborations involving organizations such as the British Council, UNICEF, GIZ, CREID, and the Mastercard Foundation.

kkatung@gmail.com https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7019-9703

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Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

ABSTRACT

Post-Independence Nigeria has been mired in problems of power consolidation, the challenge of leadership and its capacity to handle myriad sociopolitical issues. Critics have written on sociocultural aspects of Soyinka's works as well as the military interventionist traits in his plays, but this paper is concerned with the transition of power from one regime to another. Wole Soyinka in *King Baabu* deploys biting sarcasm etched on the remarkable background of contemporary history to portray the bastardization of leadership positions by military despots-turned-politicians. Using the praxis of New Historicism, the paper interrogates the playwright's outrage and disenchantment at the power structure and at leaders who have bullied the masses while masking their true intentions behind promises of democratic dividends. The paper concludes that this seizure of power through unscrupulous means to keep their corrupt practices in motion culminates in a case of the same "shit," different toilets: same people, same ideology, except for a different system taking advantage of the masses whose gullibility spurs its continuity.

KEYWORDS

Post-Independence

Soyinka

Nigeria

Sarcasm

Power

New Historicism

Military Dictatorship

Introduction

The old adage of visualizing life as a vicious cycle is best exemplified by the leadership of post-independence Nigeria, particularly after the coup of January 15, 1966. This marks the beginning of military interventionism in civilian leadership and governance. Nationalist and anti-colonial pressures exerted on the British colonialists enthroned a Nigerian representative government in October 1960, though it was not earned. Unlike the guerrilla warfare of the Maji Maji of Tanzania (Schmidt 27-62), the Gukurahundi militarized violence against the people (Mangena 7; Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems 961), the Second Chimurenga liberation war against Ian Smith in Zimbabwe and the Chilembwe revolt in Nyasaland (Malawi) (Barchiesi 360); the Mau Mau guerrilla warfare (Barnett and Njama 23), the Sepoy Mutiny or the Indian Insurrection (Belmekki 113-24; Pati; Baker 511-43; Malik 95-127) among others fought by subjects materially and culturally disoriented by colonial conquests after World War I to earn their Independence through sacrificial bloodbaths, the Nigerian Independence came at a lesser cost. Probably, that is why its leadership takes the privileges of power for granted. It is unfortunate that the abuse and imbalance of representation of power obliged the military to disrupt the course of history, which has altogether caused the country eighteen years of military dictatorship and nine coups d'état. Not to mention military heads of state masquerading as democratically elected presidents beginning from 1999, when the country had a political interlude from the interesting transformation of General Sani Abacha and his mysterious death.

Contact ✉ dominicjamesaboi@gmail.com ✉ kkatung@gmail.com

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This death and attempts by the military junta to revitalize and reinstate their power positions under the auspices of the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) form the basis of this paper. It is fascinating that even when civilian rule was reinstated, it was punctuated by the overwhelming presence of the military. Having ousted the Maradona of Nigerian politics, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, the Sani Abacha regime (1993-1998), knowing the cycle could be reversed, switched its uniforms for civilian attire to contest for public office.

The scatological representation of leadership and control in the anecdotes by Soyinka and Maiwada metaphorically embodies power and its inherent qualities. The post-Independence tussle for power has become so commonplace that it serves as a vernacular atmosphere in the country in the sense that, regardless of religion, age, creed or social stratifications, everyone is obsessed and absorbed in the process of acquiring it. This is why Maiwada warns that though shit, which is power in this case, is "something sweet, tasty, until it went into us," before it is abused by selfish means and ends, "out the anus it still hasn't exhausted its utility": meaning shit – power – could be harnessed towards positive or negative dispositions. It is not surprising that Soyinka's character Sagoe fashions his "Shit Philosophy" as Voidancy and avers that "voidancy is not a movement of protest, but it protests, it is non-revolutionary, but it revolts" (*The Interpreters* 71), and concludes that "To shit is human, to voidante divine" (156). In this way, to hold onto power is human, but to explore its truth and positive energies is divine. Esty takes an ethical leaning on voidancy: "even when understood according to the representational codes of realism, however, shit has a political vocation: it draws attention to the failures of development, to the unkept promises not only of colonial modernizing regimes but of postindependence economic policy" (32).

The deployment of shit both as a tyrannical force of negativity and as a symbol of resistance is explored to demonstrate its terror, the people's outrage, its cyclical nature of existence and continuity. This slice of Nigerian military history has found expression in the sociocultural and political satire, *King Baabu* by Wole Soyinka, which is roughly presented as a paratext, in the manner of the French playwright Alfred Jarry's play *Ubu Roi*. The play is concerned with power and its cyclical nature within the political landscape of Nigeria. It weaves burlesque, comedy and storytelling techniques to draw attention to germane issues affecting society.

Jarry's (1873-1907) play is a parody of *Macbeth* in which a revolutionary (Ubu) kills the king of Poland (Piepenbring); it has *merdre* as its first line, a neologism which is the French word for *shit* with an extra *r* added (Moorcock). The play brutally attacks complacency, mocks civilization and sweeps humanity into a slop-pail. Using Jarry's play as a "retro," which, according to Stuart Sim, is the "appropriation and recontextualization of older forms and styles" (D'Angelo 35) and a mode of intertextuality, Soyinka interrogates the complexities of dictatorships and expresses his disenchantment with the masses who accommodate the empty manifestos of the military power brokers, despots-turned-politicians, as we see in the transformation of Basha Bash to a life President, and finally to a monarchical messiah to ensure and confer the inheritance of power on his heir apparent, Biibabae. Soyinka demystifies the myth of sympathizing with the masses as victims of an immoral system by depicting their contributions to their undoing. As in the Yoruba worldview, where morality is bound up with mandatory compensation of nature, Maduakor contends that Soyinka's notion of morality is "predicated on the dialectics of challenge and response, on action and counteraction, on the hubristic infractions of nature, which in turn, compel countermeasures for the reassertion of totality" (301). Jeyifo is right in stating that Soyinka's works seem to promote a kind of "bourgeois" radicalism in representing the lower social orders in ways that did not show a belief in their readiness or capacity to overthrow the conditions of their oppression (xiv). Talajooy lends weight to this claim in asserting that Soyinka's *King Baabu* suggests a recurrent pattern

of human inanity that results in similar vicious systems, such that not even God could save the masses from their fooleries (387).

Brief Outlines on the New Historicism and Soyinka's *King Baabu*

The New Historicism is an innovative critical movement sometimes called cultural poetics that emerged in the 1980s from the writings of Stephen Greenblatt, like *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Belsey 43-44), and is supposed to replace old criticism in a manner that supersedes prominent positions of the 1970s, notably Deconstruction and Marxism (Hohendahl 87). It is premised on the "importance of historical context to the interpretation of text of all kinds" (Hamilton 2), and also investigates a veneration of the past or traditions with a view to the contingent dynamics of human actions (Pieters 23-24). In understanding the dynamic flexibility of New Historicism and its ability to incorporate other forms, McGann opines that in a historicist's imagination, "history is the past, or perhaps the past seen in and through the present; and the historical task is to attempt a reconstruction of the past, including, perhaps, the present of that past…" (105). Of the binary between past and present, Bressler posits that "an intricate connection exists between an aesthetic object – a text or any work of art – and that all texts must be analyzed in their cultural context, not in isolation" (188). In a similar vein, Greenblatt lends weight to this, saying "belief and practices that form a given culture function as a pervasive technology of control, a set of limits within which social behavior must be contained" (11).

Brannigan asserts that New Historicism is a mode of critical interpretation that privileges power relations as the most important context for texts of all kinds (6). He further asserts that as "a critical practice it treats literary texts as a space where power relations are made visible." Ryan, in his introduction to *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, observes that new historicists insist on "situating the text, on sticking it back into the intertextual quilt of its initial contest," and finally submits that "The aim is to dethrone and demystify the privileged literary work: to destroy its immunity to infection by circumstance and other kinds of text, and to rob it of political innocence by exposing its discreet commitments, its subtle collusions in the cultural struggle for power" (xiii-xiv). This is to say the trajectory in a text, most times, is to subvert an earlier notion, which, in a political way, addresses an earlier ideal that is not agreed upon, and therefore proffers another way of seeing or a different (better) view, if necessary. It is only right that some of the key assumptions and tenets of New Historicism be discussed in the body of the work as this study progresses.

The two-act play, *King Baabu,* illustrates a contemporary view of resisting "official narratives that rationalize oppressive necro-politics and consign terror to the past" (Youker 550) and therefore begins with a military takeover. Maariya, Basha's wife, celebrates her husband's participation in the coup and the spoils it brings. She takes advantage of the turbulent situation by staging a house arrest, which results in Basha taking over as the new Head of State. Basha and his wife bribe their way to acceptance and adopt the British model of monarchy to enthrone him as king of the Guatu kingdom. At the end, Potipoo plans a comeback that results in Basha's poisoning through a rhino's powder, which is supposed to be an aphrodisiac. This, like the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* brings the Marabout's prophecy to bear (Al-Moghales and Hezam 1549), and demonstrates how oppressive regimes switch sides to suit their priorities at the expense of the masses left worse than the previous government.

The Anal-Orgy in the Cycle of Power and the "Shitstem"

The self-evident notion that absolute power corrupts absolutely or *deliciously* continues to manifest itself not only in Africa but also in Nigeria after Independence. Instead of the leadership harnessing the resources of the country, escaping external pressures and molding an independent identity (Booth 6) by steering the country towards infrastructural and sustainable development, it was busy creating personality cults and making sure it stayed in power. This irresponsible thirst for power and material wealth at the expense of a suffering population gave the military the impetus to take over, with the claim of restoring good leadership to the country. The military involvement further disintegrates meaningful transitions of power as one coup follows another. Soyinka, who is outraged by the recycling of parochial governments, lampoons the miscarriage of leadership responsibilities in his political satire. Maiwada (19), in like manner, laments this roller-coaster, disillusioned state of the nation when he posits:

> I hear a report from the barracks
> His sheep of state is bleating…
> ……
> "There is a coup in process –
> "Cabbage out, garbage in"
> I can see the sweat making fissures
> In their starch emasculated khaki
> And blood flowing on the bridge
> Of the earth's surface (19)

This crass desire for control has launched the country into an orgy of power-drunkenness engaged by military despots who demand the lion's share of national wealth from the shitstem. Maariya basks in the euphoria of acquiring filthy wealth, saying, "To be rich is to be rich, whether deserved or not is nobody's business" (5). New Historicists are "not as interested in power plays between contending monarchs or between monarchs and usurpers as they are interested in the operations of power within regulating ideologies" (Brannigan 7). This is why it is symbolic to consider Maariya's approval of Basha's participation in the coup as General Set-em up and Knock-em down, and asking him not to settle for less. Basha, on his part, decries being poor and celebrates wearing the deceased General's long service medallions (5). Indifferent to the rationality of purpose, the military continues to use the people as "correction fluids for their regal errors" such that a religious plea has to be summoned: "where will our salvation come" (Maiwada 19).

The orgy of power acquisition stimulates a narcissistic enchantment with the tropes (ropes) of its manipulation and the struggle to maintain it. The incompetence of leaders and their stooges is represented by the wasteful projects and failed promises they engage in. Basha aspires to designate millions of dollars for a special budget allocation to begin Operation Fill the Stomach (17), which ironically satirizes the military government of Olusegun Obasanjo, who introduced the Green Revolution, dubbed Operation Feed the Nation in 1973. In a similar vein, Basha encourages Potipoo to secure luxuries for the future instead of retiring on "chicken feed army pension?" (17). This Darwinian survival of the fittest in the post-independence jungle of African politics and its consequence, as it was in Nigeria, is captured by p'Bitek (107) thus:

> Some said
> Independence falls like a bull buffalo

> And the hunters
> Rush to it with drawn knives,
> Sharp shining knives
> For carving the carcass.
> And if your chest
> Is small, bony and weak
> They push you off,
> And if your knife is blunt
> You get the dung on your elbow,
> You come home empty-handed
> And the dogs bark at you! (107)

Power works without permission like an anal urge to a purging stomach. It disables responsibility and accountability of any kind. General Rajinda was killed for failed budgetary allocation (20), and his next in command, Potipoo, refuses to declare his assets. Rent and Dope – as well as Rout, who represent labor, tradition and religious interests – insist on having something to tell their followers, else they lose their positions, but Maariya bribes them to silence in the most convincing oratorical plea: "the ancestors must not be denied libation and sacrifices" (28). This choice of moments in the presentation of history is how New Historicism relates a very small section of actual life, only that section which is connected with public or institutional or cultural change (Kroner 134). In spite of critics' disagreement with Louis Montrose's "the historicity of texts and the textuality of history," New Historicism establishes connections among discrete texts at levels of discourses (Holub 175) and in the context of this paper, it mediates history as an ongoing text being written across various facets of lives of commoners and aristocrats tugging through Nigeria's history as illustrated by Soyinka.

Soyinka's *King Baabu* deploys Shakespearean allusions in a manner that brings history into conversation with the present. This "transposition of one sign system into another" (Kristeva 60), one of the key tenets in New Historicism, is best exemplified when Basha's wife fools him into passing a forged intelligence report to his superior. He justifies his apology thus: "I say to Potipoo, look, I love my wife, but I love my Commander-in-Chief more." This resonates with Brutus' claim after his involvement in the murder of Caesar: "If that a friend asks why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer: Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more" (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* 52). This shows every text is in a dialogical relationship with others; no text can be completely free from other texts, and in this case, Soyinka parodies *Julius Caesar* to ridicule abused power positions. In the manner Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth encourages Macbeth to usurp power from King Duncan (*Macbeth* 41), Maariya schemes towards gaining political control for her husband, saying:

> You did it for Rajinda. You did it for Potipoo. Now it's your turn, and you don't know which way to turn. Anyway, you can't turn back now. It's too late. You either carry out the plan or you're finished…The nation needs its redeemer. Is Potipoo a better man than you? Just because he went to Sandhurst and West Point, while you came up through the ranks. But that is where you have the advantage. The troops know you. It's not so long since you were their sergeant-major. You're what is called a soldier's soldier (24).

This Lady-Macbethean approach to authority sets the cycle of power acquisition rolling. Soyinka's appropriation of Jarry's *Ubu Roi*, which is patterned on the plot of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Richard III*, but focuses on the ruling class as engaged in continual undeclared

war against the poor and social radicals (Youker 538), in itself acts as a pastiche – a patchwork of borrowed styles (D'Angelo 40) – on *King Baabu* to historicize the Nigerian leadership's attitude to power. In fact, Maariya summarizes her approach to power and what has been in continuum about the ruling classes and the shitstem as: "First thing now I bash them up and smash them up, then flush them down the mess toilet" (27). This lends weight to the manner in which African heads of state who are convinced of their messianic powers forcefully change constituted laws to fit their caprices. But as inscribed in unwritten laws of African dictatorships to avoid global interference, Maariya advises that the takeover should be bloodless in the spirit of democracy because "Western busybodies won't stand for any bloodshed" (30).

Soyinka takes no prisoners in lambasting the government for its abuse of political office and deep-rooted systemic corruption, and has no sacred cows when criticizing bad leaders in the manner he satirizes their shortcomings in *A Play of Giants* (39). In refuting African dictatorship, Soyinka rouses a postcolonial inquiry into the legitimacy of European monarchical power and control. Is it not ironic that while superpowers debunk military rule for its overt imposition of personal wills, nobody bats an eye at European monarchy (39)? To ensure power continuity, Basha suggests they turn Guatu into a kingdom, but the crowd decodes the ploy and reiterates, "You're bringing in the military through the backdoor" (42). In Nigerian history, it speaks to the Sani Abacha government, which seized power from Ernest Shonekan and shed its army fatigues for civilian clothes. This is a classic demonstration of the same shit, different toilets. Afolayan captures the situation thus:

> *King Baabu* mirrors a time near anarchy in Nigeria when General Sani Abacha's predecessors, General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, annulled the June 12, 1993, presidential election, which was widely believed to have been won by Alhaji Moshood Abiola. Along with other activists who were vocal in their criticism of the annulment of the elections, Soyinka was accused of being a mastermind of the series of bombing that rocked the nation and consequently was listed to face treason charges. (161)

The first stroke for disabling constituted authority is the mastery of crowd mentality and the milking of opportunities. The last veneer in the consolidation of power is convincing the masses of its legitimacy. Soyinka's *King Baabu* explores this political hypocrisy even as the crowd cries out, "It's another military wolf in sheep's clothing" (42). King Baabu ingratiates himself with the poor, claims he is a cultural ideologue who eats with his fingers, denies playing golf with the upper echelons, and professes his attachment to local rhythms like juju or suku-suku (43), which is an examination of class conflict, minority domination and state power that New Historicism explores (Leitch 27). Fueled by Tikim and Maariya, King Baabu claims, "Speaking to you is the voice of the new democracy / I am merely regent of the new democratic order" (44). And like clockwork, the crowd takes the bait but, with skepticism, confesses:

> Look, maybe it's not Basha
> It's democracy in transitional robes.
> Shi-aiw! They're all impostors
> More delaying tactics.
> We're sick of musical chairs.
> Just who the hell are you?
> Don't play games with us – speak!
> Tell us who you really are.
> You're not speaking to fools, you know (44).

The changing face of power is one of the most important attributes of political deception, and in Jarry's typical fashion of using props and masks on which Soyinka roughly positions *King Baabu*, the cycle of power completes its round by convincing the crowd of its good intentions. It not only illustrates New Historicism's ability to give dead records plasticity and life (Veeser 5), but also that "history remained a perfect observer / Hobbling on its crutches / To keep a perspective" (Maiwada 17). By recasting past dictators into the present drama of existence, Soyinka resituates the play in relation to other texts (canonical and non-canonical) in a variety of genres, and also in relation to contemporaneous socio-political institutions and events, as well as discursive and non-discursive practices (Harrison 367).

The Credo of "Baabu" (Nothingness) and the Dialectics of Influence

The relationship between humankind and the world has always been about power. In the manner that the history of every existing society is shrouded in class struggle (Marx and Engels 390), most leadership structures in sub-Saharan Africa are built around the consolidation of power and the dialectics to maintain it. But most importantly, it is the innocence with which this corridor of influence is approached; often, the "politrickians" come as nobodies with nothing to offer, both literally and metaphorically. This translates into the credo of "baabu" – nothingness – as claimed by Soyinka's anti-hero, Basha, a corrupt version of "Abacha," who, before becoming King Baabu, turns out his pockets, saying, "See for yourself. Empty. Nothing. Baabu" (44). "Baabu" is a Hausa word for nothing, or the lack of something. This stimulates the existentialist question: Is there any such thing as nothing or nothingness? Sartre contends that the word "nothingness" derives its origin from negative judgments (19). In a sense, it is the only being by which a destruction can be accomplished (122) because anything could be built on it, after all, its pondering towards negativity. It is also of transcendence of material absence or limitations. Nothing is excluded; often, many things are subjectively removed. Sartre therefore sees "nothingness as a state of non-being" but again, "being presupposes essence" – existence (131).

Laycock argues that "Nothingness is in a way within being" (94). Nothingness, therefore, is incapable of mounting an absolute opposition to being (94); but Nishitani avers that "true nothingness means that there is no thing as nothingness, and this is absolute nothingness" (70). This signifies that Basha's claim to have nothing materially is non-existent because "nothingness neither opposes nor replaces being, and absence is then interiorized presence," which means that presence unfolds in nothingness (Laycock 98). This suggests that Basha has, and is, everything he denies having, or is everything he claims he is not.

It is on this seemingly innocent notion of nothingness and having nothing, or being a nobody, that the dialectics of influence exerts its claim on power. When the masses protest Basha's ascension as King (44), he pleads, "Look. Not one penny. Baabu kudi" (44). He rekindles the Buddhist mystic Milarepa, who posits, "I need nothing. I seek nothing. I desire nothing" (Soyinka, *The Credo of Being and Nothingness* 9). Though the crowd rejects this claim, Tikim insists Basha is "the architect of a new nation" and deploys the dialectics of influence similar to that employed by Mark Antony after Caesar's death in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (56). Soyinka intertextually alludes to this:

> TIKIM: He took the golf course, the polo field, and gave it back to the people for Operation Fill the Stomach. Was this ambition? Ambition should be made of sterner stuff. The Royal Estates Nominal and Traditional are here to back him. Yes, the evil

> that men do lives after them – but must we wait till the good is interred with their bones? King Baabu is here to serve to the last drop of his blood. (44)

The manner in which power feeds on innocence is the very fuel that greases and gets its wheels running. Tikim claims Basha takes the golf course and polo field and gives it back to the people as though it is a feature of his goodwill, without the crowd's knowledge of the contract bargains he made out of their budgets and taxes. This intertextuality burrows deep into partisan politics and the culture of not only the masses' ignorance but also the people's short memory in relation to theory – saying, and practice – doing. The only moment Basha is truthful is the one time the crowd refuses to believe him (45), as he insists: "But I promise nothing." Vasquez and Riofrancos argue that every society deserves the type of art it gets (Crowdus 49; Lang 74). The burden of proof to this claim could be derived from the present Nigerian President's paradoxical claim that he belongs to everybody and belongs to nobody (Let us not forget the last president, Jonathan, said he had no shoes!). Being everybody's friend makes him nobody's friend. The present President's metamorphosis is similar to Basha's as well as his instituted policies and programs – Operation War Against Indiscipline and Corruption. Most significant is that they are both once military General-Heads-of-States-turned-politicians, as Soyinka documents in "The Spoils of Power: The Buhari-Shagari Casebook" (63-79), as well as Tunde Idiagbon's sadistic contributions.

Of all characters in Soyinka's satire, it is Maariya who understands the dialectics of influence – the tropes of power and its repositories – and deploys them at the right time across instances. Gilles, in his interview with Foucault in 1971, contends that "power to exercise justice is in the hands of forces which work against popular unity" (Foucault 30), and it is therefore requisite to have representation when it comes to the exercise of justice. Maariya seizes the vulnerability of the masses and activates the psychology of crowd mentality. She rebukes her aides for not taking advantage of materialist inclinations: "All you time-wasters, you should always speak to the stomach and the pockets!" (45) as she showers money on the crowd who parochially reiterates: "If this is being baabu, then give us baabu every day!" (46). Maariya buys the consent of the crowd, just as Nigerians are lured with gifts to vote for political candidates without understanding that "today's generosity is tomorrow's starvation" (48). This interrogates a New Historicist tendency to study the artifacts that construct the population's systems of meaning, because those systems define experience (Kelly and Kelly 684).

Soyinka is so outraged by historically entrenched power-drunkenness and bureaucratic corruption in the system that he explores anti-colonial discourse to address it. The deployment of scatology as a technique to right the wrongs of society, which dates back to Aristophanes and Juvenal (Esty 25), is meant to question societal ethos and cultural orientation that foreground national access to resources and their management. Soyinka's *King Baabu* dramatizes the playwright's disillusionment with the lost promises of Independence, but also chastises the change of baton to democracy. Soyinka discountenances the recycling of old despots in monarchical order, particularly those who have failed the country. This rejuvenation of past leaders who embezzle funds from the national treasury is potting the same old shit in different toilets. Armah, for instance, reflected and redirected the symbolic association of excrement inherited from colonial discourses, turning scatology to a new task of representing postcolonial disillusionment. In spite of Baabu's claim of running an Open House Government and bridging the gap between the ruler and the people (50), he forces bankers to sign open cheques for his selfish ends, executes them when they object, and takes charge of the banks (55).

A cardinal trope in the dialectics of influence and abuse of power is its politico-religious bigotry and outright deception. Fanon argues, "the colonial bourgeoisie is aided and abetted in

the pacification of the colonized by the inescapable powers of religion" (28), and this lends weight to why the masses are kept in the dark about the affairs of rulers through religious manipulations. In most cases, sanctimonious clerics donning dubious cloaks come to hoodwink people in power, as was the case of King Baabu. Religion as the opiate of the masses is an understatement in the context of Baabu's acceptance of religious mysticism. The Marabout instigates him into sacrificing hunchbacks and albinos whose lips will be padlocked and buried alive to guarantee no voices rising in protest against his policies (62). This is in line with religious proselytization – "the spiritual regions of the mind have never been divorced from mundane political and territorial power" (Soyinka and Fioupou 8) – and social control. It is this sheer misapplication of religious dogma and rituals that Soyinka satirizes in order to highlight its negative impact on cosmopolitan societies and therefore warns against "seasoned manipulators of the irrational sentiments of faith," knowing that "fundamentalist grounding of religious conviction ministers blindly to power" (Soyinka 141).

Right from *The Open Sore of a Continent*, Soyinka disapproves of the remotest promotion of power-thirsty absolutists and apostates that become control monsters like Baabu at the expense of a population reaping the bitter fruits of such miscalculation (86). Rout calls it a "gross misreading of historic forces at work, nothing less than bourgeois deviationism and criminal adventurism" (87). Cheeseman, Lynch and Willis observe that most times the "politicians present themselves as practitioners of patrimonial virtues" because of the moral demands of their people (212). Thus, when Shoki, Potiplan and Potipoo blame him for playing a part in the coup, he responds with the survival antics of the cycle of power within the shitstem:

> You have to understand. There are moments in history when revolutionary options within the dialectical process of class struggle become severely limited. In this case, we were down to two – Audit or Sod it… (87)

In spite of the brief stint in civilian palace democracy, the military, in the person of Potipoo and his forces, returned to power, which elucidates the New Historicists' recognition of competing centers of power (Pechter 293). It is contemptible that manipulations of the last regime will continue, and this is what New Historicists highlight: to relate alternative history, present hidden transcripts that are defaced and dig out "disturbing anecdotes that incubate within booming triumphalist histories" (Veeser 4). Maariya laments that fake redeemers have proletarianized the masses: "You won't settle accounts, but your accounts are safely stashed away, you know where" (106). This resonates with the political ethos of the belly in Africa, which is located in the continuity of past conflict: what is being fought for is the exclusive right to riches of the beholders of power – their meal tickets (Bayart 235-41). A game of "chop I chop". This speaks to the cyclical rejuvenation of bad leadership within the political spectrum that falls in line with this paper's title: same shit, different toilets and the cycle of power. The immoral inversion of the people's values is evident in the Nigerian system and echoes the principles of the cult of AS in Soyinka's play *Madmen and Specialists,* where the powers that be, similar to *King Baabu*'s visit, inflict atrocities on the lower class. They parrot that their grip on power is both a duty and a historical necessity, with traditions that must be maintained, and are entitled to match the shitstem history for history (Soyinka 70).

Conclusion

Soyinka's *King Baabu* orchestrates the plight of the masses under different corridors of power, delineates the despotic and corrupt nature of the political transition of power through whatever means necessary, without considering the people's democratic wills or the country's moral

creed. While it speaks with almost prophetic precision to the present Nigerian political system, it satirizes religious mediums deployed by charlatans who, for personal ends, smuggle themselves into the safe books of despots to mislead the people instead of being informed torchbearers of their society. Given Nigeria's political crisis, one wonders if Maiwada was prophetic in his scatological reference to the messy conditions of the country as a state of the anus (7).

Soyinka clinically demonstrates a historical violation of the people's rights, but the play falls short of an optimistic democratic vision in its revisionist circulation of power within the same cabal of power addicts that continue to abuse public offices with impunity while neglecting the arc in the moral compass of personal dignity and honesty. It is also true that Soyinka does not evade sociopolitical responsibilities or misdirect artistic vision, but the ending of *King Baabu* represses alternative power, socialist realist mediations, and denies popular justice the public authorization and instrumentation to dismantle class power, as well as nullifies the classical Marxist emphasis on the emancipatory agency of the working class and oppressed groups. With the exposure of how even the intelligentsia could play into the hands of a failed leadership that masks its true intents behind progressive or religious ideology, Soyinka speaks to the heart of not only Nigeria's underdevelopment but also Africa's rejection of practical approaches towards ensuring the dividends of democratic systems and principles. In line with New Historicism, Soyinka's *King Baabu* stands as a historical testament to the retrogressive powers at the helm of a nation's affairs that should be closely monitored to rewrite a people's history, chart new territories in the promise of a progressive society that upholds social justice, lights the future of individual freedom and is accountable to public service.

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