

# Literature and History: A Study of Nigerian Indigenous Historical Novels

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## Abstract

*The assumption that history posits itself as a fact, while literature is taken to be an artistic form, only for entertainment (i.e. a difference between truth and falsehood, reality and illusion) has been a contention for long between the formalist and sociology of literature theorists. In Yorùbá society, literature and history are important in letting us understand the world around us; both explain the full meaning of life. It is against this background that this paper examines the relationship between literature and history and how Yorùbá novelists use their works as vehicle of representation of history. We adopt the theory of New Historicism to analyse T.A.A Ladele's *Igbì Ayé ñ yí* and Olu Owólabí's *Òtẹ̀ Nibò*. Some of the findings reveal that: both Yorùbá literature and history are closely related, they are both based on Yorùbá experience and Yorùbá existence either in the past or present; while Ladele interpreted the history of the dignity and royal glamour of the Yorùbá ọ̀ba in pre-colonial era as a form of domination which is often achieved through culturally-orchestrated consent rather than force, Owólabí represented the history of party politics in Yorùbá society as fraudulent, deceitful, full of bitterness and violence. The paper concludes that both novelists are subjective in their representation of Yorùbá history, but they successfully establish the fact that the novel is a banker of history. However, such history is not a mere chronicle of facts and events, but rather a complex description of human reality and evolution of preconceived notions.*

## Introduction

There are three generations of Yoruba literary writers according to Barber (1995); the long established giants like D.O. Fagunwa, Adebayo Faleti, J.F. Ọ̀dunjọ, T.A.A. Ladele, Ogundele J.O. Lagbondoko, Isaac Delanọ who began writing in the colonial era; the writers of the 1960s and 1970s

like Olu Owolabi, Afolabi Olabimtan, Oladiipo Yemitan, Lawuyi Oguniran, Oladejo Okediji, Akinwumi Isola and a new prolific category of post oil boom newcomers like Bamiji Ojo, Jibola Abiodun, Bode Akinola among others. Most of these writers have used historical materials in their literary works to respond to the challenges of their society. As aptly attested by Ogunsina (1995, p. 297) “A writer responds with his total personality, to a social environment which changes all the time for the writer himself lives in, and is shaped by history”. Although most of the literary works of these writers (poetry, drama and prose) have been subjected to critical analysis by prominent Yoruba critics for example, Yai (1977), Irele (1982), Işola (1991), Barber (1995), Ogunsina (2006), Bamgboşe (2007), Adeleke (2009), Akinyemi (2010), Adeyemi (2010, 2011), Afolayan (2011) and Adekunle (2011) among numerous others, Yoruba literary scholars are yet to focus their critical attention on the relationship between history and literature as portrayed in the literary works of these writers. Scholars of Yorùbá literature have examined various themes, economy, social relation, gender, culture and philosophy but a more conscious insertion of the study of history and literature is yet to be elaborately done.

The thrust of this study is to examine the relationship between literature and history and how the writers use literature as a vehicle for the representation of Yorùbá history. Our focus is on Yoruba historical fiction which is becoming increasingly more popular and critically received by academic historians, literary critics and readers. In fact, some of the historical novels/plays have been reduced to films by filmmakers, some of the writers reflect history e.g Faleti’s *Başòrun Gáà*, Owolabi’s *Agbòngbò Àkàlà*, while some subvert history, e.g. Ladipo’s *Ọba kò so*. This study is designed to answer the following questions which constitute the problem of the research:

1. What is the relationship between literature and history?
2. How do the selected Yoruba novelists use literature as a vehicle for the representation of history?
3. What is the role of historical context in interpreting literary texts?

The objectives of this study are to:

1. examine the relationship between literature and history;

2. critically analyse within the theory of new historicism how the Yoruba novelists use their literary works as a vehicle for the representation of history; and
3. Identify the role of historical context in interpreting literary texts.

This type of study involves a broad knowledge of other disciplines especially history, history of different phases in Yoruba society, pre-colonial, colonial, decolonization and post-independence. Thus, we consider an interdisciplinary discourse to be germane to our study. Interdisciplinary approach to literary criticism is the study of literary works in relation to other disciplines, in this case, history.

The primary source of information comes from the literary texts. We limit our selection to the historical novels of T.A.A. Ladele and Olu Owolabi. Their works cover the different historical phases in Yoruba land especially in the pre- and post-independence era but which Yoruba literary critics have not given due attention to unlike other foremost writers such as D.O. Fagunwa, Adebayo Faleti, Akinwumi Isola, and Oladejo Okediji. The secondary source of data collection includes textbooks, library materials, journals, seminar papers, articles and other relevant sources.

Our theoretical frame work for the study is New Historicism. New Historicism emerged as a recognisable theory in 1980 when Greenblatt published *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (Brannigan1999). Historicism understands the stories of the past as society's way of constructing narrative which unconsciously fits its own interests. The theory of New Historicism is influenced by post- structuralist theory and it seeks to reconnect a work with the time period in which it was produced and with the cultural and political movements of the time. New Historicism assumes that every work is a product of the historic moment that created it. Unlike the Historical theory of the past, which asks questions such as 'What happened'? 'And what does the event tell us about history'? New historicism asks, 'How has the event been interpreted'? Other typical questions new historicism always asks are: What language/characters/events present in the work reflect the current events of the author's day? How are events' interpretation and presentation a product of the culture of the author? How does the portrayal criticize the leading political figures or movements of the day? How does the work

consider traditionally marginalized populations? New Historicists do not believe that we can look at history objectively, but rather that we interpret events as products of our time and culture. In other words, history here is not a mere chronicle of facts and events, but rather a complex description of human reality and evolution of preconceived notions. The New historicism, according to Jurgen (2000, p. 1) gained the immediate interest of those who had become dissatisfied with the stringent textualist ideology upheld by most American deconstructionists. New historicism is more 'sociohistorical' than the restriction of formalism and structuralism to the text alone.

New historicism allows cross-fertilization of ideas between historians and literary critics. It is broad based and new in Yorùbá literary scholarship. New ideas usually bring innovations. It is hoped that the critical input of this study will greatly extend and enrich our understanding of Yoruba historical novels. This study will most probably be an innovation in the critical study of Yoruba novels and be a major contribution to the existing knowledge of Yorùbá literary criticism. Academic historians will also benefit from the study because it would expand and enrich their knowledge about Yoruba history in particular and Nigeria political history in general as interpreted by Yorùbá novelists.

### **Relationship between History and Literature**

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, literary critics seemed to become more interested in the relationship between literature and history. In Britain and the USA according to Brannigan (1999, p.417), the contents of literary journals, the subject of critical books, university courses and the titles of academic conferences were reflecting a growing interest in examining how literature reflected, shaped and represented history. Frisina (2006) cited the statement of Eli Whitney, first chairman of the Tutorial Board History and Literature in the *Fields of Concentration Handbook 1928* that:

The field of history and literature is designed primarily for those men who have, shall we say, a philosophic turn of mind. At all events, they must be interested in cause and effect, they must have the capacity and background to see the inter-relation of events; and must be possessed of sufficient imagination to apply the lessons of the past to the problems of the future.

The critical point in the above quotation is that literature and history are related and they interact in cause and effect in order to apply the lessons of the past to the problems of the future.

In the pre-colonial African society, history and literature are not strange bedfellows. The relationship between literature and history has never been subjected to serious contention in Yorùbá society. The provocative blurring of boundaries and crossing of borders among disciplines have long been part of Yorùbá knowledge system. Departmentalization of knowledge is rare in traditional Yorùbá society. The traditional chanters and dramatists were great recorders and revealers of history. The griots, the poets and musicians were bankers of historical facts. At a period when writing was unknown, the oral medium served the people as a bank for the preservation of their ancient experience and historical events. Much of the evidence that related to the past of the Nigerian people today could be found in their oral and written literature.

Ìtàn is the generic name for any kind of story, and history which is regarded as a true story belongs to ìtàn. Other types of ìtàn include myths (ìtàn ìgbà iwáṣẹ̀), legends (ìtàn ìgbàani), origin story (ìtàn orírun), folktales (àlọ onítàn) and in modern time the novel (ìtàn- àròṣọ). Yorùbá narratives belong to different classes according to the criterion of factuality. Some are believed to be true or false, others are fiction. Factual traditions or accounts are transmitted differently-with more regard to faithful reproduction of content – than are fictional narratives such as folktales. Vansina (1985) observes a close relationship between historical tales and historical account in Rwanda. He states that a comparison of the popular tales about Ruganzu Ndori and historical accounts about him show obvious influences from tales on the popular version and exhibit the full effects of artistic license. Vansina asserts that the only significant difference between historical tales and historical account is that the tale is told for entertainment and subject to the dynamics of fiction while historical accounts are not, but both retain the authentic history.

In Pre-colonial Yorùbá society, myths and legends are used by historians to establish oral historical tradition. For example, the myth of Şàngó is a manifestation of the divinity among the worshippers. However, there is also an oral historical version which sees Şàngó as human. The real name of Şàngó, the fourth Aláàfin of Oyo is Ítíolú Babáyẹmí. He assumed the

name Sàngó because of his peculiar actions like the Şàngó divinity. As Bohrer and Susanne Wenger (1976, p.12) observe, "Şàngó is also important because of his human history as the Aláàfin of Oyo. He is not a myth like others; he is both very human and very godly". In the myth of Moremi of Ife, we observe the process of the transformation of an oral traditional historical event into mythological manifestation. Both stories are respected as correct and sacrosanct. Quayson (2000, p.74) cautions against a postcolonial historiography that would erase local traditions of storytelling about the past. Knowledge based solely on documents, he argues, serves ultimately to over determine the very ways by which indigenous peoples later imagine their histories.

The novel is fundamentally a story, but it is a story of a particular type and as Ogunsina (1993) observes, a novel is essentially a written prose narrative of some length; an imaginative portrayal of life, with plot, situation, and characterisation all based on facts of existence. History on the other hand, is the recording of events in time. History, according to *Webster Collegiate Dictionary* 10<sup>th</sup> edition (1995, p.550) is a chronological record of significant events including an explanation of their causes. History deals with the overall achievements, events, occurrences and happenings of an entire population. Literature (novel) deals with the same events, from a much more personal viewpoint. Both history and literature especially the novel depend on events, occurrences and happenings in the society.

Until far into the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ankersmit (2009, p.4) states that the word "novel" could refer to a true story or a fictional one and within this episteme, the novel and history could hardly be expected to become independent of each other, The traditional material of myth, legend and folktale is so intimately connected with the life of the Yoruba people that some knowledge of it is necessary to an intelligent understanding of some aspects of their history. The close relation which up to that time existed between literature and history changed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ranke (1890) cited in Ankersmit (2009, p. 5) explains in clear term that:

History is distinguished from all other sciences in that it is also an art. History is a science in collecting, founding, penetrating; it is an art because it recreates and portrays that which it has found and recognized other

sciences are satisfied simply with recording what has been found. History requires the ability to recreate.

According to Ranke, history contains scientific component- which is associated with “historical research”, a poetical component which he calls “historical writing”. He listed six qualities of an historian, namely: love of truth, an accurate production of the sources, a complete openness to the past, penetration into casual relations, impartiality and the pursuit of an overall picture of the area of the past being studied. He concludes that what is required of a historian is a passive surrender to the past with no space at all for the aesthetic dimension of historical writing. On the relationship between literature and history, Professor Barret Wedell, the first chair of History and literature at Harvard University USA, insisted that writers could never have been what they were but for the historical forces that surged about them conversely, it is through the literary voices of the past that the historian comes to understand not only bare facts but also how those facts made the living men feel who knew them in the flesh (Follansbee 2006, p. 1).

The contention that history posits itself as a fact, while the novel is taken to be an artistic form i.e. a difference between truth and falsehood, reality and illusion, serious and non-serious discourse is no longer fashionable. The point is that both literature and history are important in letting us understand the world around us; both explain the full of life. Literature is the historical life in reality. Historical facts like the novel are constructed not found; documents do not possess their own meaning but are given by historians. Literature and history are based on human experience and human existence either past or present. Even though history consists of descriptions of the past in direct unadorned language, though simile and metaphor may be used, and the imaginative spirit plays a dominant role in literature, both the historian and the novelist are engaged in the narrativizing process of selecting, ordering and narrating the events of the past. History, like literature, is presented as the site of knowledge, what Haraway (1991, p.195) calls “situated Knowledge”- where we can talk about things like the politics and epistemologies of location, positioning and situation where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims. In other words, literature and history are not separable categories of discourse in the modern day

and some of the contemporary Yorùbá novels have shown the creative possibilities of cross-border activity between Yorùbá novel and history.

The truth-value of historical narrative itself is subject to the interpretation of the historian, and both literature and history aspire to promote the integration of the two disciplines and strike a balance between general knowledge and specific expertise. Thus, the close relationship between literature and history gives birth to the historical novel where the writer studies a particular era from the past in order to write a story. Such stories may be wholly fictional or they might be fictionalized accounts of real people and real events. In this study, the indigenous literature of the south west Nigeria (Yoruba) is our focus.

### **Yorùbá Political History in the Selected Novels of T.A.A. Ladele and Olu Owolabi**

The political history and development of the Yorùbá people and Nigeria in general pose special problems, especially in dealing with the history of the years of their existence before contact with the Europeans. The Yorùbá historians depend largely on materials transmitted by the oral traditions to construct the history of the people. Also the Yorùbá novelists generally use their knowledge of Yorùbá oral traditions, personal experiences, and other written sources to represent and interpret Yorùbá history. Delano (1963, 1971) whose novels namely: *Lójó Ojoun* and *Aiyé Daiyé Òyìnbó* constitute the first sets of Yorùbá historical novels depends on his deep knowledge of Yorùbá oral tradition, his personal experience and events of his days. *Lójó Ojoun* is set in Abèòkúta his home town to reflect the splendour and pleasantness of traditional Yorùbá life before the coming of the Europeans. The novel is a representation of Yorùbá cultural history in the pre-colonial era especially in the nineteenth century. *Aiyé Daiyé Òyìnbó* on the other hand, portrays the historical contact the Yorùbá people had with the white men and the consequences of such contact on Yorùbá traditional politics.

T. A.A. Ladele and Olu Owolabi are literary historians whose novels are vehicles for the representation of history, which reveal the processes and tensions by which historical change comes about. Ladele's *Igbì Ayé ñ yí* and Owolabi's *Òtẹ̀ Nibò* do not just document Yorubá political history, rather, they re-create and re-evaluate active parts of particular historical



moment from the perspective of community historians. The two novels make a historical exploration of the pre-colonial period. Even though there is no chronological representation of the historical facts in the texts yet, the two authors relate various aspects of Yorùbá life before the advent of the colonial masters. In *Igbì Ayé ñ yí*, Ladele documents the socio-political organization of the Yorùbá during the pre-colonial years of its history which was dominated by the special position occupied by the Ọba. The ọba wielded enormous power and he was then highly respected. An Ọba was rarely seen in the public. Whenever he came out during an annual festival, he was veiled. The king had the power of life and death. Even though no Yorùbá king could afford to be autocratic, he is called “Aláṣẹ Igbákejì Ọ̀rìṣà”. The setting of the novel is the old Ọyọ kingdom which the novelist calls Ọ̀tólú and Olú is the Ọba. Olú means the paramount ruler, the leader of many leaders or the apex of authority. His power is unquestionable and he uses his power not only to accumulate wealth, wives, slaves and other material prosperity at the detriment of the subjects, such power and influence are transferred to his sons.

In *Igbì Ayé ñ yí*, Adérìbigbé and Ọ̀látóngéé who are the princes of Ọ̀tólú ride on human beings like horses. They snatch other peoples’ wives and terminate lives of people who fail to bow down for them. The misuse and abuse of political power by the Ọba is satirically portrayed in the characterisation technique. Characters such as Ajitọ-ọba (Eater-of-Ọba’s-saliva), Anuba (He-who-feeds-the ọba), Tọbaṣẹ (The-carrier-of-ọba-to-the-toilet), and Kọba-ń-rìn (He-who-walks-for-the-king) represent the type of luxury and monopoly of power by the Yorùbá ọba in the pre-colonial era at the expense of their subjects.

However, the story of the importance and the royal splendour of Yorùbá Ọba changed with the effective occupation of the colonial masters. The emergence of the elite class represented by Bánkárere, Bákó-ń-mókà, Ajénifúnjà teams up with the colonial masters to change the political structure and history of Ọbaship in the kingdom. None of the kings portrayed in Ọ̀tólú and its environment could resist or fight against the colonial political order because they could not withstand the military superiority of the colonial masters. In fact, the first Olú Ọ̀tólú and his son Aderibigbe were imprisoned for unlawful and criminal activities in the town. The Olú of Ọ̀tólú died after the imprisonment episode and the second king is forced to concede the territories of Ọ̀tólú to the white

people. In *Igbì Ayé ñ yí* the new political order gives no role to the ọba. The district officer, a white man, says:

A ó yan àwọn tí wọn lajú ní ilú yìí, àwọn ni yóò máa pàṣẹ, Ọba yóò máa fọwọ sí i lásán ni (o.i.91)

(We will select members of the elite in this town, they would be given the orders, which the king would merely endorse.)

The king remembers how he has suffered great humiliation in the hands of colonial police officers, and the collective conspiracy of the elite, who are his subjects, all he could do is a sigh of sadness and hopelessness. He sorrowfully laments thus:

Igbì ayé ñ yí lóòótó! (o.i. 92).

The narrator through the colonial governor asserts the reasons for the change of power from Ọbaship to democracy. He states:

A rí i pé ètò ìṣẹ̀lú tí à ñ bá ̀bò tẹ̀lẹ̀ mẹ̀hẹ̀ díẹ̀, ó sì ñ fẹ̀ àtúnṣe látí mú kí àwọn mẹ̀kúnnù lè jẹ̀, kí wọn mu, kí wọn sì ní àlàáfíà.... Láyé àtíjọ̀, a fi gbogbo agbára lé Olú Ọ̀tólú lọwọ̀....gégé bí èyin náà sì ̀ṣe rí i, ọ̀pọ̀lopọ̀ ̀ìgbà ni ọ̀ba tàbí súnmọ̀ba ñ ̀ṣi agbára yìí lò (o.i.88)

(We have seen the weaknesses of the traditional politics, there is need for correction so that the masses will have peace of mind and freedom from oppression....In the past, all the powers were given to Olú Ọ̀tólú and as you can see he and his closest men misuse the power)

Ladele has not only represented the history of the Yorùbá pre-colonial political history in *Igbì Ayé ñ yí*, he has debunked the traditional view of perfection of rulership attached to Yorùbá ọbas. The Yorùbá ọbas were neither flawless nor were they all divine. They are domineering and most of the times enjoy luxury which they have not laboured for. They depend on the sweat of the teaming masses for their existence and abhor human rights. However, in line with new historicism domination is often achieved through culturally orchestrated consent rather than force. The

people attribute the domination of their kings over them as part of the tradition and they agreed to be dominated without being forced. The novelist, whose work takes particular interest in representation of marginalized people calls for a change.

In Owolabi's *Òtẹ̀ Nibò*, a survey of the traditional past of the Yorùbá people is given at the beginning of the novel. The narrator comments thus:

Ayé àwọn baba wa mà kúkú dùn o! Wọn kì í fi ayé ni ara wọn Lára, wọn kì í dale ọ̀rẹ́, wọn kì í ẹ̀kẹ́ ọ̀gún, wọn kì í búra ẹ̀tàn (i. o.13)

(The life of our forefathers was very pleasant. They did not make life difficult for one another. They did not betray their friends, or bear false testimony against Ọ̀gún (god of iron) and they did not swear falsely)

The arrival of the colonial masters leads to the disruption of the peaceful and harmonious existence of the people. The narrator laments:

Nínú ìgbádùn tí kò légbẹ́ ni àwọn baba ńlá wa wà, tí àwọn ọ̀yìn bó Gẹ̀ẹ̀sì fi dé. Ọ̀yìn bó dé, ọ̀gbón ẹ̀wé dé, ọ̀yìn bó dé, ipà̀nle dé, pákáleke dé (i.o:3)

(Our forefathers were living in matchless joy before the white man came. The white man came and diplomacy came. The arrival of the white man brought hooliganism and difficulties.)

In the novel, the arrival of the white men fuels the fire of intra-tribal wars in Yorùbá land during which they buy men and women as slaves. Owólabí is silent on the negative roles of the Yorùbá ọ̀bas in the nineteenth century when they assisted the slave masters to purchase their subjects, or when they lost their status and empires because of internal dissension. Owolabi documents that various representations of the colonial government missions exploited the turmoil of Yorùbá politics by playing one group against another. The colonial masters realised that each warring tribal king needed firearms. Non-trading government missions colluded with trade companies e.g. the Royal Niger Company (RNC), to weaken the kings who did not suspect the intentions of their helpers. At the end of

the encounter, one king after another was made to sign a treaty. On one of the visits of Ajélè (the Resident Officer) he declares:

Lórúkọ ọba ilú òyìnbó, mo kí yín mo sì kí gbogbo ijòyè  
Iṣẹ takuntakun tí n bẹ lówó mi ni láti fi yé yín pé ètò  
òṣèlú Irú èyí tí wọ̀n n ló ní ilú òyìnbó ni a ó máa ló báyí.  
Èyí ni pé a ó Maa yan `awọ̀n tí yòò máa sojú agbègbè  
kòòkan ní ilé aṣòfin.(o.i.11)

(In the name of the Queen of England, I greet you and all the chiefs of the town. The arduous assignment before me is to let you know that we shall henceforth adopt the British system of government. This is the system whereby an elected representative will represent each area in the House of Assembly.)

From this stage of declaration by the British representation till the end of the novel, Owolabi makes scenic presentations of various incidents and situations which the new order brings to the Yorùbá society.

Owolabi interprets the history of party politics in Yorùbá society events, characterisations, language and themes. In *Òtẹ̀ Nibò*, political parties are formed on tribal and ethnic basis. For example, Ọbáyẹmí Ọrẹ̀òfẹ̀rọ́ teams up with notable Yorùbá figures to form Ẹgbẹ̀ Olóko. He is assisted by Akinjọla an acclaimed orator. Àríkàwé is influential in the East. He teams up with Ẹjalónibú (a Yorùbá man) to head Ẹgbẹ̀ Alágùnfon while Şéríkí together with Jẹ́jẹ́níwà forms Ẹgbẹ̀ Olówó- a feudal party based in the North. In the election, Ẹgbẹ̀ Olówó from the North wins and forms a coalition government, because it has no comfortable majority, with Ẹgbẹ̀ Alágùnfon. Ẹgbẹ̀ Olóko becomes the main opposition.

The colonial government favours Ẹgbẹ̀ Olówó (the party in the North) to win the Federal elections before independence. At the regional level, Şeeni Akinjọla becomes the Premier of Western Region, while Ọrẹ̀òfẹ̀rọ́ becomes the opposition leader at the Federal level. Suddenly, Ẹjalónibú dies in a motor accident and this leads to violence in Ibadan, ideological differences occur between Akinjọla and Ọrẹ̀òfẹ̀rọ́. The party cannot resolve the differences and the party becomes divided. The division leads to the removal of Akinjọla as the premier. He refuses to be removed and

problems erupt in the House of Assembly. The conflict leads to political fracas in the Western Region and the National Government declares a state of emergency in the region. Later, Chief Ọbáyẹmí Ọrẹ̀òfẹ́rọ́ is set up and accused of treasonable felony. He and few of his closest supporters are charged to court and are found guilty. Ọrẹ̀òfẹ́rọ́ is sentenced to various terms of imprisonment. In the election that follows, Akinjọla teams up with Ẹgbẹ́ Olówó to form Ẹgbẹ́ Olómi. Ẹgbẹ́ Olóko unites with Ẹgbẹ́ Alágùnfọ̀n to form Ẹgbẹ́ Ọbágorí but the elections result in violence, looting and anarchy. To stop the dangerous political trend, full of violence, looting and killing, the military strikes for the first time and the story ends tragically. The Prime Minister, Jẹ́jẹ̀nìwà, Akinjọla (the Premier of Western region) and a host of other politicians are killed in the coup-de-tat.

The political format coincides with the three regional groupings into which Nigeria was divided by the Littleton Constitution of 1954. The depiction of the three political parties as Ẹgbẹ́ Olóko, Ẹgbẹ́ Alágùnfọ̀n and Ẹgbẹ́ Olówó should not be seen as mere labels. The characters and the events within the political parties are presented to interpret the agony of our historical past. Ẹgbẹ́ Olóko represents the Action Group whose members are mainly from the south west. The Action Group is historically called Ẹgbẹ́ Ọlọpẹ led by Chief Ọbáfẹ́mi Awólọwọ. Ẹgbẹ́ Alágùnfọ̀n is symbolic of the NCNC headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe, while Ẹgbẹ́ Olówó is reminiscent of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) led by Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. The artistic creation of these political parties does not vividly illustrate the structure and nature of political parties of the early 1950s in Nigeria. However, from the ways the author depicts the main characters in each political party, he recreates and interprets the history of party politics in Yorùbá society as a very sad one. The title of the novel *Ọtẹ̀ Nìbò*, is deliberate. It points to the bitter experience of the Yorùbá people at the elections during the first republic. The novelist's regret is revealed in the way he depicts the theme of violence, ethnicity and the bitterness of party politics in the first republic in Nigeria. Each of the three major ethnic groups believes that, it is its destiny to dictate the future of the country politically, economically and socially.

Political campaign is one of the veritable means of disseminating political information and beliefs to the electorate. The post-colonial experience

reveals that political campaigns are used to attack political opponents. Politicians in the novels resort to blackmail, abusive words are freely traded, and chaotic manipulation of words is usually the order of the day. Apart from the use of campaign of calumny, there is the notorious strategy of thuggery and violence at campaign rallies. The political thugs employed by politicians bear frightful, intimidating and strange names such as ‘Dagbangbaru’ (the spoilers, disorganizers), ‘Omi-ata’(the peperish water), ‘Aṣúḍeḍe’ (the silent mischief-maker) among others (p.76). Owólabí, the literary historian creates such characters to bring out the variety of wickedness among the political players of the post-independence era, up to the turbulent ‘wẹ̀ẹ̀tiẹ̀’ days in the ‘wild wild West’ of Nigeria between 1964 and 1966. Owólabí seems to mix up the political thuggery of the pre- independence 1954 election with the post-independence election of 1964 -1966. However, he is opposed to political thuggery which is a product of colonial influence on Nigerian politics. The story of the thugs is re- enacted to paint a lurid picture of the wickedness and the heartlessness that colonial politics has brought to our body politics till today.

Owólabi also brings to memory the historical figures that played critical roles in the politics of the first republic. The depiction of the characters is so direct that the main characters can easily be identified among the political actors of the first republic. For example, Ọbayẹmi is a pseudonym for Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ. Şeeni Akinjọla is a pseudonym for Samuel Akintọla. Jinadu Seriki is Ahmadu Bello, while Jeḗniwa is Alhaji Tafawa Balewa. Faramoni Arikawe is Nnamdi Azikwe. Ọladoke Eḗalonibu is Adegoke Adelabu. Owolabi uses his knowledge of Yorùbá phonology and folk etymology to transform the real names of the political actors to fictitious ones. Adégòkè Adélabú for example, is a political leader in Ibadan, the novelist calls him Eḗalónibú . He is satirized in a song as follows:

Eḗalónibú, máa nájó wa lọ(2ce)  
 Igunu ló ni Tápà, Tápà ló nìgunu  
 Máa nájó wa lọ (o.i.56)

(Eḗalónibú continue to squander our money (2ce)  
 The Igunu masquerade owns the Nupes, the Nupes own the Igunu masquerade,  
 continue to squander our money)

In pre-colonial Yorùbá society, swindlers or looters of the treasury are not condoned. They are disgraced and ridiculed but from the first republic till today they are celebrated. Even though this novel was written many years ago, it reflects the current events in post-colonial Nigeria.

In Yorùbá political history, the names of political heroes are usually symptomatic of their exploits and their ideological positions. For example, we have such names as “Ògbórí Èlémòṣò” (The war-lord, who killed and cut off the head of Èlémòṣò the trouble of Oyo kingdom during the reign of Oba Àjàgbó), Tìmi Àgbàlé Ọlọfà-iná (The political head of Ede renowned for his arrows of fire). Others are Ajagunla of Ila Ọrangun (the great warrior), Olúwò Abanikannda Amida of Ìwó and Baṣorun Ògúnmólá of Ìbàdàn. Their names suggest the type of leaders they were. They were leaders of power and authority while the names of the leaders in the current dispensation suggest leaders of ‘bread and butter’. The marginalized population constitutes the background characters who are entirely anonymous. They are mere voices rather than individualized characters.

Owólabí also brings to memory the powerful oratory style of the Yorùbá political class during the struggle for independence in *Òtẹ̀ Nibò*. Historical songs known with particular political party is creatively interpreted. For example, after a fruitful rally led by Ọbayẹmi his supporters burst into songs:

Ibí bá kù sí ẹ wí o (2ce)  
Ènikan kì í dárádára, Kó má kù síbi kan  
Ibí bá kù sí ẹ wí o (2ce)

(Tell us his weakness  
No one can be perfect without one weakness  
Tell us his weakness).

The first line of the song is repetitive not only for aesthetics but also to register their conviction that their candidate, as far as they are concerned and to the best of their knowledge of him, is perfect and qualified without any physical, social, political, moral or intellectual blemish. The song cited is reminiscent of the one composed for Chief Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ in 1954 by his supporters:

Awólówò baba Láyínká  
Méjèèjì lo ní,  
Owó n bẹ, èèyan n bẹ  
Méjèèjì lo ní

(Awólówò, the father of Layinka  
You have the two,  
There is money, supporters are also there  
You have the two).

Owolabi changes the contents of the song in the novel but the message of the song is retained. The song is composed to instil confidence not only in the party leaders but in the general public and their supporters. At times, such a song is composed for the party. For example:

Ègbé olóko làwa ó ẹ o (2ce)  
Èni tó bá fẹ kó kí wa  
Èni tí kò fẹ kó yan wá lódì  
Ègbé olóko làwa ó ẹ o (o.i.24)

(We shall be members of Oloko party (2ce)  
He who likes may greet us  
He who does not like may decide not to greet us.  
We shall remain members of Oloko party)

The message of the song is a declaration of loyalty and consolidation of party image. The original song is not only a song of solidarity, but also a song of protest and condemnation of the NCNC party and their leaders. The original song goes thus:

Ègbé ọlọpẹ làwa ó ẹ o (2ce)  
Àkùkọ ti kú ú oee  
Àkùkọ ti kú,  
Adélabú ti nù ùn  
Ègbé ọlọpẹ làwa ó ẹ o

(We shall be members of Action Group (2ce)  
NCNC is dead  
The cock is dead  
Adélabú has disappeared,  
We shall be members of the Action Group).



Apart from the use of language for political propaganda, diplomacy and demobilization of political opponents, Owólabí appreciates the politicians' oratory style and their effective use of their mother tongue during political rallies, but he denounces the use of violence which has become a historical heritage in Nigerian politics.

The representation of the political history of the Yorùbá society from the pre-colonial era to the post-colonial times in *Igbì Ayé yí* and *Òtẹ̀ Nibò* are not as simple and straightforward as the two novelists present them in the two novels. Events that cover several years of the peoples' existence are narrated as if the events occurred in a straightforward and simple manner. Many historical facts and details are omitted. This is one of the shortcomings of the historical novel; because a novel is essentially a creative work it cannot afford the luxury of chronological details of historical text. New Historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. A literary work must be judged in the context in which it was written.

Ladele and Owólabí could be rated as unbiased literary historians who have used their wide knowledge of Yorùbá traditions, their personal experience and historical events to interpret the history of the Yorùbá society in particular and Nigeria in general. New Historicism does not believe that we can look at history objectively, but rather that we interpret events as products of our time and culture and that we are subjective interpreters of what we observe. To that extent, we can say that the two authors have only portrayed the aspects of history they are ideologically committed to. For example, Ladele is a prince from Oyo and his interest is on the power relation between the colonial masters and the Yorùbá obas, and the subsequent relegation of the royal splendour of Yorùbá obas. Ladele is not only concerned about the misuse of power by the Yorùbá obas against their subjects in *Igbì Ayé yí* neither is the novelist only interested in the benefits of the new political dispensation brought about by the colonial masters, his sole interest is change. Political power has to change from monolithic leadership to democratic dispensation, change that would bring prosperity, equality and justice to the masses, change that will end oppression of the masses by few lineage- offspring in the society.

Owolabi on the other hand narrates the history of the pre-independence era and the first republic as experienced in Yorùbá society in *Òtẹ̀ Nibò* based on his social background and the ideas circulating at the time. Adeyemi (2003) notes that Olu Owolabi was an influential politician in Egbado land. He was a strong member and supporter of the Action Group (AG) in the first republic and active member of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) in the second republic. It is very clear from the representation of history in Owolabi's novel that his interpretation of the first republic political history is rather subjective. He has undying commitment to Chief Ọ́bafẹ́mi Awolọ́wọ's political ideology and this is reflected in his portrayal of the characters in the novel. Ọ́bayẹ́mi `Ọ́rẹ̀òfẹ́rọ (i.e. Ọ́báfẹ́mi Awólówò) is portrayed as perfect without any blemish who hates lies of any kind. Akinjọla and Eḡjalónibú (Akintọla and Adelabu) who are in the opposition party are described as betrayers and deceitful politicians. The author only portrays their weaknesses and nothing was said about their strengths. The author only used the ideas circulating then and the preconceived notions of opposition party to interpret the history. This confirms the views of New Historicists that literary works may or may not tell us about various factual aspects of the world from which they emerge, but they will tell us about prevailing ways of thinking at the time: ideas of social organization, prejudices, and taboos etc.

## **Conclusion**

From the discussion so far, it is very clear that history and literature are related and the two novelists have proved that Yorùbá literature and history are both important in letting us understand the world around us; both explain the full meaning of life. Literature is the historical life in reality. Ladele interprets the history of royal splendour and glory of Yorùbá ọ́bas as a form of domination which is culturally-orchestrated, while Owolabi represents the history of party politics in Yorùbá society as fraudulent, tyrannical, deceitful and violent. Both novelists are subjective in line with the principle of new historicism, because history or the novel is not a mere chronicle of facts and events, but rather a complex description of human reality and evolution of preconceived notions. The novelists, in line with the views of new historicist theorists, concern themselves with the political function of literature and with the concept of power, the intricate means by which cultures produce and reproduce themselves.

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