

## **EXPLORING SOCIO-POLITICAL DECAY IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY THROUGH THE PIDGIN POETRY OF PETER ONWUDINJO**

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**ABSTRACT:** The paper examines multifaceted decadences that have pervaded the society. The problem of the study emanates basically from the fact that Peter Onwudinjo's poems have often been beclouded by other social themes and, most times, glossed over by pedestrian generalization. This study pays critical attention to the distinctive aesthetic features of the pidgin poetry of Onwudinjo, especially, in areas that have been relatively ignored in scholarship. The main objective of this study is to show the effectiveness of pidgin in interrogating a society bedevilled with institutionalised degeneration and prejudice. The choice of his poetry is informed by the poet's knowledge of the decay in Nigerian society as implicated in his poems. His aversion for the rots in our educational sector, the inglorious behaviours of the youths, the atrocities practised in our churches and visionless leadership are intricately woven in his poems. This study uses the content analysis method of research and New Historicism as the theoretical framework to examine the socio-political decay in Onwudinjo's pidgin poetry collection entitled *De Wahala for Wazobia* as the source of primary data. The theory re-emphasizes the fact that literary works should take into consideration the poets, writers, critics and contextual space in which a work of art is written. The findings reveal the efficacy of pidgin in addressing the decadence in the society. The paper concludes that setbacks in our society are products of a particular history and should be interrogated by scholars, writers and critics in that clime.

**Keywords:** Decay, New Historicism, Pidgin, Socio-Political, Society

### **INTRODUCTION**

The study on socio-political decay in the pidgin poetry of Onwudinjo in his collection *De Wahala for Wazobia* has shown that Nigeria is polarized: the rich and the poor, the weak and the strong, the complacent and the egocentric. Socio-political decay in this context has to do with the rots in our churches, education, businesses, and government parastatals. The economic statistics in Nigeria are still backward because of the unrestrained debauchery by the leaders, recalcitrant behaviour of the youths and institutionalised injustices. The air of uncertainty and gloomy atmosphere which characterised Nigerian society is seen in multiple voices epitomized by the poet's persona in the poetry of Onwudinjo. The vision of the poet for social change is best appreciated in his strategic manoeuvring of diverse voices to interrogate a society riddled with problems. The seemingly complacent passivity of the masses who bear the brunt of these problems necessitated this research.

African literary artists are the watchdogs of contemporary degeneration and decadence in the society. The position of Awa (2020) is quite illuminating when the critic states that

The literary artist in his literary creations serves as a watchdog, gadfly with a rolling eye monitoring the happenings in the society. His literary text, is therefore, a spot of conflict and a domain for the violation of the rights and freedom of the citizens of the society who inhibit the world of his text. He earnestly brings to limelight the conflict and derogations of the right and freedoms and so point the way for the resolution of the conflict and the protection of the right and freedom of the citizen so as to create an egalitarian society (p.4).

The writer's sole goal is to interrogate certain depravities that he sees as not in conformity with the societal norms and behavioural patterns of the people. Onwudinjo belongs to those categories of African poets who strive beyond the traditional precepts and roles of interrogating oppression, inept and bad leadership and exploitation to showcase the daily infirmities and maladies of our immediate environment. The poet sees his position as a watchdog that must not just stop there, but nip all existential threats to humanity in the bud. Etta's (2022) position corroborates the above statement when he states that "For this class of writers art must do more than just this exposition and criticism of social vices and economic injustice, it should proffer solutions to the existential dilemmas of modern man" (p.169). The poetry in pidgin also aligns firmly with the position of the New Historicists like Jan (2020), who asserts that "Through this doctrine, New Historicists claim to speak for the marginalised, the oppressed and for everything peripheral a society turns its back on" (p.20). Just like post-colonialism, Marxism, feminism, ecocriticism and deconstruction theories, new historicists strive to speak for the most neglected indigent masses.

The post-colonial poets have been very firm in their decision to expose the activities of the dominant class; the degeneration and despair that the citizenry have been battling with for centuries. To these writers, poetry remains a veritable tool for interrogating these anomalies as Achebe (1964) rightly observes

If the artist is anything, he is a human being with heightened sensibilities; he must be aware of the faintest nuances of injustice in human relations. The African writers cannot, therefore, be unaware of or indifferent to the monumental injustice which his people suffer (p.79).

In the same vein, Fanon (1967) cries out that "A society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a non-viable society, a society to be replaced" (55). In contemporary Nigerian society, most Nigerian poets have resorted to using pidgin as a means to reach out to different categories of people. In pidgin, the North, South, East and West can effectively communicate with one another and carve a niche for themselves: a role that will curb the rots of a developing society. Defending the place of pidgin in the society, Balogun (2013) has this to say, "Nigerian pidgin is fast becoming popular among many speakers than before. Nigerian pidgin has undergone a lot of modifications and remodifications over the years by drawing it rich lexicons from various Nigerian indigenous languages as well as the contact language..." (p.91). Balogun (2013) adds that "Nigerian pidgin is a promoted language through its use in the propagation of national ideas,

values, political and socio-economic development, peace and unity" (p.93). African writers struggle to affirm the dignity of Africans, promote African culture and interrogate the anomalies that have remained ingrained in the minds of the people. Ogar & Odey (2023) assert that "These writers explode the myth of unrepentant dictatorship and strive to help the indigent masses" (p.90). This paper investigates how Peter Onwudinjo use of Pidgin poetry critiques socio-political decay in Nigeria, arguing that Pidgin is strategic tool for accessible resistance.

This paper adeptly examines the review of related literature, the theoretical framework adopted for this research, methodology, political corruption and inept leadership and decay that have remained ingrained in the minds of the people and the conclusion; which will unravel the need for further research on the pidgin poetry of Onwudinjo deploying other theoretical frameworks.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED SCHOLARSHIP**

Emezue (2004) argues that "Onwudinjo is a contemporary poet whose poetic expression draws from Africa's rich oral sources and is diffused with copious images, proverbs and aphorisms, as well as a thematic preoccupation with poverty, exploitation and corruption as social concerns that affect people individually and collectively" (p.1). Although the prevailing situation influenced Emezue's assertion in the political landscape of the country, the political situation typifies the inevitable issues that should dominate the creative sensibility and ingenuity of writers in Nigeria. Emezue (2009) observes in "The Stimulus of (Postcolonial) Violence" that Onwudinjo "poetic expression draws from Africa's rich oral sources and is diffused with copious images, proverbs and aphorisms, as well as thematic preoccupations with poverty, exploitation, and corruption as the social concerns that affect people individually and collectively" (p.1). Emezue posits that "Many poems in *Women of the Biafra and Other Poems*, *Songs of the Fireplace*, *Camp Fire Songs* and *Songs of Wazobia* vividly describe the deprivation and trauma in a landscape riddled with physical and psychological violence" (p.1). This point was noted by Emezue in an interview with Onwudinjo when she notes that the "poem in *Songs of Wazobia* (2005) address issues of corruption, bad leadership and bad followership in post-colonial Nigerian society and this idea tends to foreground the national literature" (p.5) She also posits that "Onwudinjo's *Because I'm Woman* and *Songs of the Fireplace* address such problems as barenness and marital pressures from a perspective I will describe as Afrocentric" (p.9). Emezue's polemic is relevant to the current study in the sense that it extrapolates how Onwudinjo deploys his artistic vision effectively to reform a despoiled society and achieve his artistic objectives. It is also against this colourful literary terrain that the artist acknowledges the universality and timelessness of singular art which appeals, not just to the society, but to humanity transcending all physical and psychological limitations.

Ayodabo (2015) in his paper entitled "A Configuration of Socio-political Dialectics in Nigerian Pidgin..." holds that the "emergence of a younger school of poetry with distinguishing temperament from the new Nigerian counterparts was a welcome development for Nigerian writing." (p.85) Ayadabo maintains that a changing society, as epitomised by the younger school of poets, engages in a critical review of its cultural values in the context of new realities. He avers that

Onwudinjo just like the third-generation poets and critics: Tanure Ojaide, Obiora Udechukwu, Odia Ofeimun, Henry Gamba, Funso Aiyejina, Ada Ugah, Catherine Acholonu, Tess Unwueeme, Silas Obadiah, Olu Obafemi, Akachi Adimra-Ezeigbo and Fidelis Okoro fall within the school of committed writers whose objectives are to communicate directly with the common people using plain language, local expressions, settings and down to earth... (p.85).

Ayodabo (2015) further avers that “Onwudinjo belongs to the younger school of poets that use poetry to comment on the socio-economic and political situations in Nigeria” (p.85). Onwudinjo treats thematic issues with alluring difference. For example, in some works, Ayodabo continues “*Women of Biafra and Other Poems* (2006), *Songs of Wazobia* (2006) and *De Wahala for Wazobia* (2007), we see a true blend of poetry and indigenous Nigerian Pidgin English (NPE), artistic style of proverbs and aphorisms, exploitation and corruption as social concerns that affect people individually and collectively” (p.85). It is implicit from the above assertion that writers like Onwudinjo are reformists and revolutionaries who use their poems as creative means of social action against oppression, exploitation, political instability and social injustices which often go unchallenged and with impunity. Ayodabo posits that “Onwudinjo’s poems may appear to be humorous in some sections, but it captures with telling accuracy the post-colonial problems in Nigeria” (p.90). Poems like “Wazobia is on Fire”, “Wazobia is dead” in his collections *Songs of Wazobia*, “Because I’m Woman”, “I Am Not Worried About My Looks”, “Don’t Give up the Fight” and “The Day of Women’s Revolt” in *Because I’m Woman* capture the post-colonial problems in our society. Ayodabo (2015) observes that the “lyric quality of the poem and the use of pidgin, orality, metaphor and allusions combine to produce an innovative critique of the country’s socio-political and economic problems” (90). Ayadabo’s position becomes very important to this paper because it will help to determine the extent to which the poetry of Onwudinjo projects artistic vision geared towards the reformation.

Ikechukwu (2014) in his paper entitled “Survey of the Poetic of the Pidgin Language in Peter Onwudinjo’s *De Wahala for Wazobia* holds that “it is a rich collection that draws on the palatable and pitiable state of affairs in his country Nigeria” (p.108). Ikechukwu maintains that “the collection bothers on the socio-historical realities of the country which obviously constitute the problems witnessed in the socio-economic, political, and religious system of the nation” (p.108). He states that “the collection also went on an array of other issues and problems of ethnicity, religious violence, corruption, election malpractices, neocolonial imperialism, and insecurity among other form of vices that have eaten deep into the fabrics of the nation and continues to militate against the autochthonous development of the country” (p.108). Ikechukwu (2004) compares Onwudinjo’s poetic vision with those of other pioneer writers like Chinua Achebe whose visions were channelled toward the reformation of the country. Ikechukwu (2004) notes that

The collection could equate Chinua Achebe’s *The Trouble with Nigeria* where he postulated several problems that pose great threats to the nation and what ought to be done. The pidgin title *De Wahala for Wazobia* in the Standard English reads *The Trouble with Nigeria* and the poems in the collection like those of the words of Achebe addressed these arrays of problems in Nigeria. The poet expresses that *De Wahala for Wazobia* is a sustained evocation of the landscape of dilemma in the

socio-economic condition of the Nigerian nation. *De Wahala for Wazobia* sails close to facts, closely hugging the reefs of reality in Nigerian society (p.108).

As a result, Ikechukwu observes that *De Wahala for Wazobia* was written by the poets to speak for Nigerians who are victims of an oppressive system. Ikechukwu (2004) further asserts that "...the work evokes the toils and troubles of the youth caught in the web of dilemmas in social institutions, corrupted, convoluted, and degraded by the myriad or vices of statism, ethnicity, marginalization, exploitation, nepotism, greed, violence, and lack of moral strength..." (p.109). The critic concludes that "the quest to use the pidgin language stems in the fact and urgency of the message of the poet and the need to be understood by the peasants, the downtrodden and the lower class which could trigger and elicit some positive and revolutionary action towards change..." (p.109). Onwudinjo is a poet who is more revolutionary and committed to the plight of the masses. This is why the poet is battling to bridge the gap between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

The above assertion is in line with Nwahunaya's (2010) arguments that the poets of the contemporary period remain lachrymal and is "encased in a tone of lament or mourning" (39). According to Nwahunaya (2010), the writers "deploy the emotion of tears to elicit sympathy and empathy for human condition" (39). The poets aim to liberate the masses from the stranglehold of oppression. Even Nnolim (2011) states that this lachrymal nature can be traced to the 20th century. But with the emergence of 21st century literature, Nnolim continues that it has been "preoccupied with blaming the African political or military leaders for leading us into political and economic quagmire, that the time has come for a more forward-looking vision" (p.4). Nnolim (2011) further avers that it is a literature enliven with "strong sense of loss; the loss of dignity; loss of our culture and tradition; loss of our religion...loss of our very humanity. This is why scholars are writing to reverse this debilitating norm in the society with the sole aim of bringing social change.

Inyabri (2006) explores the shared vision of Onwudinjo's generation when he posits that "the poets aver in their art the socio-political issues their society is grappling with" (p.68). He notes that the major trope that launched the poetry of this generation is "pains". This is why Inyabri quoted Pius Adesanmi who views the features of the poets of this generation as "aesthetic of pain" (71). Inyabri's studies on contemporary Nigerian poets explore the dialectical connectedness of all phases of poetic generation. Concluding, Inyabri cites Harold Bloom's portrayal of Oedipus complex governing the relationship between the muse, the precursor and the strong poets. He asserts that "it brought Nigerian poetry through to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As it would soon be shown, a certain psychology is in any case healthy. It is the force that has continued to sustain productivity in the genre" (p.8). The poetic vision of this generation boils down to reformation.

Contrary to the findings that poetry is a veritable tool for reformation in the society, Obi Nwakama and Charles Nnolim reported that recent studies are inconclusive on the issue. Nwakamma (1988) avers that there is no "experiential" detail in the vision of the poets. He notes that none of the writers of his generation is or has been drawn implicitly into the experience they chronicle. Nwakamma (1988) writes that "... there is not a single memorable and vivid character among generation of writers because they have not lived vividly and memorably. There is not a powerful experiential detail that undergirds the vision of our art as a writer in this generation" (p.2). Nnolim (2011) berates the writers of this generation when he states that they should "forget the complex

of the past and be more imaginatively aggressive and expansive, invading other continents and even the sky as new settings, striving to have a global outlook in his creative output, mounting a new international phase and not limiting his canvas to the African soil" (p.4). Nnolim looks at the political landscape as he calls for social commitment of the writers of this generation. This assessment shows that whereas critical scholarship exists in the pidgin poetry of most Nigerian poets, there is a noticeable lack of significant attention on socio-political decay in the pidgin poetry of Onwudinjo. In other words, while previous studies explore Onwudinjo's thematic pre-occupations, few interrogate the relationship between form (pidgin) and function (social critique) from a New Historicist lens. This is why the drive of this study is built around this critical vacuum. In studying socio-political decay, the research will attempt to bridge the scholarship gap and equally invite further research on the pidgin poetry of Onwudinjo.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is New Historicism. This theory is chosen because it accentuates the vision of Onwudinjo as implicated in his pidgin poems. The major proponents of New Historicism are Stephen Jay Greenblatt, Mitchel Foucault, Louis Montrose and a host of others. New Historicism focuses on the relationship between a literary text and the history of a particular society. Mary Klages (2011) in her book entitled *Literary Theory: A Guide for the Perplexed* states that

With New Historicism - also called 'cultural poetics' or 'cultural criticism'-all texts are created equal: anything written, any piece of discourse, is treated as a piece of writing open to interpretational analysis. New Historicism as used in the disciplines of history, anthropology and literary studies, starts with the assumption that history is story a culture tells its self about its past, rather than a set of provable facts (pp.123-124).

Bressler (1994) holds that "Disavowing the old historicism's autonomous view of history, New Historicism declares that history is one of the many discourses or ways of seeing and thinking about the world" (p.129). Also, Bressler (1994) has it that "New Historicism challenges the supposed objectivity of history, redefines the meaning of a texts and asserts that all critics must acknowledge and openly declare their own biases when interpreting a work" (p.129). For a writer to explore the happenings of the society, he or she must be conversant with the historical antecedents prevalent in the society. In most cases, a New Historicist adroitly looks at a society from a critical point of view to seamlessly unearth the hidden truth in a literary text.

Even as New Historicism is addressed as the "bastard child of history" (Bressler, 1994), it creates a consciousness hitherto unknown by the people. Hence in New Historicism, there is this teleological connectedness of a text and the society in which the writer is also a participant. "New Historicists believe that there exists "no human nature independent of culture" (qtd in Bressler, 132). Bressler's (1994) summarises the assumption of New Historicism in this manner that "Since texts are simply one of many elements that help shape a culture, New Historicists believe that all texts are really social documents that not only reflect but also, and more importantly, respond to

their historical situation" (p.133). In deploying New Historicism, contemporary happenings in the society will be brought to fore, showing its connection with a literary work of arts.

For a work art to be sustainable, it must portray the historical antecedents because it is in the cultural domain that a writer of a work of arts draw his or her inspiration. Bressler (1994) position succinctly concludes the interpretative discourse of New Historicism when he asserts that

To unlock textual meaning, the New Historicist investigates three areas of concern: (1) the life of the author; (2) the social rules and dictates found within a texts; and (3) the reflection of a work's historical situation as evidenced in the text (p.134).

Onwudinjo is a Nigerian poet whose vast knowledge of the pre-independence and post-independence era has tremendously shaped his consciousness. White (1973), expressly observes that "New Historicism is reductionist in double sense. It reduces the social status of a function of the cultural, and then further reduces the cultural to the status of a text..." (p.32). The poet is aware of the extreme degeneration by all categories of people in the society. It is this multifaceted chaos in the country that the paper interrogates in the next section.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses content analysis method of research and New Historicism as the theoretical framework to examine socio-political decay in Peter Onwudinjo's pidgin poetry collection entitled *De Wahala for Wazobia* as the source of primary data. The specific poems chosen for this study are "Everything get K-Leg for Wazobia", "I Been Wan Return to God", "I Don Land Job", "I Been De Try Reach my People", and "De Wahala for Wazobia". The decision to interrogate the poems is made considering the poet's choice of socio-political themes. Hence, the methodology is in line with the New Historicist's thought that humans cannot exist without their culture as the poems are carefully selected to examine the poet's representation of socio-political issues in the collection. The next section critiques the decadence in Nigerian society.

### **Political Corruption and Loss of Vision**

Onwudinjo's "Everything get K-Leg for Wazobia", unravels the problems bedevilling the society. According to him, census is meant to ascertain and provide an equitable distribution of the country's natural resources and social amenities like schools, market, hospital, good roads and improved welfare of the masses. He expresses disgust for the dishonest and greedy political class when he writes that

head count na to get ogwonga subsidy  
for rogue politicians to share;  
... make dem count sand sand  
we dey sahel, count cassava stick, count  
even water hyacinth wey de float for water,  
say all na man and woman

wey dey wazo; (*De Wahala for Wazobia*, pp.17-18).

He feels that the “rogue politicians” use the census to get “ogwonga subsidy” characterized by outrageous and superfluous counting. The poet lampoons the greed, inordinate ambitions and unwarranted acquisitiveness by the political class. It is implicit in Onwudinjo’s assertion that the long-awaited reformation can only come if the right things are done. The poet did not relent in his push for social change as he rhetorically asks: “how census go work for wazobia/weh lie lie full mouth?... (p.18). “Wazobia” in this context represents the three tribes: Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo. These tribes are ascribed negative connotations because of the widespread corruption, oppression, lies, and exploitation of the indigents. The poet is not only revealing his disgust for the rulers but also instigating the masses to challenge the decadent attitudes of the government. Consequently, he scolds the leaders with a prophetic note of impending doom.

as for corrupt politicians  
and the greedy wazobians wey de urge them on,  
don’t worry,  
when time reach,  
person wey take hunger swallow razor  
go pay with a bloody nyash (*De Wahala for Wazobia*, p.19)

The poet deploys exaggerated imagery and disarming humour like “razor” and “blood nyash” to nudge the masses into realising the enormity of the political imbroglio in society. Images of “razor” and “bloody nyash are metaphors for the unbridled absurdities that have engulfed the nooks and crannies of society. The poet’s persona is goading the masses to be weary of the political class as he calls for caution in our actions and inactions. Within the context of New Historicist’s hermeneutics, the poet’s complaints and despair are products of a particular history; that is, the problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s leadership. Fanon also decried it elsewhere as the “pitfall of national consciousness.”

In Onwudinjo’s “I Don Land Job”, the poet displays a virulent and bitter criticism of the political class. Corruption, exploitation, vindictiveness, and covetousness have assumed a frightening dimension in the society. Odey et al (2025) affirm that the “The confidence the masses reposed on our leaders have also been systematically eroded” (24). The poet’s persona assumed to be a woman is lamenting her ordeal in a depraved society.

For eight month  
I been de find job  
every where for wazo  
no be say job no dey-o,  
job dey but dem de take am  
set trap for chop money  
or chop mango wey  
I don swear say  
I no go sell again ...  
I go for seven Desert Bank,

dem say dem go give me job  
If I dey ready to play game (*De Wahala for Wazobia*, p.106)

The ruling class exploits vulnerable girls in the guise that they would be given jobs in the society. The quest to survive the harsh economic reality in the society pervades the psyches of the average Nigerian. Most times, these girls are promised lucrative jobs if only they can give themselves to these self-acclaimed employers of labour: “dey say dem go give job/ if I dey ready to play game”. But the poet persona has vowed never to succumb to this immoral act: “I don swear say/I no go sell again” which is also an aspect of the poet’s quest for social change. The poet persona’s lamentation continues in a harsher tone below:

den e come tell me say  
baby girl, if you wan job here  
as computer typist  
you must be ready to dance mambo  
you must be ready to lift your frock  
otherwise, no show (*De Wahala....* 107)

The above expression underscores the insensitivity of the leaders. For a woman to be made to “dance mambo” shows a virulent objectification of her gender. “Mambo” is a derogatory word used to address women of easy virtue. Onwudinjo, like his contemporaries, is making serious effort to restore a society which appears to have lost its bearings as a result of the prevailing social degeneration. In the poem, the poet uses pidgin to bring to the fore the monumental decay that characterized the post- independence Nigeria. Reading from the New historicist’s perspective, the poet unravels the historical antecedents and revolutionary spirit needed to dismantle the resurgence of capitalism. The poet persona who is assumed to be a woman cries out in the face the creeping injustice against her gender in this manner:

I just de listen to de man  
as e de yap de go de yap de go  
de yap de go, like say I dey interested  
till e commot for him seat  
come touch my softie’  
  
na im I spit for im eye *piom*  
like mamba,  
push am e land for ground  
with nyash (*De Wahala for Wazobia*, p.108)

The confrontational stance of the poet is instructional, especially for women. It is evident that since the political class is engulfed in corruption, the ordinary people in the society must do something to liberate themselves from the tight-fisted grip of the capitalists. The poet’s uncompromising voice is targeted at one thing, which is the reformation of society. It is premised on this dwindling situation that Adimora-Ezeigbo (2012) rhetorically asks that

...what does a woman do when she knows that she is not to be trusted and she is not highly valued as her male counterpart? In such culture as these, the woman must learn survival strategies to be able to overcome the impediments placed before her and live a good life. She has to be proactive and strong (*Monograph*...p.28).

The woman in the poem revolted because she had been pushed to the wall by those at the helm of affairs. A woman is doubly oppressed as a woman and as a citizen. Zora Neale Hurston's description of the woman as the "mule of the world" astutely places a woman in a dilemma in a society where they are adjudged to be the real stakeholders.

In "De Wahala for Wazobia", the poet confronts the hydra-headed corruption, infrastructural decay, misrule and the monstrous act of insensitivity with verve and vigour. Odey and Utsu (2022) assert that "This situation is brought about by greed, corruption and bad leadership initiatives coupled with the parasitic relationship existing between the leaders and led appropriated by social stratification" (119). The poet persona unravels the pathetic situation in this manner:

Mother de chop forget her sister...  
de rough rough road to nationhood  
*de wahala for wazobia*  
de broken bridge to ballot box  
*de wahala for wazobia*  
de tribal mountain, ethnic gulf  
*de wahala for wazobia* (*De Wahala for Wazobia*, p.119)

The reoccurrence of a particular linguistic unit: "de wahala for wazobia" is a metaphor for the recurring turmoil Nigeria. These incessant troubles bedevilling the society is what Nigerian yearns to surmount. He sees these problems as debasing, dehumanising and a clog in the wheel of change. He also paints a gory picture of hunger and unemployment in the society where the masses are starving and the on the brink of collapse when the persona states

see see our children are angry  
*de wahala for wazobia*  
no work to do no food to eat  
*de wahala for wazobia*  
I fear the air go explode again  
*de wahala for wazobia*  
who go stand cosuming fire  
*de wahala for wazobia* (*De Wahala for Wazobia*, p.120)

The poet is a visionary who views the society as decadent and debased. He believes in an ideal society and one that subscribes to egalitarianism. Like all African poets, Onwudinjo's tool is the word; he believes that it is only the word that can wrestle our leaders into alleys, correct institutionalised injustices and create a buffer zone that will ignite the much-expected social change. Expressions like "I fear de air go explode again/who go stand consuming fire" subvert the insensitivity of the government. He uses violent images like "explode" and "fire" to show the

anger, defiance and determination of the people striving towards achieving equitable distribution of national wealth. It is believed once the big men are overthrown, the intellectuals, in collaboration with the peasants, would create an egalitarian society.

### **Education and Moral Decay**

The poet decries the enormity of depravity and decadence among religious organization in “I Been Wan Return to God”. Most pastors and priests in the society are fake men of God. This underscores the proliferation of churches in the society for commercial reasons. Also, the preponderance of dubious practices by the purveyors of our faith is quite worrisome. Looking at the good deeds of Jesus Christ and, by extension, his disciples on earth, like Pope Francis, who recently passed on, is a depiction of the exemplary lifestyle that other religious leaders should emulate. In a civilised clime, religious leaders who are supposed to live by examples are the perpetrators of the evil acts. Shedding the blood of the poor and the vulnerable people amongst the congregation is fast becoming a norm. Little wonder why so many churches are fast going into extinction because of these alleged religious who are preachers of hate and division in the society. In most cases, they are arrested by security agencies and made to face the full wrath of the law. The poet persona tells us that

but when I remember the fake fake pastors dem  
and lie lie evangelist dem  
wen dey command God  
de fire de Holy spirit  
make riches de fall from heaven *brekete*  
sake of come-to-my church commercialism... (*De Wahala for Wazobia*, p.98)

Instead of the church to preach the gospel, churches commercialize the gospel by preaching prosperity. New historicists encourage critical reading of a text showing how such text is intricately woven with the historical antecedents in the society. It is pertinent that every crime scene displayed in a society exist in a particular time and space and must be explored in relation to that time and space. The poet persona’s perception of the church is portrayed in this manner:

even priest dem sef I no go see,  
even though my heart de long  
to go confession  
receive communion again;

I de vex for dem too  
as I hear say some don begin  
de abandon de holy life  
wey dem swear for ordination  
come de chop congo meat  
without fear (*De Wahala for Wazobia*, p.98)

Onwudinjo uses pidgin to illuminates his determination to infuse reformation and moral balance in the society. Nwankwo Nonyelum Nebechi rightly observes that "...pidgin English is deeply rooted in Nigerian culture, history and everyday life" (151). The poet feels that since he is dealing with a multilingual society, pidgin which happens to be the language of everybody, should be given this strength of purpose in interrogating the social miasma in the society. In the poem, the poet persona unmasks the menace of religiosity and its after effect on the people. The poet submits that it is better to remove the log on our faces before removing it on someone else's face when he states that

but when I remember say  
I wovo pass everybody wey dey wazo  
I come realize say I no dey  
any position for judge anybody (*De Wahala for Wazobia*, p.99)

The poet persona uses this form to sensitise the masses on the need for social change in the religious angle. The poem represents the poet's vision of eventual victory over all forms of oppression and the emergence of an ideal society where hypocrisy and deceit will be thrown into the dustbin of history.

The poet decries the decay of the country's educational system in "Dem Sow Corruption like Mellon Seeds". The poem overtly displays the lackluster attitude by students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century towards education and how this unwholesome attitude has affected youths in the society, especially in their quest for survival in the society. In most cases, students who could not afford books in school or are just averse to book reading are easy preys of the predators. This reaffirms the position of new historicists that sees the marginalized, texts and context as areas that should not be treated with levity. Bressler (1994) position on New Historicism is quite illuminating when he writes that "...New Historicism proclaims that it provides its adherents with a practice of literary analysis that highlights the interrelatedness of all human activities, admits its own prejudices, and give a more complete understanding of a text than does the old historicism and other interpretative approaches" (p.134). In line with the New Historicist's perspective, the poet paints a picture of the dwindling condition in our institution of higher as he frowns at the attitude of students in this manner:

buy books na lie  
borrow books for library, who sai,  
library books wey don grow wings  
fly commot since many years  
since *echetram* years ago;  
de few books wey remain at all  
na de grandpapa books wey Lord Lugard  
and Landers brothers been read for school;  
na just to come class come de mope,  
de plan to do wayo for exam  
when time to write am reach... (*De Wahala for Wazobia*, p.48)

The allusion to Lugard and Landers brothers evokes an era when education was of utmost importance and not now when students “na just to come class come the mope” The poet also cast aspersions on the management for the decadence in our country’s educational system. He also frowns at the unethical manner which students’ representatives are erroneously chosen to rule in our campuses. This situation, if positively handled, will bring reformation in the society. The position of the poet buttresses the vantage position of Klages (2011) that “New Historicism also assumes that a text can be treated to reveal its own ideological assumptions, contradictions and limitations” (p.131). This decadence in Nigeria has permeated virtually all sector in the society. The onus now rests on the masses, civil society and the government to nip this existential threat in the bud.

### **Conclusion**

Peter Onwudinjo’s *De Wahala for Wazobia* sarcastically bemoans the illogicalities and decadence in our society. The rot in our educational system, the thoughtlessness of the leaders and depravities amongst our youths are fast becoming norms. The poet’s use of pidgin is premised on the fact that Nigeria is a multilingual society where Hausas, Ibos, Yorubas, Efiks, Ibibios, Isokos and Itshekiris can efficiently and effectively communicate with one another in different regions. Using pidgin is not only therapeutic in a discourse space but it can also create a boundless bonding that will lead to the destruction of systemic and structural injustices that have remained ingrained in the psyches of Nigerians. The findings reveal the efficacy of pidgin in addressing the socio-political decay in Nigerian society and concludes that setbacks in our society are products of a particular history and should be interrogated by scholars, writers and critics in that clime. This paper will not only sensitize the masses on the predicaments of the people but also invites comparative study on Onwudinjo’s poetry and other pidgin poets in Nigeria.

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