Navigating Ethno-Religious Postnormality in Nigeria: Readings in Ahmed Yerima's *Pari*

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Abstract

Drama has contributed a great deal to the development of the entity called Nigeria. Playwrights in Nigeria have used the dramatic medium to navigate and interrogate issues concerning family, economy, culture, politics, and religion little wonder why the development of any society can be traced to the dramatic contents in distinct periods of their existence. Ahmed Yerima has carved a niche for himself in the Nigerian theatre space. Having written several plays that mirror major tribes of the country, he sells himself out again as a true Nigerian in *Pari*; a reaction to the recent political, economic, and philosophical anomalies in Nigeria predicated upon ethnicity and religion which this paper reads from the lenses of postnormality. As propounded by Ziauddin Sadar, the hydra-headed concept of postnormality is couched around three major strands: Chaos, Contradictions, and Complexities, which can be seen in every facet of the Nigerian society. This paper brings the theory of postnormality to bear in the ethno-religious interrogation of *Pari* using the content analysis approach. This paper observes that the complex, contradictory and chaotic face of Nigerian democracy, is largely predicated upon the mutating ethno-religious ideologies introduced by 'ethno-religious entrepreneurs' as a strategy to negotiate political power in the nation. It concludes that more than anything else in the socio-political parlance of the nation, Nigerians must jettison ethnicity and religion as yardstick for leadership assessment and focus on ability, efficiency and capacity of politicians if we must make anything out of our latent democracy.

Nijerya'daki Etno-Dini Postnormallikte Gezinmek: Ahmed Yerima'nın *Pari*'sinde Okumalar

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Özet

Drama, Nijerya denen teşekkülün gelişimine büyük bir katkıda bulunmuştur. Nijerya'daki oyun yazarları: aile, ekonomi, kültür, siyaset ve dinle ilgili konuları ele almak ve sorgulamak için tiyatroyu araç olarak kullanmışlardır. Herhangi bir toplumun gelişiminin, varoluşlarının farklı dönemlerinde dramatik içeriklerle izlenebilmesine şaşmamak gerekir. Ahmed Yerima Nijerya tiyatro dünyasında kendine bir yer edinmiştir. Ülkenin belli başlı kabilelerine ayna tutan birçok oyun yazmış olan yazar, bu makalenin postnormalite merceğinden okuduğu, Nijerya'da etnisite ve din üzerine kurulu son dönem siyasi, ekonomik ve felsefi anomalilere bir tepki niteliğindeki *Pari*'de gerçek bir Nijeryalı olarak kendini yeniden satıyor. Ziauddin Sadar tarafından ortaya atıldığı şekliyle, çok başlı ve çok sorunlu postnormalite kavramı üç ana unsur etrafında şekillenmektedir: Nijerya toplumunun her alanında görülebilen Kaos, Çelişkiler ve Karmaşıklıklar. Bu makale, postnormalite teorisini, içerik analizi yaklaşımını kullanarak *Pari*'nin etno-dini sorgulamasına taşımaktadır. Bu makale, Nijerya demokrasisinin karmaşık, çelişkili ve kaotik yüzünün, büyük ölçüde 'etno-dinsel girişimciler' tarafından ülkedeki siyasi gücü müzakere etme stratejisi olarak ortaya atılan etno-dinsel ideolojilerin değişmesine dayandığını gözlemlemektedir. Bu çalışma, ulusun sosyo-politik dilinde her şeyden çok, Nijeryalıların liderlik değerlendirmesinde etnik köken ve dini kıstas olarak kullanmaktan vazgeçmeleri ve gizli demokrasimizden bir şeyler elde etmek istiyorsak politikacıların yetenek, verimlilik ve kapasitelerine odaklanmaları gerektiği sonucuna varmaktadır.

Introduction: Welcome to the Postnormal Times

> *Everything seems to be in a state of flux, nothing can be trusted. All that we regard as normal is melting away right before us. The post-normal times theory attempts to make sense of a rapidly changing world, where uncertainty is the dominant theme ...(Sardar, 2019)*

Since the last decade, studies about futures gained prominence, fueled by unprecedented changes in the system of things that were hitherto perceived as normal. These changes, consequent upon boisterous interactions and unending complexities in the workings of the society, have plunged the world into what Ziauddin Sardar (2010) considers the 'postnormal times (PNT).' These interactions and unending complexities are the drivers of the crises which reinforces the tripod of PNT which are complexities, contradictions, and chaos otherwise called the three C's of PNT. Hence, when we are welcomed to the PNT, we are welcomed to a period "when all is uncertain, nothing is predictable" (Gardner 139) and "little or nothing can be trusted or gives us confidence... the spirit of our age, is characterized by uncertainty, rapid change, and realignment of power, upheaval and chaotic behavior." (Sardar 435)

Postnormality unlike other epochs – classic, modernism, and postmodernism – is characterized by deep ambiguity, rapid change, and uncertainty so much that the future is feared; the continuity of systems and boundaries is non-existent. The fear of the future is a very significant feature of postnormality and the future according to Sardar "is associated with the loss of power, paradigmatic angst, and potential collapse of society, civilization and the ecosystems of the Earth. Part of the fear comes from the fact of the epochal shift itself and the realization that return to 'normal' is not a viable option."(*On the Nature of ...* 18)

PNT is not merely another 'post' as in the case of post-modern, post-liberal, and post-ideological concepts used for analysis and deconstruction, but a diagnostic and prognostic medium for assessing and predicting outcomes in studies about futures. In the times before now – *the normal times –,* there was confidence in our values and facts as well as the fact that we can take time to make credible and appropriate decisions but in the PNT, "the future seems like a runaway train barreling into the unknown." (postnormaltim.es/what-postnormal-times) The ideologies of postnormality should be understood from spatial context and time; the reason being that what might seem postnormal in one place might not be in another.

Generally, however, "the world is confronting a host of old, dying orthodoxies: modernity, postmodernity, neoliberalism, hierarchical structures of society, institutions, and organizations: top-down politics;   and   everything   else   that   has   shaped   and   defined   the   modern

world."(postnormaltim.es/what-postnormal-times) In the words of Galbraith (2014) we have approached the "end of normalcy" given the complexities, chaotic and contradictory features that prompt the workings of the present society. Complexity is the first feature of PNT as it presents a different phenomenon from what hitherto was viewed as the norm or normal. This is brought about by the intricate intersections of several systems, philosophies, and structures that drive contemporary times. These independent parts connect and interact with each other, and are characterized by uncertainties, multiple perspectives, and prone to chaotic behavior.

Contradictions are another feature of the PNT which speaks to logical inconsistencies within the complex systems that drives chaotic outcomes. "Contradictions often present the first signs that a system is moving towards complexity, chaos, and eventually postnormality." (https://postnormaltim.es/essentials/3cs) Chaos being the last force that drives PNT is the outcome of complexities and contradiction. It refers to many independent variables interacting in many ways within the network of complex systems. At the height of the chaos, a complex system can collapse or mutate into another form of complexity or a new order. These features give postnormality away as manufactured normality or what Sardar and Sweeney (110) in the *Three Tomorrows of Postnormal Times* read as "changing change" which leaves more questions than answers.

Postnormal Reading of Nigeria's Ethno-Religious and Political Climate

We will anchor on the premise of Sardar and Sweeney's conclusion above to run a diagnosis and prognosis of Nigeria's future given the present interactions and overlapping of the ethnic and religious complexities, contradictory and chaotic the emissions that shape the nation's political landscape. Thereafter, we intend to interrogate Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* using the canons of postnormality as established in Nigeria's religio-political workings to evolve a strategy for navigating the current turbulent, chaotic, and unpredictable terrains of postnormal Nigeria.

The multi-ethnic face of the Nigerian nation-state qualifies the nation as a complex system and the ethno-religious diversities which characterize this complex system exude contradictions and chaos. The ethno-religious interactions and interference in the political and economic space of Nigeria have produced conflicts which in turn have recently threatened a collapse of the Nigerian state such as the current clamor of secession and mutation of others such as the terrorist inclinations of certain ethnic and religious groups. Today, "the Nigerian political space has itself become a theatre featuring the comedy of manners and comedy of errors designed by macadamized electioneering processes and illuminated by tribal and religious wrangling over leadership." (Abakporo, 161) The mutating and conflicting ideologies of Islam, Christianity, and traditional religion within the nation's political and ethnic evolution have further challenged the

attainment of nationhood. Jegede (53) confirms this perspective thus;

> Sustainable and lasting religious peace across the nation has been aborted times without number owing to the recurrent cases of religious conflicts. As those religious conflicts linger on, distrust and suspicion became the order of the day, especially between the adherents of Islam and Christianity in Nigeria.

The battle for ethnic and religious superiority overrides the leadership landscape of Nigeria so much that within the evolution and transitions in government, power tussle has dragged along ethnic and religious lines which threatens the survival and unity of the nation and seems to align with the prediction of Carol Lancaster that "political divisions would increasingly fall along ethnic or regional lines, heightening tensions, and ultimately threatening national unity (Cited in Ake, 94). Cases of power tussle along ethno-religious borders are replete in Nigeria's history; a reference point is captured in the International IDEA (82) report;

> [...] Now the government of Olusegun Obasanjo is raising fears about a reversal from Muslim to Christian dominance of the security forces and state structures … His government is reported to have removed most of the Muslim commanders in the armed forces and replaced them with Christian officers. A chapel has been constructed in the statehouse in Aso Rock, previously there were three mosques and no church in the complex … These factors might have been conjugated in the minds of Muslim activists' fears about a Christian 'hidden agenda'. The attempted introduction of the Sharia legal system by some states in the federation might therefore be an attempt to checkmate what they consider to be a Christian threat.

From the above report, there seems to be an ethno-religious undertone to the governance of the entity called Nigeria. Corroborating this idea also is the statement of the Mustapha Jokolo, the Former Emir of Gwandu (19) "We [Muslims] have been pushed to the wall and it is time to fight…. Obasanjo is trampling on our rights and Muslims must rise and defend their rights. The more we continue to wait, the more we will continue to be marginalized."

It is within this framework that one can agree with Felbab-Brown and James (2012) that the north has seen far more ethnic, tribal, and religious violence, often manipulated by politicians for selfish political gains — especially in areas where neither Muslims nor Christians are a clear majority. Reactions to the above resulted in the adoption, funding, and enhancement of the terrorist base of Boko Haram. Besides that, Obasanjo's perceived suppressive ethno-religious acts above found a counter-reaction in Buhari's administration with the 2015 registration of the country with the Islamic Coalition against terrorism formed by majorly Islamic countries at the instance of

Saudi Arabia to fight international terrorism... barely two weeks after stating that Nigeria was not a member (Nwabughiogu, 2016) and forceful retirement of defense chiefs, a majority of whom are Christians. This confirms Serra's position that in PNT, "there is seldom a direct cause and effect relationship. Nowadays phenomena are the result of complex networks of causality in which many causal factors are intermingled." (Serra 249)

Theatre and Society

Theatre in particular acts as a mirror of life with every event recorded therein in all its manifestations, the theatre can enclose the cosmic as well as every day human existence. The theatrical event can provide an occasion for the validation of all that is religious, political, economic and social within the community. Theatre have maintained fidelity with the dialectic socio-political and cultural outlook of various cultures. The visual and performative of several African communities are reflective of their socio-cultural, religious, economic and political realities from the pre-colonial periods till present. Drama overtime, have been used to mirror the realities of a people and their struggle to grasp, interrogate, project and negotiate their identities, place and culture. Drama according to Adie (2013) underwent a flurry of experimentation to fully grasp its potential. Through theological and mythical education, theatre was converted from a setting for just domestication and entertainment to a radical platform that fosters critical thought, consciousness, and empowerment. With reference to several recent South African plays, Krueger (2007) evaluates the theatre as an ideal place for inquiries into the cultural negotiations involved in the delineation and transformation of identities.

The dynamic nature of drama and other theatre forms have also been deployed towards projecting or interrogating certain religious tenets and virtues. According to Crowe (2013), insofar as religion and the arts both strive to understand and give meaning to human existence, it may be said that they have always been linked, and that they form part of the cultural roots. However, it is frequently suggested that theatre has a particularly intimate relationship with the ritual side of religion. Several dramatists in Africa such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, Tewfik Alhakim, and Wole Soyinka among others have captured the intricacies and impacts of the new religions (Christianity and Islam) to indigenous African communities.

Theatre has also been utilized in socio-political negotiations within a society. Plays such as Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures,* Femi Osofisan's *A Restless Run of Locusts,* Gloria Ernest -Samuel's *The Beautiful Masquerade* and Iyorwuese Hagher;s *Swem Karagbe* among others are representations of the political climate in Nigeria both at the local and international level. Several critics have also maintained that the art must always keep tabs with the socio-political climate of

the society and that artists must ensure to align their works with the prevailing socio-political realities of their societies to remain relevant. (Achebe (1983); Boal (1979); Asigbo (2008); & Ebo (2008)) Theatre artists are therefore advised to work for change. By doing this according to Agu (2005), they ought to take the topic of discussion off the stage of the theatre and confront society heads-on. Theatre practitioners have not been effective in doing this, and they may require new perspectives to introduce theatre to a broader arena where arguments are currently resolved dialogue or the gun.

In the line of these ideologies, Nigerian drama have continued to be inundated by socio-political issues. The several issues (such as poor educational background of politicians, corruption, macadamized democratic processes, skewed religious philosophies, insurgence, banditry and ethnicity) that have pervaded the political landscape in Nigeria, have caught the eyes of theatre artistes in the nation. Recently, one can hardly find any dramatic text about Nigeria that avoids the socio-political intricacies of the nation, but Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* illuminates the most current issues that threaten national growth, peace and development: Religion and Ethnicity. Issues of leadership in Nigeria have largely been drawn along the lines of ethnic and religious conduits which *Pari* captures as will be discussed in the subsequent sections.

Postnormality: Nigeria's Ethno-Religious and Political Climate in Ahmed Yerima's *Pari*

> *The new nation called Nigeria should be the estate of our great-grandfather, Uthman Dan Fodio. We must ruthlessly prevent the change of power. We use the minorities of the North as willing tools and the South as a conquered territory and never allow them to rule over us, and never allow them to have control over their future.* (Sir Ahmadu Bello)

The process of transition across ethnic and religious borders in Nigerian leadership kill the idea of continuity as an important key in governance by creating "threatening uncertainties for groups and opens up a range of transitory political opportunities for ethnic entrepreneurs." (Gurr 85) These religious approaches to governance with underlying tribal markings paved the way for the sordid face of Nigerian leadership, the enthronement of her corrupt over layer, and an array of its negative effects on the masses wherein Ama, a major character in *Pari* concludes that "This country is dying" (Yerima 31)

The focus in this discourse will be the structures put in place by religious and ethnic entrepreneurs to advance the power struggle within the Nigerian space. Ethnic and religious entrepreneurs as used in this work denote the power structures that benefit from such religious and

ethnic upheavals or what Onapajo (59) describes as "religious capital." The chaos that emanates from these ethno-religious complexities and contradictions in recent times compel on to rethink the place of religion in national unity and development. It also lends credibility to the assessment of Asigbo (37-38) that "this is a country that thrives best in controversies. Besides, as our people say, every crisis is an opportunity for us the leaders to feather our nest… we can go to sleep with our two eyes closed knowing our agenda is continuing."

The carnage and its devastating impacts by the Boko Haram Islamic sect are the rubrics of chaotic religio-political manifestations which stimulates Yerima's documentation of *Pari*. The sect according to Vanguard (2009) stands to oppose western education and its negative effects on Islam as well as the social and political ills associated with the western domination of the Nigerian state. Campbell (1) sees the sect as "a radical Islamist movement ... that combines a sectarian, radical Islamic agenda with violence. Its stated goal is the establishment of a Sharia state... and opposes the Islam of the traditional northern Nigerian establishment, which is broadly tolerant." In a more elaborate sense, Thurston (5) put it this way;

> [...] The sect's theology and politics encompass more than hatred for Western influence. Its worldview fuses two broader ideas. First, there is a religious exclusivism that opposes all other value systems, including rival interpretations of Islam. This exclusivism demands that Muslims choose between Islam and a set of allegedly anti-Islamic practices: democracy, constitutionalism, alliances with non-Muslims, and Western-style education. Second, there is a politics of victimhood. Boko Haram claims that its violence responds to what it sees as a decades-long history of persecution against Muslims in Nigeria. Boko Haram sees state crackdowns on the sect as the latest manifestation of such persecution.

This scenario is captured in the traumatic experiences of Ama, the mother of the eponymous character, Pari. The play tells the story of the mayhem, trauma, and colossal losses of lives and property in the wake of the Boko Haram insurgency in Chibok which led to the abduction of two hundred and seventy girls, and their experiences in the Sambisa Forest believed to be the haven of the Boko Haram field marshals. The sect according to Thurston (2017) is a revolution against the complex religious and political environment of Nigeria. In the play, Pari is one of the girls, a Christian that was abducted by Boko Haram. The play opens two years after their abduction in 2014, to reveal the religious trauma of her Christian mother, Ama praying in the Islamic way in hope that the God of the insurgents will return her daughter to her. In her words;

Ama: From now on, I swear by Allah, this is what I want to do... if you take what is

mine forcefully, and claim that it is right in the sight of a god... your god... and get away with it, then I want to know why? I want to know what language your god understands ... when he sleeps... I just need to find a way to talk to him... speak his language like they do. Wear His hijab like their women do... kneel before Him, grovel if I have to and by whatever other means they used when they broke into the Chibok school, dragged those poor girls out, loaded them into trucks and drove them out ... (Yerima 9*)*

The entire play is permeated with abnormal and desperate shuttling between Islam, Christianity, and traditional religion fueled by a collapsed system within the matrix of a decayed political climate. The willingness to transfer or negotiate faith and dedication in exchange for redemption, happiness, and fulfillment by the above character in the face of the terror of terrorism questions the potency of these religious ideologies and the place or persona of the God factor in the face of persistent trauma arising from religious chaos.

How far can one remain dedicated to religion amidst persistent insecurity crises that have become the reality of the Nigerian nation-state? The commodification of faith and worship as well as the trivial reification of the concept of God in the play places question on the place of religion in the leadership of a people – should ethnicity and faith matter in the contemporary running of public office and service delivery to a people, especially in complex religious entities like Nigeria? Questions like this, seeing the interaction of chaotic faith and the colossal loss of lives and property in the play, one is drawn to Mark Juergensmeyer's (2003) thought that perhaps God had terror in mind in his dealings with mankind.

The Christian Ama (14), in the face of her devastating realities of living without her only child for two years, gives up her faith in Jesus because according to her "I want my child back and if Jesus is going to allow this to happen to me then I am done with him. I shall remain with the Prophet until I find my poor lost child." Not long, however, having prayed the Muslim way and adopted the name 'Khadijat' (8), she consults Shaagu, the seer who further diminishes her faith and reliance on the newly adopted religion even when Ama boasts thus;

> **Ama:** That was why I became a Muslim like the abductors of my daughter. Allah will hear my pleas a little bit louder now... Allah is enough! The Limam says that he sees the deepest secrets of the soul of man.
>
> **Shaagu:** Does he?... why then has He not listened to your cries? Why have you not seen your daughter in two years? Your daughter whom I say will return soon (Yerima 24)

The abduction of her daughter and consequent reliance on, and practice of a postnormal faith (admixture of Christianity and Islam) is revealed in her financial preparations for the church prayers "this is only enough for the church members. Where will I get the money for the special prayers for the Saadaka in the mosque?" (Yerima 17). Her attachments to both faiths, however, did not make her and her relations immune to the terror of these terrorist attacks. The attacks on villages of Mubi and Uba by the dreaded Boko Haram sect in the play saw the burning of churches and the killing of pastors including Tada's little cousin Reverend John who was posted to pastor the church. The character was killed while reciting the Lord's Prayer which further pushes Tada's faith to the extreme and heightens the religious contradictions that permeate the play. This is seen in his response to Hanna who admonished him to take solace in God thus;

> **Tada:** When will Christians fight back?
>
> **Hanna:** God is our strength
>
> **Tada:** ...Which one? The one that allows people to kill? Or the one that smites the meek with a muteness to die? Which one?
>
> **Ama:** I don't believe God exists anymore. Even on the day, we chose to honor and remind him of our plight, he allowed them to kill Sister Vero's young husband. Get up my dear husband, don't waste your supplications. God has since walked away from here... all hope is lost on him now. (Yerima 19-22)

The return of the long-awaited Pari (Yerima 34*)* did not meet the expectation of the traumatized parents as their once radiant angel is reduced to a "shadow of herself". She returns with a child and in the narration of her ordeals to her parents grieves that "in two years, your little girl became a woman and then she became a mother." (Yerima 40) The abducted little girls are shared among the Boko Haram fighters in the Sambisa Forest, forcefully converted to Islam, forcefully married, thingnified, and sexually abused severally until some like Pari (Yerima 37-39) saw their awkward realities as a way of life as revealed in her comment that "I became his girl. I guess when the soul is trapped, it adjusts." Shaagu the priest in his divination of the experiences of Pari (Yerima 27) laments "Never have I seen fear and pain mingle into a paste of raw mental sickness."

In the face of her dreaded realities in the forest and the survivalist acceptance of the new faith, all Christian doctrines and ideologies she had nurtured were put on the furnace of survival where she either embrace Islam or she would die like one of them as Pari (Yerima 36) narrates "One day, they said we all had to get married, we resisted it. One girl who screamed her refusal and was blindfolded and... killed. Those who lived or survived like me were living carcasses..." The

radical approach in the ideologies and life of the Boko Haram sect and the traumatic realities they posed on the Christian abductees was the final straw that broke the Camel's back on Pari's Christian faith and beliefs as she submits;

> **Pari:** God got tired of looking after me. He must have walked away to tend the souls of our dead friends... I took the chain with the cross. With my teeth, I cut it into pieces, bent the cross until I could not recognize it, and then I dropped it in a pit latrine with my sad past... And besides, Ama had lied... the day you gave me the chain, you said that if I was ever in trouble, should pray... and rub the cross with my fingers until Jesus would come and save me... Jesus refused to come... so I gave myself and my heart to him (Ibrahim)... (Yerima 36-39)

The question that comes to mind following this willing and forced conversion from Christianity to Islam by Ama and Pari her daughter would be – Is it greener on the other side? Yerima's position in the play is clear with the return of Ibrahim, a Boko Haram fighter who had taken Pari as his wife and had escaped in search of Pari and his child. His narrations point towards the fact that over time, the God concept and personality faded away as they too watched God abandon them and their cause which could further the above concerns of Juergensmeyer's (2013) terror in the mind of God. In his words;

> **Ibrahim:** What about him?... we had predicaments strewn all over ... and God stood silently by. We were ready to burn and blow up the sky where we believed He lived in smugness and allowed life to pass us by. Even after a while, the promise that we would go straight to aljana faded... With time the aljana we believed was what we created ... we were the gods in the aljana we created with guns and bombs, even Allah was afraid of us... (Yerima 47)

Ibrahim's thought above revealed a deviation or perhaps a mutation of the sect when realities and survival come face to face with religious beliefs. The manipulated or manufactured ethno-religious ideologies by ethnic and religious capitalists over time metamorphosed into a full-blown terrorist unit that has left mayhem and disaster in many parts of the North since 2012. It is no doubt that these manufactured ideologies were born from misinterpreted ethnic and religious ideologies for the political use of power brokers in the North. These ideologies overtime were proven to be the lies of faith; misguiding and harmful to humanity as crystallized in Ibrahim's dialogue with Ama thus; "**Ibrahim:** Pity. I am sorry. A thread of sacred faith lies that I believed would save me on judgment day derailed my senses and unwittingly, I became a harbinger of death... but with each passing day, it dawned on me that I was the fool." (Yerima 50)

Their abandonment of those ethno-religious capitalists who formed the militant group contributed to its mutation into an independent terrorist organization. After the power brokers have used them to discredit and dethrone President Goodluck Ebele Johnathan, the Northern cabals should have restored peace by ideologically rehumanizing and disarming the militants, retrieving their weapons, and reintegrating them into society.

Perhaps they were too carried away by their reclamation of power and left their militant groups to themselves which made them feel abandoned, hence their mutation into an independent organization, finding new reasons to advance their cause and consequently, turning on those whom they were supposed to protect. They have become too difficult to contain and according to Brechenmaker (2019), proven remarkably adaptable in their tactics hence, the ethno-religious entrepreneurs denied their involvement with the group and their activities. Ibrahim's dialogue with Pari's parents supports this claim

> **Tada:** And the government? They deny knowing about you. The former Local government Chairman says you even killed four of his brothers.
>
> **Ibrahim:** ...Well, this is a different story from what really happened. The irony is that they created us, nurtured us for their own good at first ... and after, they dumped us. Where did we get the arms? Where? From them, the military and black market. Where did we get the monies we spend? Who fueled our anger? ... See how well they lie now that they do not know how to quench the fire they selfishly lit. Pity. (Yerima 48)

The contradictions and chaos that beset the leadership and security situation of the nation fired by the embers of ethnicity and religion have gained international recognition which implies that the fire lit by these religious and ethnic capitalists has blazed beyond their control; the beast they created has outgrown its cage and today, ending the Boko Haram crises has been placed on the front burner of local and international authorities; a feat which has gulped lots of funds from local and international pockets with a seemingly little or no progress in dislodging the militants and ending the crisis.

The hydra-headed impact of the crises on the lives and economy of the nation is also of significance. Today, due to the ethno-religious gimmicks of the Northern authorities which this paper reads as a conglomeration of ideologies concocted to fulfill the wish of Sir Ahmadu Bello in the epigram above, Nigeria has been torn apart along ethnic and religious lines which currently threatens the unity of the nation. The Nnamdi Kanu's Biafra and Sunday Igboho's Oduduwa nation secessionist ideologies are counter-responses born from this postnormal ethno-religious

manipulation of Nigeria's nascent democracy.

Pari is an espousal of the root of Nigeria's leadership and security woes funded by ethnicity and religion that have so far forced the masses to have to lose "faith in the leaders as a panacea for freedom." (Nwosu and Kelechi 272) In the play, leaders only play out an ethno-religious script with their positions in the country which informs the commodification of the common man; the thought that his voice and actions can be bought. On the other hand, they use the money to mask their inefficiencies and ineffectiveness to engage serious issues in the country. This can be seen in the devaluation and commodification of the Chibok girls by the government in the play who paid the parents of the abducted children Sixty-four thousand naira; a feat which Pari's mother refers to as "Blood money given to me as compensation for having lost my dearest daughter..." (Yerima 11)

Perhaps, the government has helped the terrorists to negotiate the sale and abuse of the girls with their parents. Today, the clamor for secession is brewing as an ethno-religious response from the South and West as a response to the Northern ethno-religious Jihad drama on the Nigerian landscape. It is not only Northerners who suffer in this radicalized ethnic and religious activities of Boko Haram, the entire nation also suffers shortage in the food supply, dwindling foreign investments, increasing unemployment rates, loss of lives of citizens, and the negative view of Nigeria in the foreign scene as a terrorist state.

Navigating Ethno-religious Postnormality: Deductions from Yerima's *Pari*

> *In contrast to these ever-accelerating catastrophes, today's politics is beset by an inability to generate the new ideas and modes of organization necessary to transform our societies to confront and resolve the coming annihilations. While crisis gathers force and speed, politics withers and retreats. In this paralysis of the political imaginary, the future has been canceled.* (Williams and Srnicek)

The current face of Nigerian democracy reflects the complex network of effects and responses stemming from religion and ethnic coffers. This research attributes the entire gamut of Nigeria's leadership woes and its corrupt affiliations to twisted ethno-religious ideals. In concise expression, the plot of Nigeria's politics is couched around ethnic and religious supremacy; or what can expressly be read as the government of/for the tribe and religion rather than a government for humanity as confirmed in Sir Ahmadu Bello and Emir of Gwandu's statement afore expressed in this paper.

It is in this consciousness that the researcher envisions through Ahmed Yerima's *Pari* that ethno-religiosity has not been fair to Nigerian democracy since independence; the radicalized clamor for religious and ethnic supremacy since independence has become the ill wind that has

crippled the giant of Africa. Through the study text, Christianity appears as a religion of docility on its adherents, shutting down their capabilities for violence, hence a victimization ideology while the manipulated teachings in Northern Islam are used to push ethnic ideologies of supremacy geared toward domesticating political power in the North and Islamization of the country.

Against the foregrounding of jihad against the state and the unfaithful as encoded in the religious practice of Islam, Christians are supposed to live in peace with all men, pray for their enemies and turn the other cheek when slapped which proves Falola (50) right in the assessment that "loyalty to religion is often more important than loyalty to the state among Nigerians." The seeming alertness to religion and consequent docility or irrationality of citizens to affairs of the state and humanity is a major factor to contend with in Nigeria. More than ever, given the assiduous nature of the proliferation of violence in the nation, it is difficult to evolve pragmatic strategies for restoring peace.

A similar study by Kumsa and Subrt (755) on the causes of Islamic fundamentalist violent movements in postcolonial Nigeria does not "suggest any decision and do not provide any final conclusions – they admit the uncertainty of the current situation in Nigeria." This is in concordance with the ideals of Serra that "to be honest, we do not know how to shape viable policies for postnormal times" (Kumsa and Subrt 249) and with the uncertain nature of the chaotic emissions of ethno-religious postnormality, "the concept of building peace with a terrorist group can only be conceived of outside the box" (Fyanka, 4) and with a charge of Sardar, the father of PNT that

> Imagination, and its broader umbrella, creativity, are essential 'to imagine our way out of the postnormal times.' As the old ways of thinking and doing are failing, creativity is as a vital resource to envision and develop alternatives… today creativity is viewed increasingly as a relational, collaborative everyday/everyone/ everywhere process that is not limited to the arts and sciences… The change in creativity is both driven by, and in turn itself drives, social trends and social change. (Montouri and Gabrielle 358)

On the above notions, this paper will attempt to imagine our way out of ethno-religious postnormality with support from images drawn from the study text. First, there is a need now to rethink the place of ethnicity and religion in piloting the affairs of the current Nigerian state. It is against this backdrop, that this paper advocates that the humanist ideology be explored henceforth to steer the nation out of her current chaotic political, ethnic and religious potpourri, knowing that postnormality for us will become the norm for the generations to come. (Sardar and Sweeney,

2019) While the pregnant young Pari runs for her life, she delivers twin babies in the forest but seeing the dehumanized humanity the future holds for the female child based on her experiences, she "tore off a long piece of her hijab... and strangled my child... buried her in a shallow grave by the stream" (Yerima 41) Her action above sets the platform on which this research explores humanism as a panacea for invading ethno-religious postnormality.

"Tearing off a long piece of the hijab' for this work is symbolic because it reads decolonization of ethno-religious ideologies that betray peaceful coexistence and which have hitherto halted the progress of the nation. The tearing of the hijab being a head-covering worn by Muslim women signifies cutting through the overlayer of long-held faulty ethno-religious doctrines, opening our eyes to the reality of our existence as humans and making concerted efforts to improve our humanity. Strangling and burying in Pari's action above is interpreted here not as the total detachment from ethno-religious ideologies, but the laying aside of the harmful manipulated ideologies that emanate therefrom to embrace its true humanistic ideals and teaching in line with the changing times. Ethnicity and religion in their current manifestations so far have proven to be ineffectual in piloting the affairs of the complex Nigerian nation-state. Subjecting Nigeria to humanist assessments, given the persistent ethno-religious chaos, we have become far less humane if not bereft of humanism, and are "growing alone. We had left the people we set out to fight for behind. Each time we turned back we left devastation." (Yerima 51) The entire plot of the play has played on anti-humanism, the privileging of self-more than the common good.

Power brokers and religious entrepreneurs utilize these manipulated ethno-religious ideologies to psychologically invade adherents to support their political goals irrespective of the negative impacts on the unity and security of the nation. They also utilize it to mask their ineffectiveness and inabilities to understand and pilot the affairs of the nation; cause distractions that further discourage youth involvement and interest in the affairs of the nation; and coerce younger generations into all manner of violence in the name of economic survival as reflected in the current trends of ritual killing, kidnapping for ransom, militancy, necrophilia and bestiality rituals. The ethno-religious postnormality in Nigeria should be traced to the radical admixture of religion and ethnic ideals into "a paste of raw mental sickness" (Yerima 27) that needs to be cured by humanism.

Humanism stresses the importance of human values and dignity. Rather than looking to religious traditions, humanism focuses on helping people live well to make the world a better place. The humanist ideology is based on liberal human values which place the end of moral action in the welfare of humanity rather than in fulfilling the will of God. On the platform of humanist ideologies, there are values for life and the conscious efforts to better the living conditions and

peaceful coexistence of humanity. The humanist essence cuts across race, ethnicity, religion, and nationality. The humanism approach is solicited as the force that will help steer us out of the PNT. When adopted, it will aid in evolving "novel platforms for inciting peaceful resolutions of the inherent issues that fuel terrorism..." (Fyanka 4) Within the threshold of humanism, "we need to acknowledge that no one is in control, at least not in a democratic society... those who think that only governments can deliver, cause or achieve whatever needs to be done, are deluding themselves." (Serra 249)

Piloting the affairs of state from a humanist perspective would ensure good governance, equity, and transparency which according to Ukiwo (115), "would restore governmental legitimacy, inter-ethnic and religious harmony and promote democratic consolidation." Humane ideologies will open up necessary creative and imaginative modalities for policy implementation to ensure peace and stability of the nation; the kind of policies that will consider and involve "different perspectives and competing, even contradictory, interests... our interests are not served by focusing on what 'we desire'; our goals will be contested, just as we would contest 'their goals'; and only through a process of contested negotiations a positive outcome can be realized. (Serra 249-250) At the moment, under the auspices of humanist thought, peaceful methods to combat security issues by inclusively engaging in dialogues before policies are made, reorientations, ensuring fairness and equity in distributing resources, as well as ensuring that the locals are involved in the monitoring of projects awarded in their locality.

Conclusion

The complexities, contradictions, and chaos that currently besiege Nigerian society are heavily linked to a strong outplay of ethno-religious antics. The clamor for leadership positions in the country along ethnic and religious lines has constituted a major block on the road to Nigeria's development with the hydra-headed manifestations of corruption and purposelessness in government. This clamor has put the nation on the palms of ethno-religious cabals that continue to fleece the nation and enforce dehumanizing, witch-hunting, and purposeless policies that continue to cripple the giant of Africa. The persistent focus of government on inhumane ethno-religious ideologies and loyalty to ethnic and religious capitalists have seen the polarization of the nation through the "abdication of its responsibilities and also has not lived up to expectation ... of securing lives and properties as a precondition of securing economic growth and development" (Abdulkadir 13).

To make headway in the pursuit of peace and unity in the nation, given the persistent chaos over the years, is to embrace humanism in governance and followership. In the humanist

ideologies, lie the modalities for navigating the PNT through inclusive governance, adequate policy -making, and equitable distribution of national resources which revives the economy and restores peaceful atmospheres in which foreign investors can partner for job creation and improved livelihood of the masses. In concise terms, the corruption that has besieged the Nigerian landscape, electoral fraud, and the dwindling economy are by-products of the chaotic emissions of ethno-religious power tussle; a postnormal feature that the humanist ideals will greatly affect when adopted and implemented on the Nigerian landscape. When we are humanity-driven, we are largely done tackling the fundamental issue with Nigeria: the ethno-religious misnomer.

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