HISTORICISM AS A LITERARY DISCOURSE:

A STUDY OF ISIDORE OKPEWHO'S *THE LAST DUTY*, ELECHI AMADI'S *SUNSET IN BIAFRA* AND BIYI BANDELE'S *BURMA BOY*

M. A. THESIS

BY

ISMAILA, ABDULLAHI AHMAD

(M. A./ARTS/01066/2006-2007)

Submitted to the

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES, AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER DEGREE OF LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

JUNE, 2012

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DEDICATION

To my wife and children who bore all the inconveniences that I put them through in the course of pursuing this study programme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I thank God once again for giving me the energy and resources to undertake this study programme.

I thank most sincerely Professor Tanimu Abubakar for patiently guiding me through the writing of this thesis, and for constantly encouraging me especially at moments when my spirit seemed to have sagged. I also thank my external surpervisor, Professor John Ilah, for appreciating me. Dr. Abel Joseph was also a huge support and always a 'friend'. I thank you all immensely.

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I also thank my typist, Mrs. Agnes Aje for bearing with my disturbances and coping with my short notices in the typing of this thesis. Thanks for being there for me always.

CERTIFICATION

This thesis was supervised and approved as meeting the requirement for the award of Master Degree of Literature in English.

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ABSTRACT

This study deploys Historicism as a literary discourse to the analysis of the selected writings of Isidore Okpewho, Elechi Amadi and Biyi Bandele. The study argues that Historicism emerged in the 19th Century as a method of investigating how texts of all kinds come to terms with their putative contexts. In spite of this, the application of Historicism to the analysis of texts on the internecine Nigerian Civil War and the reconstruction of the roles of Nigerians in the prosecution of the Second World War has been sparing. This thesis, therefore, demonstrates the applicability of the discourse of historicism to Isidore Okpewho's ***The Last Duty****, Elechi Amadi's* ***Sunset In Biafra****, and Biyi Bandele's* ***Burma Boy****. It argues that, writing as historicists, these writers appropriate historical events, vicarious and personal experiences, and recorded or documented activities, all of which had hitherto passed into history as past. Having been refined and reconstituted, these variegated materials appear aesthetically resplendent as novels, as new experiences, conformable to the patterns of literary discourse. This study thus argues that, the novels that emerge from this social process are never complete without relating them to the minutest discourse that shapes them and to which the texts invariably respond. The thesis is divided into four chapters for proper articulation of the discourse. Chapter One is an introduction, which deals with (Conceptual Background, Statement of the Problem, Objectives of the Study, Justification, Scope, Methodology, Historicism and Literature, Assessment Criteria of poetics of historicism, and Literature Review. Chapter Two examines the Reconstruction of Nigerian Civil War in Isidore Okpewho's* ***The Last Duty*** *and Elechi Amadi's* ***Sunset In Biafra****. Chapter Three deals with the Discourse of Second World War As a Historical Event in Biyi Bandele's* ***Burma Boy.*** *And Chapter Four is the concluding chapter.*

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

1.0 CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

As Chidi Amuta (1988) puts it, the Nigerian civil war literatures represent a "significant step towards the politicization of the Nigerian literary imagination". Similarly the Second World War has also continued to attract intellectual discourse especially by African Scholars on the role played by Africans in its prosecution. Such treatises have often questioned the rationale behind the participation of Africans in a war that was not theirs. However, analysts of the international political system such as Louis J. Halle (1984) and K.J. Holsti (1972), have dubbed the Second World War as 'the war to end all wars' on accounts of its gruesome devastation. The depiction of the horrors of Second World War has further fuelled the resentment of African intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon, Aime Cessaire against the involvement of Africans.

The two war situations provide the setting for writers to accentuate and articulate the devastation suffered by individuals and societies. As evidenced by historical records and literatures, the two wars occasioned physical suffering and psychological dislocation. However, despite these gruesome effects, the two wars serve as platforms for Africans and Nigerians respectively to reassess their conditions and the means by which they contribute to nation-building, world peace and progress.

This study is premised on the conviction that wars, like revolutions, are historical convulsions usually with devastating effects on the psychology of individuals and societies. In this context, the novels used in this study are assessed as an imaginative

reconstruction, or the telling, of historical experiences and this is thrust on the framework of historicism. Historicism both as a theory and literary discourse emerged as a "critical movement insisting on the prime importance of historical context to the interpretation of texts of all kinds" (Hamilton: 1996). This is a complete departure from – and even subordinates – the assumptions of formalism which discountenance the important correspondence between literature and the reality that shapes it. Formalists argue that 'literature was not and could not be a reflection of reality but only a particular semiotically organized signification of it. And that literary texts tend only to make that reality strange, to dislocate the habitual perceptions of the real world so as to make it the object of a renewed attentiveness'.

In contrast, however, historicism, apart from its concern with situating any statement in its historical context, also typically "doubles back on itself to explore the extent to which any historical enterprise inevitably reflects the interests and bias of the period in which it was written" (Hamilton: 1996). As philosophers and scholars have tried to show since the ancient times, history and fiction have close affinity. Aristotle demonstrated this by concluding that "history was distinguished from poetry not by greater seriousness of purpose but by the different balance of probability and possibility proper to each discourse" (Hamilton: 1996). Plato's use of myth to describe the ultimate truths of philosophy implicates history in fiction (Hamilton: 1996).

Similarly, at the twilight of the formalist period in Russia, Mukarovsky of the Czech Structuralism, notes that "the work of art exists as an 'aesthetic object' located in the consciousness of an entire community (Hartland: 1999). According to him, this

inevitably *"confers enormous power upon the community and the predispositions which it brings to the business of construction"* (Hartland: 1999). Mukarovsky further argues that *"the very boundaries of what is to be construed as aesthetic are socially determined and immensely variable from period to period"* (Hartland: 1999). This means that history and fiction form important relationship especially within literary discourse and that external factors, or what Foucault calls 'exteriority of accidents, form important discourse of historicism.

This study then is an affirmation of the assumptions of historicism which raises the possibility of locating texts of all kinds in their historical contexts. It, however, does not pretend to be the first of its kind in the field of literary appreciation, but perhaps the first in the application of historicism to the analysis of texts under consideration. It, therefore, affirms that Biyi Bandele's novel, Burma Boy, is an expose of both the historical role of Nigerians in the Second World War, and the history of the events that shaped the war. In the same context, Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty and Elechi Amadi's Sunset in Biafra are no less telling representations of the dastardly effects of the Nigerian civil war on individuals and communities.

Each of these three novels represents a striking metaphor and satirical representations of the gruesome effects of war on Nigerians both at home and abroad. Together they succeed as an interpretation of the histories of the wars they depict. What is particularly striking about these novels nonetheless is the extent to which historical data is fictionalized and presented '*as the story'* of both the Second World War and the Nigerian civil war. In doing this, the thin line dividing facts from

fiction is blurred, and attempt is made to reconcile history to literature as modes of mutually reinforcing conception of reality. For instance, the blurb accompanying Biyi Bandele's Burma Boy indicates that it is not only *"the first novel to depict the experiences of black African soldiers in the Second World War"* but also *"a story of real-life battles"*…(2007).

Similary, the commentary by the The Times Literary Supplement on Elechi Amadi's Sunset In Biafra quotes the writer as saying *"this is not a story of the war"; it is an intimate, personal story, told for its own sake"* (1973), perhaps as a way of exonerating himself from the animosity that the war engendered. However, such animosity is the thrust of Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty as it touches off on *"fundamental social bonds and institutions such as marriage and friendship thereby exposing individuals to often difficult moral choices"* (Amuta: 1988).

The novels under consideration belong to the world's tradition of war literature. To be sure, war literatures generally seek to recreate historical experiences, a past which always seeks to be the present because as Yuri Nagibin (1985) argues, *"war will never become the past for those who still carry bits of lead in their flesh and bones, the lead of the losses in their hearts, and the eternal burden on memory and mind…".* This dialectical relationship between past and present underscores historicism as a discourse. In other words, historicism like the post modernist discourse, "distrust not only tradition but also any interpretation which does not acknowledge that its history of the past is relativised by being also a history of the present" (Hamilton: 1996).

The writers whose works are treated here have been aided by history and literature in the way they articulated the travails and psychological trauma of their characters. This means that there is a reconciliation of the fragile boundary that exists between what is probable, which is literature, and what is possible, which is history, in the appropriation of the stories for the novels. This is made possible through the use of imagination, self-reflexivity, and the emplotment of the stories in the reconstruction of the events of the wars. In other words, as fiction writers, they have attempted to find *"ways of making the possible and the probable interact, balancing truth to the facts against the need for those facts to make sense"* (Hamilton: 1996). In this sense, the writers have employed the realism of the novel and the hard facts of history to depict the war situations as an insistent reminder of man's unsociability.

This is in conformity with Hayden White's reference to the historical work as a *"verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that classifies past structures and processes in order to explain what they were by representing them as models".* The views of structural Linguists like Bakhtin's treatise on the polyphonic or dialogical novel can also be linked to this. According to Bakhtin, the novel is composed of many voices, that is, *"there are the different"* voices of the speaking characters, the different voices of narrators within the text, the different voices of 'reproduced' letters or journals, and the different voices assumed by the author in addressing the reader" (Hartland: 1999). To him, *"many authorial manners are infact borrowings from non-fictional discourses: the discourse of the historian, for example, or the travel-writer, or the moral assayist"* (Hartland: 1999).

Given this praxis, therefore, the texts under consideration, being a dialogue with the past, can be taken as polyphonic or dialogical novels as well as verbal structures which typify them as narrative prose discourse. This is moreso because of their inclusion of, and indebtedness to, non-fictional discourses. It can then be argued that the writers under consideration wrote as historicists in the sense that it is possible to situate their novels within the historical contexts to which they refer, and to the extent that their articulation and depiction of the stories bear an interpretation (or understanding) of the periods of the wars.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

Although there is a plethora of critical works such as Chidi Amuta (1988), Funsho Aiyejina (1988), Akachi Ezeigbo (1991), Christopher Anyokwu (2008), and Hugh Hodges (2009) on Nigerian civil war literatures, none of these uses strictly the critical perspective of historicism. Christopher Anyokwu's (2008) essay, "Inheritance of Loss: Narrative and history in Helon Habila's Measuring Time, is not on the Nigerian civil war but richly reviews literatures on the mediating role of imagination in historiography thereby foregrounding the historicity of the discourse of Measuring Time. Akachi Ezeigbo's book Fact and Fiction in the Literature of Nigerian Civil War (1991) as the name implies, only scours through the fictionalization of the lived facts of the Nigerian civil war thereby skirting the discourse of historicism.

Similarly, Chidi Amuta's essay, "*Literature of the Nigerian civil war*" (1988) only traces the development of the civil war literature and their thematisation of the war experiences. While Funsho Aiyejina's essay, "Isidore Okpewho" (1988) focuses on

the thematic preoccupation of Okpewho's novels including The Last Duty. These critical outputs veer off the critical perspective of historicism. Anyokwu's essay is perhaps the only closest to it but it is discounted here because the novel it analyses is not specifically on Nigerian civil war but touches on the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra leone. Hugh Hodge's essay *"Writing Biafra: Adichie, Emecheta, and the Dilemma's of Biafran War Fiction"* (2009) similarly acknowledges the discourse of historicism but counterpoises this by periscoping the problem writers of fiction on Nigerian civil war face on how to reconcile or at least balance the competing demands of historicism and storytelling. He thus concerns himself with the refutation of the call by Eddie Iroh for 'an unbiased, total assessment of the whole tragedy' that is the Nigerian civil war.

This then leaves a huge gap in the existing knowledge and discourse in critical literatures on the Nigerian civil war especially given the discourse of historicism. The same can be said pertaining to literatures on the roles of Nigerians in the Second World War, for which a search in the Internet revealed nothing. By and large, this study is an attempt to fill this gap by investigating the extent to which the texts selected here are reducible to the tenets of historicism. In other words, this study aligns the contents of these texts to the tenets of historicism in order to properly situate their discourse in historical, non-fictional contexts. This is a significant contribution to the body of critical literatures on war especially the underlining traditions or historical contexts that spanned reconstruction of events that shaped the texts.

In the main, this study is premised on the proposition that Biyi Bandele's Burma Boy, Elechi Amadi's Sunset in Biafra, and Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty rely on archaeological sources to reconstruct the experiences and the battles waged in both the Second World War and the internecine Nigerian civil war thereby building a sense of history through representation of their human scale. The texts are overt thematisation of the processes of historical representations offering literary contextualization of the events during the Second World War and the Nigerian Civil War. In this context, the texts achieve a heightened historical significance marked by their historical distance on one hand, and fictionally fulfilling a progressive rationality which connects the present with the past. In other words, the contexts which are embedded in the texts signify the referential past, while the texts as presently constituted are the present of that past. This is a significant contribution to the existing body of literatures on the two wars depicted in the texts.

This is allied to the proposition that the texts, in addition to being reconstruction of the past, are also the textualization of the present of that past. This makes the stories not true or false, but intelligible, coherent, consistent, and persuasive. After all, what can be more truth-revealing than fiction in the guise of history? This is more so for the fact that the issues of imperial and primordial tribal power relations which constitute the contextual and textual basis of the texts are still a present reality in Nigeria and the world respectively. This means that as a putative and crafted conversation with the past, or the verbal structure that is a model of the past structures and processes, the novels no less perpetuate traditions which ensure the historical negotiation between past and present. By also striving to establish this

continuity this study significantly departs from existing war literatures which treat wars merely as historical records and past events, and so a cessation.

Thirdly, the historicity of the texts itself circumscribes their distinctiveness within an economy of other texts. This distinctiveness describes not just the traditions reflected by the texts, but also the significance of the peculiar events recounted in the structuring of the texts which enhance cognition of their teleological and ontological basis. This marks out the texts as different from say Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart or Ngugi Wa Thiongo's Weep Not, Child both of which achieve a heightened historical significance but can not be classified as war novels. This possibility offered by this study is by all means a propitious contribution to the body of Nigerian and African literature. This study addresses itself to the specific problem of the dearth of critical works that investigate the close connectedness of literary texts on the Nigerian Civil War and the Second World War to their historical contexts from the strict standpoint of historicism.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

In terms of its objectives, this thesis is designed to:

* Substantiate the historicists' claim that any statement – philosophical, historical or aesthetic – can be situated in its historical context, and that in this regard, the novel form, is a flexable and veritable source of discourse that negotiates between past and present;

* Prove that the discourse of historicism is all about textual reconstruction of the past, that is, from tissues of past citations, bits of codes, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social language and documents already in circulation in some form or other; and

* Illustrate the discourse of historicism with war literatures as a way of authenticating their distinctiveness within the economy of other texts and thus presents an analytical discourse on the constitutive process of war literatures as a continuum in the search for identity, stability, and the true meaning of good and evil by individuals and societies.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

This study covers the spectrum of the Second World War and the Nigerian Civil War as enunciated by Biyi Bandele, in *Burma Boy*, Isidore Okpewho in *The Last Duty*, and Elechi Amadi in *Sunset In Biafra*. These novels showcase the historicity of the two wars as well as the concomittant effects of the wars on Nigerians. Valid examples can be found in these novels which illustrate the historicity of the texts.

It is thus accepted as given by this researcher that the novels under study belong largely but not exclusively to the tradition of world's war literatures which are circumscribed by their distinctiveness within an economy of other texts.

METHODOLOGY:

In this study, the library method is adopted for its appropriateness and convenience. This methodological approach entails data collection from secondary

sources such as critical works, treatises, and documented materials usually from the library, the internet, and the book stores for the purpose of interpreting the primary texts. This relates to the qualitative research methodology used mostly in the Humanities disciplines as a means of collecting a variety of empirical data on case studies, personal experiences or introspection, life story, interviews, observation, historical narratives, visual texts, which describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in the life of an individual. This means that the qualitative research methodology is concerned with the interpretation of concepts and ideas and the meaning people bring to them. Therefore, this approach is not wholly scientific in the sense of trying to prove the truth claim of any particular argument, but instead study things in their natural settings and adopt a multi-method approach to its subject matter. This, therefore, means that reference materials on the general and specific concepts of historicism, reviews and analysis of the primary texts as well as treatises on war literatures generally will be relied upon.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY:

This study is justified by the need to provide a basis for the historicist interpretation of the texts on the Nigerian Civil War and the Second World War. This is more so for the fact that historicism has sparked interest in the process of rediscovering the past by investigating the extra-textual source of the reality represented in historical narratives or literary texts. This interest has continued to generate debates into which this study will give some insights.

Apart from sustaining interest in, and continuing the debate on, the application of historicism to the texts under study, this study enriches Nigerian, nay African, Literature with its analytical representation of the discourse of historicism, and by this fact widen understanding of this form of cultural production in this part of the world.

HISTORICISM AND LITERATURE:

This study is based on the conceptual vista of historicism as a literary discourse. In this regard, the constitutive theoretical tools of historicism will be used to examine the texts selected for this study. This is because of its appropriateness and centrality to the discourse on the reconstruction or recovery of the past especially its amenability to literary discourse.

Historicism, both as a theory and literary discourse, emerged as an anti-enlightenment reaction to grand narratives or *"the practice of deducing from first principles truths about how people are obliged to organize themselves socially and politically"* (Hamilton: 1996). In other words, historicists are opposed to the notion that understanding or evaluation of cultures or human behaviour approximate the ideal pattern of natural laws governing such cultures. Instead, historicists argue that *"human nature is too various for such legislation to be universally applicable"* (Hamilton: 1996).

Given this praxis, historicists' discourse seeks to redouble our understanding of the fluid interaction between history and literature or other disciplines. However, as a literary discourse, it develops a two perspective towards interpretation of texts. On the one hand, it presupposes that any *"statement – philosophical, historical, aesthetic*

or whatever should be situated in its historical context". This perspective is called the hermeneutical historicism. On the other hand, it is a discourse which *"doubles back on itself to explore the extent to which any historical enterprise inevitably reflects the interests and bias of the period in which it was written"* (Hamilton: 1996).

By and large, what is suggested by this two perspective is that the discourse of historicism is dialectical or divisive in nature, that is, that it always advances two level analyses. At once, historicism is skeptical about itself. Yet, it also offers both its past and its present for ideological scrutiny. In this later sense, historicism always acknowledges that the *"history of the past is relativised by being also a history of the present"* (Hamilton: 1996).

Understood as such, historicism as a literary discourse becomes a *"critical movement insisting on the prime importance of historical context to the interpretation of texts of all kinds"* (Hamilton: 1996). Since the ancient times, philosophers and scholars alike have concerned themselves with the attempts to separate history from fiction. In this regard, Aristotle saw the distinction between history and poetry as based not on any *"greater seriousness of purpose but by the different balance of probability and possibility proper to each discourse*" (Hamilton: 1996). While Plato's recourse to art, in this case, myth, to explain the nature of knowledge and mortality no less implicates history in fiction. All this points to the fact that a fragile boundary exists between history and fiction.

As such, while poetry or literature functions on the basis of probability, history produces a set of possibilities. However, as Paul Hamilton (1996) notes, *"if the*

historian tells a coherent tale, one that has point and purpose, its probability may undermine its possibility and leave the author justified as a philosopher and discredited as an historian." The historian in this case has assumed the role assigned to literature however *"possible, faithfulness to what happened or could have happened"* (Hamilton: 1996). This then is the raison d'etre of those writers who appropriate war history in the sense that in trying to be faithful to what happened or could have happened they end up with a record of a host of improbabilities which have logical coherence or contain beginning, middle, end and reached some cathartic conclusion. In other words, such historical accounts fulfill instead a fictional or literary function. It is argued here that writers under consideration have appropriated stories of wars or historical data but variously used such materials literarily.

This study therefore adopts the divinatory or psychological aspect of hermeneutical historicism. Hermeneutics generally understood is a theory of understanding, that is linguistic and psychological understanding. This is why Dilthey in Paul Hamilton (1996) defines hermeneutics as *"the understanding of recorded expression"*. Both Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey agree that *"the forms of understanding common to individuals have objectified themselves in the world of the senses"* (Hamilton: 1996). This means that understanding (or historical understanding) is both subjective and inter-subjective. In other words, historical understanding is an empathetic understanding to the extent that, as Dilthey argues, *"the understanding of past events certainly betokens … as a sort of empathy by which we transpose ourselves into a past not our own so as to re-live it"* (Hamilton: 1996). In this context, as Dilthey further stresses in Paul Hamilton (1996):

> *Transposition is made possible by the interpretation of publicly available signs and symbols; it is dependent on permanently fixed expressions being available so that understanding can always return to them.*

Hermeneutics in its subjective or psychological aspect deals with the formative experiences which authors acquire as precocious beings, because as Dilthey opines, *"the reflection of a person about himself remains the standard and basis for understanding history*" (Hamilton: 1996). This comes in form of the 'spirit rising above the letter. This again means that hermeneutics' takes as it's *"objects an inner life complementary to its outward expression"* (Hamilton: 1996). The means of achieving this is through empathy.

By and large, *"…empathy remains the source of coherent literary interpretation"* because as Dilthey proffers *"….states of mind are constantly expressed in gestures, facial changes and words and have an objective existence in institutions, states, churches, and seats of learning, these provide the context of history"* (Hamiton:1996). Put differently, Raymond Aron states *that "we can establish the significance of an action by discovering the intentions of the actors"* (Conan: 1978). He notes that:

> *History is the reconstitution by and for those who are living of the lives of those who are dead… the endeavour to get to know an ancestor whose prestige and glory have survived to the present; the praise of the virtues that have made the city;… in every case, the memory, be it of the individual or the group, starts from fiction, myth, or legend and clears a painful path towards the truth (Conan: 1978).*

To Historicists like Wilhelm Dilthey, poems, narratives and stories are 'better models than science for self – understanding'. This suggests that as details of individual's experiences literature embodies historical or cultural contexts which aid

understanding of texts or narratives. Apparently, both Wilhelm Dilthey and Raymond Aron agree that literature, as an imaginative art, is at the heart of historical reconstruction and cognition. Raymond Aron puts it succinctly thus, *"historical science, then, begins (speaking of course of a logical and not a temporal succession) by reaction to the imagined happenings of the past"* (Conan: 1978).

This is true to the extent that the novel form is flexible and elaborate in its admission of all sorts of information, which is why it is suitable for the reconstruction of historical happenings and experiences. It is, to say the least, the junkyard of varied forms of experiences. That is why it is possible for novelists living in the present to reach back in time to synthesize facts there-from by means of imagination in order to relive them. That is also what makes it possible for the novelist to project two levels of consciousness (historical consciousness, that is, in the case of historicism) of the writer, and the protagonists. The consciousness of the writer synthesizes historical materials, while that of the protagonists relate with a wider stream of experiences both within and outside the text. Thus, the experiences so related become an ensemble of history and fiction-it becomes 'the story' in its logical succession.

Nonetheless, historical knowledge is grafted *by relating a part to the whole mainly because, as Raymond Aron opines "historical selection is guided by the questions that the present asks of the past"* (Conan: 1978). Raymond Aron further stresses that in war literatures, 'it is possible to understand the movement of each particular regiment only by seeing it in relation to the battle as a whole'.

According to him,

> *Only by putting the battle in its place in the history of the Punic Wars is it possible to understand its causes and consequences and only by putting the Punic Wars in their place in the whole course of ancient history—in the struggle for mastery of the Mediterranean, in the ups and downs of imperial unification and the balance of power—is it possible to understand the Punic wars themselves* (Conan: 1978).

Given this praxis, the texts under study serve as systems of reference or what Max Weber calls of interests, for the causes and consequences of the Second World War and the Nigerian Civil War. In the main, they reveal the states of mind of the actors and the master-minds of the two wars thereby yielding their historical contexts. As war literatures, they are not only composed of that stuff of objective mind (subjectivity) of which history is made; they are also expressive of recorded symbols which demand *'empathy rather than recognition of their truth'.*

To this end, it will suffice to relate these texts to the principles of war in order to understand them. Emmanuel Kant enunciates that war literatures generally fulfill two kinds of history – viz, causal and purposive. The casual history represents non-rational urges, animal existence or state of nature which equates to the stage of man's unsociability and the killing field of war. It is in this regard that Dmitri Likhachev, (1985) describes war as *"contraindicated to life and civilization, it is anti-culture."*

While the purposive kind of history is the teleological aspect that results in the development of distinctive rationality or a reconstruction of war situation for the purpose of returning understanding or rationality to it. According to Kant, *"wars are nature's way of realigning states in patterns more productive of its purpose for us"*

(Hamilton: 1996). Wars, strifes, antagonism and all the selfish desires that are not compatible with other people's satisfaction necessarily lead to a search for ingenious social solutions. War literatures therefore represent the fruits of man's unsociability because in the main, *"they testify to how the social order enlists our common animal drives in the service of distinctively rational fulfillment nature intends for us"* (Hamilton: 1996).

In this wise, Biyi Bandele's Burma Boy, Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty and Elechi Amadi's Sunset In Biafra are not just another gripping tales of anguish, horror and suffering occasioned by war situations, they are also empathetic reconstructions of real-life battles which happened once upon a time between imperial and regional powers. They are gruesome tales of hegemonic powers trying to subdue each other.

In the case of Biyi Bandele's Burma Boy, the activities of the group of soldiers known as the Chindits can only be understood against the backdrop of 'King Joji's' summon to the British Colonies to send men to fight in the Second World War. This is captured thus:

> *King Joji, monarch of Ingila, is fighting a war in a land called Boma and he wants our help. He wants all able-bodied men to go to Kaduna and join his band of warriors* (pg 42-3).

Apparently, this summon is consequent upon an amphibious assault on the British South East Asian colony of Malaya as well as the destruction by the Imperial Japanese Navy of 188 planes belonging to the U.S. Navy and killing thousands of American servicemen and civilians on the Hawalian Island of Oahu. The resultant American reaction was a declaration of war by President Franklin Roosevelt against

Japan. These pockets of incidents as well as the eventual role played by Africans in the prosecution of the Second World War can best be understood against the backdrop of the bigger picture of the British Empire and colonial systems and the demand by Germany, Japan and Italy for the return of, and share in, colonies especially in Africa. This demand also followed in the wake of the world economic depression. All these incidents have far-reaching implication on the way the Second World War was fought.

Besides the bombings, the rocket fires, and the gun-shots which engaged the Chindits at the battle-fronts, Burma Boy is also the story of power relation and struggles between imperial powers or the Allied forces and the Axis forces; and between the colonialists and the colonized. Although, the novel achieves a sense of historical distance, it is nonetheless the story of the ongoing structuring of an emasculating world order thereby achieving the effect of here and now. Hence it is the story of the present subjugation of Africa by the Western powers.

At this instance, the novel becomes a historical negotiation between past and present by the tradition of imperial domination revealed in its narration. To be sure, tradition, according to Gadamer, is the *"process by which we both question the past and feel addressed by it"* (Hamilton: 1996). He stresses equally that tradition

> *…demonstrates that we understand the past by appreciating our historical distance from it, this difference however is only graspable by us through traditions linking us with the past* (Hamilton: 1996).

The pattern of relationship between the imperial powers and the periphery or between the colonialists and the colonized is a long standing tradition that has been

recurring in African literature. Thus, as Foucault argues, *"history records relations of power; not relations of meaning"* (Hamilton: 1996). This power relation underlines the structure of the story in Burma Boy. Another tradition revealed in the novel is that of the Yan Kama performance mode, a comic pastiche, in Hausa which bears a character like Ali Banana.

While in Elechi Amadi's Sunset in Biafra and Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty, the time-worn tradition which connects both past and present in their recounting of the Nigerian civil war is that of the herd instinct that boils down to regional cum tribal power relations. In this context, Elechi Amadi in Sunset in Biafra opines that *"…tribal loyalties are strong enough to generate civil wars"* (pg 23). This statement is justified considering series of tribally motivated utterances of some prominent Nigerian leaders preceding the civil war. For instance, in 1945 an Ibo lawyer was quoted to have said *"Igbo domination of Nigeria was only a matter of time"* (Falola, *et al:* 2003). Similarly, in 1947, Chief Obafemi Awolowo referred to Nigeria as a *"mere geographical expression"* (Falola, *et al:* 2003). Also, in 1948 Abubakar Tafawa Balewa accentuated this view when he said *"this presence of unity is artificial and it ends only in this chamber"* (Falola *et al:* 2003).

These statements demonstrate that Nigeria is a tottering giant seething with tribal loyalties. This has been the bane of Nigeria's nation-building efforts. It doubtless eventuated in the internecine civil war. Funsho Aiyejina (2003) notes, The Last Duty is a *"metaphor of a failed marriage, this time, the political marriage between the various ethnic groups in Nigeria".* Thus, the Urukpe and Simba border

communities in the novel represent both the Nigerian Federation and Biafra nation engaged in fierce battles. In fact, the term Simba historically refers to the rebel Simbas in the Congo Democratic Republic.

By and large, the primary texts selected for this study represent a kind of conversation with the past which serve to perpetuate the tradition of power relations between the metropol and the periphery, or the dominant regional and tribal blocs.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA FOR THE POETICS OF HISTORICISM:

Historicists, whether old or new, are, at least, agreed on all of the following constitutive modes of interpreting texts of all kind. However, these apparatus criticus of literary historicism do not follow a definite pattern as they are scattered in essays on historicism, and so they are not final altogether!

* Historicist historical writing always manifest traceable archaeological and historical materials which link the work to its putative historical context. That is why, it is possible for Stephen Greenblatt to link Shakespeare's plays to documents taken from the 'slime of history' such as diaries, and autobiographies, records of dreams, chronicles of festivals and local fairs, protocols of witches burned at the stake, etc;

* In this connection, historicist historical writing is a multi-voiced textuality.

  This is Mukarovsky's idea of a polyphonic or dialogic novel which embodies diverse discourses that interact with, define, and are in turn shaped by their culture;

* This means that historicist historical writing is panoramic in that it strives to provide its readers with as wide a survey of the most important developments, experiences and events in our history as the historian (or historicist) can achieve;

* To this extent, the historicist historical writing is necessarily emploted especially metaphorically, that is, seeing one thing from the point of view of another. In this case, metaphor is a veritable means by which the historicist 'effects an organization of our knowledge; and

* By and large, the historicist historical writing embodies the life of the author, historical situations which can be appropriated to unlock the textual meaning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A plethora of literatures exist which variously distinguish between the old or traditional historicism and the New Historicism, though not differing considerably from each other. On the one hand, scholars like F.R. Ankersmit (1995) and Paul Hamilton (1996) acknowledge that the old or traditional historicism is a product of German historical thought which emerged as an anti-enlightenment reaction to grand narratives that characterized the natural law philosophy. Ankersmit argues that the Enlightenment historical writing takes "the true statement as its model" thereby positing that "reality is made up of entities essentially remaining the same in the course of time." Within this purview, he further stresses, the ontology of true statement suggests that the world consists of objects "all more or less

remaining the same even while acquiring or losing certain properties in the course of their histories."

However, as Paul Hamilton (1996) succinctly argues, it is this notion that understanding or evaluation of cultures or human behaviour approximates the ideal pattern of natural laws governing all cultures that is repudiated by the old historicism. Historicists, he contends, argue that "human nature is too various for such legislation to be universally applicable." Thus, as a nineteenth century historical turn, the old historicism, in the view of Dwight W. Hoover (1992), stresses:

> *The need for historians to fathom the mental universes of past cultures and societies in order to understand them…and a belief that each culture and society was a product of its historical circumstance and, hence, that no comparison, or rather evaluation, on a single standard or scale could be made.*

As an organized body of knowledge, historicism lays claim to one or both of two assumptions, which are, that there is an organic succession of development; and that local conditions and peculiarities influence the results in a decisive way (Wikipedia: 2008). In this regard, it presupposes "that to understand a social phenomenon is to be able to trace its genesis and development (Wikipedia: 2008).

On the other hand, the new historicism, though not differing considerably from this postulation, nevertheless advances a critique of the traditional historicism while stating its own oeuvre. Jurgen Pieters (2000) reiterates Stephen Greenblatt's oft-quoted critique of traditional historicism that the "traditional historicists monologize history: they reduce historical periods to a single, homogeneous tradition and they consider what they come up with in their research to be historical facts rather than

'the product of the historian's imagination." It is in this sense, explains Anton Kaes (1992), that "the term 'New Historicism posits itself on two fronts against New criticism and the 'Old historicism.' He further states that, in contrast to the old historicism, and the linguistic turn marked by post structuralism and deconstruction, new historicism offers "the richness and resonance of a multi-voiced textuality" which makes it a "blanket term for all critical work that emphasizes the historicity of the text and the textuality of history." This assertion contains the dialectics of the interplay between context and text.

The principles of new historicism resemble those of the old historicism not only in terms of the dialectics of the historicity of the text and the textuality of history (or context and text) but also in relation to their use of such terms as cultural practices or cultural context, historical understanding or historical idea, historical context, systems of culture or cultural poetics, and objective mind. Both the old and the new historicism similarly agree on the dialectics of past and present.

For instance, while relating philosophy to its historical context Whilhelm Dilthey states that "from the essential nature of a philosophical world-view is derived its relationship to the systems of culture" (Hamilton: 1996). And that "philosophy historically understood, grows out of and then theorizes unphilosophical cultural practices" (Hamilton: 1996). Dilthey also states that systems of culture "cover a broad band of religious, legal, political, social and aesthetic institutions" (Hamilton: 1996). While corroborating this assertion, Stephen Greenblatt calls these systems of culture the 'poetics of culture' which covers a whole "complex of minute transactions that

takes place between literature, culture, and society at the level of the texts" (Kaes: 1992). Anton Kaes (1992) then observes that "as a poetics of culture, New Historicism investigates systems of cultural and social practices that often resonate up to this day within a literary work."

Similarly, both Wilhelm Dilthey and H.G Gadamer though differing in their approaches to hermeneutical historicism, agree on the historical context which to them means objective mind, or subjectivity. H.G. Gadamer argues that while "the world is objectified by scientific knowledge … in a partial, instrumental fashion' it is nonetheless 'tailored to the needs of the human subject and so subjectivised (Hamilton: 1996). To him both subjectivizing and objectifying are refractions of each other. By the same token, Dilthey states that *"the forms of understanding common to individuals have objectified themselves in the world of the senses",* of the objective mind, that is. And to him the sphere of this objective mind extends

> *… From the style of life and the forms of social intercourse to the system of purpose which society has created for itself and to custom, law, state, religion, art, science and philosophy. For even the work of genius represents ideas, feelings and ideas commonly held in an age and environment.*

And so, for Dilthey the only way to understand the cultural language of a person or the past is by *"recreating in ourselves its expression of subjectivity".* For according to him, *"self understanding makes use of the communal forms of objective mind already in the public sphere, automatically locating autobiography in its historical context"* (Hamilton: 1996).

Given this praxis, the historical context or systems of culture, objective mind or historical understanding form a critical plank of the theory of historicism. It also

provides the template for the dialectical viewpoint of both the old and new historicism as advanced by several philosophers and thinkers among them G.W. Hegel, Friedrich Meinecke, Samuel Pufendorf, Emmanuel Kant, Gimbattista Vico, J.G. Herder, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, H.G Gadamer, Michael Foucault and a host of others. Each of these philosophers and thinkers has explained the dialectics of historicism as a negotiation between past and present. In other words, everything in the present is given shape and substance by what precedes it, just as the past is contained in the present. In other words, while rationalizing the dialectical thrust of historicism, Richard Kroner (1946) states that "the past is present in so far as we represent it in our memory or historical imagination" and that "the past is the present remembered." In this wise, to the historicist imagination

> *… History is the past, or perhaps the past seen in and through the present; and the historical task is to attempt a reconstruction of the past, including, perhaps, the present of that past (Hamilton: 1996).*

That is why Clifford Geertz in Paul Hamilton (1996) notes that *"everything is the context of something else; nothing is the privileged repository of significance."* Hegel's dialectics is contained in the statement that *"philosophy is the history of philosophy".* Hegel's position is clarified in his perception of the *"relationship between individuals and societies as organic even their social discourse is mediated by language and language is rooted in etymology and unique character"* (Wikipedia: 2008). Thus, in Hegel's view,

> *To understand why a person is the way he is, you must put that person in a society: and to understand that society, you must understand its history, and the forces that shaped it. (Wikipedia: 2008)*

This underscores how the present reaches back to the past to authenticate itself and thereby give significance to the past. This interplay of both the past and the present is replicated in the dialectical viewpoints advanced by Emmanuel Kant and Giambattista Vico. Kant's dialectic is contained in his idea of two kinds of history – causal and purposive. He enunciates that man's unsociability provides the context for nature's purpose of realigning social order towards a rational end. To him these two kinds of history work in tandem to bring about human progress. According to him, "*their natural competitiveness must be harmonized within a commonwealth once more rationalizing this natural unsociability for the furtherance of human progress"* (Hamilton: 1996). Similarly, Vico's dialectic is contained in his idea of courses and recourses, which hint at the vestigial natural law guaranteeing that the courses nature charted in the past inevitably have their recourses in the present. He shows *"these repetitions as evidence for the regularity of the underlying natural law of the nations"* (Hamilton: 1996).

In the same manner, Friedrich Schleiermacher relates the interplay of the past and the present in the relationship between the psychology of an individual (or author) or what he calls 'internal speaking of thought' and his language (or grammatical system) or what he calls the *'shared language'*. In other words, as he puts it*,* " *a particular word in order to have meaning must inhere within a grammatical system"* (Hamilton: 1996). This means that *"the psychological insight of*

his theory serves to intensify our linguistic understanding of the expressive resources available to an author at a particular moment" (Hamilton: 1996). Paul Hamilton (1996) puts it succinctly thus,

> *Complementary impulse of psychological empathy in Schleiermacher's hermeneutics describes a process which may issue in the common language we all use to describe our world, but which … exists prior to that.*

It can be seen from the foregoing, that historicism is a theory substantiated and circumscribed by hermeneutic tradition. This study therefore adopts the hermeneutical historicism and its psychological or divinatory aspect against its grammatical aspect towards understanding literary historicism.

Hermeneutics, as Wilhelm Dilthey defines it, is the methodology of the understanding of recorded expression. It is also the art of interpretation which is rooted in the interpretation of Christian religious texts. Its abiding religious use is consequent upon the compression of divine purpose to human expression in order to become comprehensible' which then allows for endless interpretation. However, hermeneutics survived nineteen century secularization to become a general theory of understanding.

As Paul Hamilton (1996) puts it, hermeneutics can *"perversely require us to reinterpret the very notions of tradition and continuity on which it is based."* To be sure, *"tradition is the mode in which our existence is historically differentiated and thus authenticated"* (Hamilton: 1996). In other words, hermeneutics *"demonstrates that we understand the past by appreciating our historical distance from it, this difference however is only graspable by us through traditions linking us with the*

past" (Hamilton: 1996). In this sense, tradition is a necessary part of making sense of the present. That is why H.G. Gadamer finds it convenient to use tragedy, an aesthetic experience, as a demonstration of the way tradition authenticate the present. For Gadamer, tragedy

> *Show we can grasp a common being persisting behind otherwise mutually exclusive distinctions – pity and fear, sameness and difference, past and present. We understand the play by entering the tradition which makes this existential increase possible.*

For instance, in the case of painting, the picture it presents does not disappear by merely pointing or indicating something else, *"but in its own being"* the picture shares in what it represents. And so Gadamer puts it succinctly that the *"existence or being which art brings into play is not an enlargement but the sheer authenticity of things … we hear that in being presented in play, what is emerges"* (Hamilton: 1996). To this extent, therefore, as Gadamer further argues,

> *… the art which thus puts you into play by that action itself become existent. In structuring your being anew, art enjoys a transformation into the true, and the being of its presentation is revealed. In getting you right it shows what it is.* (Hamilton: 1996).

F.R. Ankersmit (1995) further elaborates on this hermeneutical argument using the substantialist ontology as a point of departure between the Enlightenment historical writing and the new historicism. He states that the dialectics of Enlightenment historical writing presents "a permanent and persistent urge to invite causal language to invade the domain of the substance" where "the 'deeper' and not merely peripheral causes can be given for the phenomena studied by the historians have moved "outside the domain where the language of cause and

effect can properly be used" which effectively guarantees the art of historical representation or narrativity. However, he opines that, in the case of the new historicist discourse, "as soon as cause and effect enter the domain of substance, the substance is no longer the passive 'substratum separating causes from their effects', effects now become part of their causes and vice versa. Since both have now lost themselves in the substance, the substance may now present itself as the cause of its own effects and, hence, of its own history." This language of cause and effect (i.e. narrative language) which enters the domain of the substance (historical phenomenon) gives coherence to the past by means of what Stephen Greenblatt calls social energy. This concept of social energy is linked to Aristotle's linguistic *energeia* through which he says "things are set before the eyes by words that signify actuality" and as Jurgen Pieters (2000) explains is "manifested in the capacity to produce, shape, and organize collective physical and mental experiences." In this sense, the coherence of the past is a materialization of social energy which authenticates the historicist claim that the existence which art brings into play is the sheer authenticity of things, that is, "the art which thus puts you into play by that action itself becomes existent" (Hamilton: 1996).

These dialectical arguments also clarify into another dialectical supposition which Louis A. Montrose (1989) calls the textuality of history by which he means the textual traces of lived material existence of a given society. And so in Montrose's view, even the so-called historicity of texts – historical contexts or backgrounds – are texts. In this wise, Dominick Lacapra (1985) argues that "the context itself is a text of sorts…it can not become the occasion for a reductive

reading of texts." Or put differently but meaning the same thing, Anton Kaes (1992) states that "proceeding from the assumption that the historical 'background' is only accessible to us textually, it follows that the background itself becomes textualised and thus an object of interpretation."

Nevertheless, both notions of the historicity of texts and the textuality of history contest for space within the ambience of the novel as a narrative prose or expressive art. In this connection, the novel offers its form, that is, its narrativity or story telling mode, its subjective perception of objective reality through sensory responses and reasoning, its emplotment, to historical account. In other words, to paraphrase Catherine Belsey (1988), events, experiences, and activities all pass into history as past. These are then released, recollected, and reconstructed by the apparatus criticus or protocol of narratology, through the questions the present critic, writer or historian asks or wishes to investigate. Such reconstruction of the past is then aesthetically made to appear resplendent as new experience, as relived activity conformable to the patterns of literary discourse or convention. It is thus in this context that historicism is thought of as a 'perpetual present.'

It is also in this regard that Hayden White views the writing of history as a poetic process. To him, historical narratives are 'verbal artifacts' and the nature of historical representation is 'essentially provisional.' This points to the fact that, narrative form in history, as in fiction, is, to White, the product of imagination. And so in the words of Catherine Belsey (1988). *"Such a history is not offered as objective, authoritative, neutral or true. It is not outside history itself, or outside*

the present. On the contrary, it is part of history, part of the present. It is irreducibly textual, offering no place outside discourse from which to interpret or judge." Thus, the novel form exposes the process by which the past or history is represented in terms of a metafictional self-reflexivity.

The stories of the wars represented in the text under study constitute the omnipresent stream of life. In other words, the writers rewrite the past as stories in order to open it up to the present. That is why in the views of Yuri Nagibin (1985) the Second World War may have been history for many, *"but it will never become the past for those who still carry bits of lead in their flesh and bones, the lead of the losses in their hearts, and the eternal burden on memory and mind…"*

In the final analysis historicism as a literary discourse is the convergence of literary interpretation and historical explanation, at hermeneutical height, demanded by the particular modes of expression of different nations at different times. At this instance, literature and by implication the literary historicist, mediates between the past (its social and historical contexts) and the present (its attempt to authenticate itself), to give existential increase to that which it creates or to aesthetic experience. This mediating role of literature goes to acknowledge that the story it tells of the past is relativised by being also the story of the present, the empathetic present of an aesthetic experience.

Given that the task of a literary historicist is to reduce history to a narrative, or an expressive recording of what happened or could have happened, he also does this by using history or tradition as a trajectory between the past and its empathetic

reception. This ensures the contemplation of the situation depicted in a narrative or a story which *"experiences an increase in being; and which becomes an ontological basis of literature".* In other words, the novel form is a helpful medium within which the relationship between the historicity of texts or contextuality (the cultural specificity, the social embedment of all modes of writing) and the textuality of history or the text (which gives access to a full authentic past, a lived material existence) is played out.

By imposing logical sequence on raw historical data through the medium of the novel and imagination, it becomes possible to locate a pulsating story both in the past as well as in the here and now persisting behind the narration of an otherwise historical event. The story is made to come alive and takes a life of its own as if the actions are taking place all over again. Here, history is awakened in the narration of such events in a fictional form; history too rendered expressively and in an open-ended form of aestheticism.

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CHAPTER TWO:

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR IN ISIDORE OKPEWHO's *THE LAST DUTY* AND ELECHI AMADI's *SUNSET IN BIAFRA*

This chapter examines the relationship between Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty and Elechi Amadi's Sunset in Biafra and their historical contexts which are drawn from personal and vicarious experiences. Basically, historicism is concerned with the prime importance of historical contexts to the interpretation of texts of all kinds. To be sure, historicists take for granted the fact that *"history always manifests itself in the form of text"* (Oppermann: nd). This notion therefore negates the empiricist epistemology about objective reality. In other words, history is always narrated from *"…a certain point of view which can never attain certainty in any objective sense"* (Oppermann: nd). This certainly opens up a new vista in research undertaking to find out how text in deed is said to come to terms with its putative contexts.

This type of research undertaking is exemplified by Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Shakespearean Negotiations*, where, as explained by Anton Kaes (1992), he states that Shakespeare's play King Lear benefited from the circulation of Samuel Harsnett's tract entitled "A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures" which "railed against exorcists in the Catholic Church." According to Kaes, in the chapter on 'Shakespeare and the Exorcists; Greenblatt "works from the assumption that the names, motifs, and figures of speech in King Lear had been appropriated from Samuel Harsnett's tract" the theological polemic regarded "as the raw material and

historical background to the literary text." While further accentuating the historical contexts and the dynamic cultural field embedded in Shakespeare's plays, Anton Kaes (1992) notes that:

> *Diaries and autobiographies, records of dreams, chronicles of festivals and local fairs, protocols of witches burned at the stake and of exorcisms, primers on sexuality, descriptions of clothing and cosmetics, eyewitness accounts and illustrations of disease, insanity, birth and death, and so on: all these documents taken from the 'Slime of history' may be obscure but they are not irrelevant for the study of Shakespeare.*

Anton Kaes further states that these diverse sources reveal, for instance, "how around 1600 the human body was controlled, how deviance was regulated, how power was represented, how women were portrayed, and how political unrest was thematised." And that "these non-literary texts are themselves complex material and symbolic articulations of a society's imaginative and ideological structures."

This demonstration of how a text comes to terms with its putative contexts will serve as a paradigm for the analysis of the texts for this study. In the main, this task is remitted by three suppositions which are based upon the self-reflexivity of the writers as well as the historicity of the texts. Also, these suppositions are important vistas through which the past dissolves into literature. The suppositions are, that the writers are Nigerians of Eastern Nigerian extraction and so are products of the environment they wrote about; that the war situation and symbols depicted in the two novels point invariably to the Nigerian Civil War which provide substance for the texts; and that the social and political causes and effects of the war as well as the systems of culture of the Nigerian Society (i.e. Nigerian Army, Biafran Soldiers,

Cities, Infrastructure, names, etc.) replicated in the two novels provide their historical contexts.

In the main, the two writers under study have written their novels as Nigerians by drawing upon their personal and vicarious experiences of the Civil War. Thus, the two novels thematise the civil war experiences as a process of historical representations using literary contextualization of the events during the war. The writers self-reflexivity and imagination are veritable instruments in this process of reconstructing the Nigerian civil war. This means that Elechi Amadi reflects upon his personal experiences of the war both as its victim and participant, while Isidore Okpewho reflects his vicarious experience of the war using *"anthropological detail… to reinforce the fictional focus of his novel(s)"* (Aiyejina: 2001). Nonetheless, the two novels range from formal rewriting of remembered events, in the case of Amadi's Sunset in Biafra, to the recontextualising of the entire sociological climate of the war, in the case *of Okpewho's The Last Duty. It can then be claimed that the two novels "draw attention to how the documents of history turn into a fictional context in the writing process"* (Oppermann: nd).

In many respects, The Last Duty draws attention to the process of historical representation through literary contextualization of events of the civil war. This is couched in its persuasive human scale and referentiality which altogether evokes a sense of history behind the narrative. The novel exemplifies the complex ways by which the text and its contexts interact. For instance, the reference to the Federal war slogan *"To Keep Zonda one is a task that must be done!"* (pg 19) is an explicit

and deliberate fictionalization of its original text 'to keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done' to which the civil war effort and machinery was directed to achieving.

Similarly, Major Ali's reflection to the effect that *"guerrilla attacks have been visited on us, and now that the rebels have acquired increased air power from Europe we are the target of occasional air raids"* (pg 21), points glaringly to other texts of similar affirmation. In this context, Frederick Forsyth acknowledges in his book, The Biafra Story (1976) that *"the general level of Biafran weapons and firepower went steadily up during 1969".* He attributes this to several reasons, one of which is that:

> *During 1969 they acquired a substantial number of good-quality bazookas, and rockets to go with them. Some were of the Soviet type… others were the more complex French LRAC bazookas made in the Western world.*

Given this level of weaponry and capability, even Gen. Ojukwu could not help but to enthuse, *"we are infinitely better off in firepower than at any time since the war began"* (Forsyth: 1976). In addition to this, the Biafrans also had the service of European pilots and mercenaries who helped to fly their B25s, Minicons, and train a band of commandos who conducted occasional raids and guerrilla attacks.

Frederick Forsyth (1976) documents this fact thus, *"those who have actually fought with the Biafran forces have been a small handful comprising a German, Scot, South African, Italian, Englishman, Rhodesian, American (one each), two Flemings and two Frenchman"* (pg 115). The fact is, the Welsh-born South African, Taffy Williams, together with the German, Rolf Steiner, in April of 1969 helped to

form the Biafran Fourth Commando Brigade which played a *"widely publicized part in Biafran operations against the Federal Army"* (pg 132).

Similarly, the activity of the Minicons chronicled on page 94 of The Last Duty by Okpewho apparently points to the contribution of the veteran Swedish pilot, Count Carl Gustav Von Rosen, who introduced them to the Biafrans. Frederick Forsyth hints that on the Christmas day in 1968, Count Von Rosen discussed with him the plan to buy for the Biafrans "light aircraft of an extremely manoeuvrable type, fit them with rockets or bombs, and use them at tree top level *"…flying scarcely above the tops of the palm trees, they would be undetectable until they struck…"* (pg 149). This is what Okpewho describes in the following passage.

> *Suddenly we heard the faint buzzing of light craft…from the eastern horizon three Minicons came in formation, Skirting the tops of trees, threatening to whip off the foliage. They have to fly so low, these moths, to achieve anything like a hit (pg 94).*

Again Okpewho uses inscriptions on signboards as part of the historical documents in the process of scripting the text. The *"ambitious signboards"* read:

> *'Idhigu's Technical Radio Works'… German Medical Company (for Superior Medication)… 'Franco's Cut (International Barbers)'… 'Delta Massage Clinick (for Relief of Backy – ache and Instant Pregnancy of Woman, A Trial will conceive you)'…*

This does not only serve the purpose of Pastiche and Satire, the fact that they are in inverted comas also indicates that they are quoted and appropriated from a context. They also relate quite significantly to the tradition of the Ibos' commercial sense and practice of impressing prospective buyers on the genuineness of their products and services by using high-sounding and foreign names.

In the same breath, Okpewho re-echos Marxist revolutionary tropes and Frantz Fanon's discourse on national culture. On page 151, Okpewho even uses the title of Fanon's book The Wretched of the Earth when the character, Agbeyegbe says, *"…which is nothing compared to the terrible misfortune facing the wretched of the earth".* On page 147, Agbeyegbe reels out Marxist revolutionary tropes to be: doctrinal or ideological stage; the intellectual front; the strategic front where certain institutions are set up for the training of young, able men –able in mind and body; and the physical front, the fight. Although Frantz Fanon's Schema is in three stages, it nevertheless resembles the Marxist tropes that Okpewho reiterates. Fanon's Schema is that, *"the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power; the native is disturbed, he decides to remember what he is; and the fighting phase… a revolutionary literature"* (1963: 179).

In this context, this glaring Marxist revolutionary discourse substantially relates to the Focauldian claim that history records relations of oppression, which is why Agbeyegbe regards the civil war as a time "for us to take positive action" (pg 146). On this score, it can be inferred that Okpewho is "drawing attention to the process of textualisation as much as to the historical reality behind the text: (Oppermann: nd). In other words, this socialist revolutionary discourse effectively connects the text to the Zeitgeist (spirit) of the period (the 60s) in which the text was written when much of the academic and literary enterprises in Nigeria were characterized by Marxist discourse and aestheticism. In deed, The Last Duty can be interpreted as a metaphorical representation of the relations of oppression and repression of the Biafrans or rebels by the Federal Army or might, of the less privileged, the weak and

the vulnerable by the titled chiefs as represented in the relationship between Chief Toje Onovwakpo and Mukoro Oshevire on one hand; and between Chief Toje and Odibo and Aku on the other hand. These relations of oppression and repression are couched in Agbeyegbe's rantings especially when he observes that, "*the bane of the world" today is exploitation, the exploitation of the lower classes. And they are lower not because they chose to be, but because their oppressors have constantly kept them in that position and blocked every chance they might have of rising to greater positions: (pg 144).*

This also explains both Aku's and Odibo's predicament in the hands of Chief Toje. Aku expresses her ordeal and helplessness when she introspects:

> *Come and meet me at such and such a place: and you come. Lie down: and you spread your wretched self on the bed. Open your legs: and you obeyed like a patient without any choice. And all this time you offered nothing that could be called resistance. You couldn't summon up the courage to tell him to his face that what he was doing was wrong and unjust.*

But, Chief Toje, having effectively framed Aku's husband, Mukoro Oshevire, in the allegation of conniving with rebels for displacing him in a rubber trade, the reason of which he is imprisoned, sees this despicable act as a fair exchange. According to him, Aku:

> *Needs food, clothing, maintenance and protection very badly. With her husband far away and under the firm grip of detention she cannot help herself, alone and unattended. I am in need of self-reassurance. I need very badly to confirm to myself that I still possess within me that natural power without which a man has no claim whatsoever to the qualification.*

On the other hand, Odibo ratiocinates over his subjection to disgrace and oppression by Chief Toje. His perception of himself as worthless, before his last purgatory act and epiphanous moment, is reinforced by Chief Toje's description of him as a fool with a big body but hardly any sense. Chief Toje has "chained his mind, his whole being." But in his moment of epiphany, Odibo notes that "there is a point beyond which a man will refuse to be pushed" (pg 215).

What all this point to in historicist terms is that the language of cause and effect has entered the domain of the substance thereby making the substance present itself as the cause of its own effects and, hence, of its own history. In other words, the narrativisation or representation of the causes of war and conflict such as the enlightened self interest and power relations like the majority versus minority political relations, lead invariably to repressive measures, and all of this subsequently authenticate the substance, the actual war story itself. Having being constructed in the language of representation or in what Aristotle terms linguistic energeia, or social energy, the war story is presented as the cause of its own effects and, hence, its own history.

In the same manner, the historicity of the text and the textuality of history can be demonstrated using Okpewho's copious references to the cultural life in the communities as a way of reinforcing the narrativisation of the Civil War. This can be gleaned in the profiling of Chief Toje Onovwakpo; the activities and the stock-in-trade of the herbalists like Godinheaven and Emuakpor; the linguistic tropes which belong especially to the Urhobo people of Delta State of Nigeria; and the proverbs.

The profiling of Chief Toje Onovwakpo does not only showcase his gait and condescending personality, it also displays the narrative's, emplotment within the metaphorical trope, in this case, the metaphor of impotent leadership. In Hayden White's view, "every history, even the most synchronic of them, will be emploted in some way" (1973). Chief Toje's self conceit and impotence is thus a measure of Nigeria's elite leadership's warped sense of vision, and concern with personal security and pleasure rather than collective survival. And so, despite the grave atmosphere of the war, Chief Toje finds time to ratiocinate thus:

> *I am a big man…if therefore anything happens to people like me that might detract from the position in which we are held, no sacrifice should be too great from anybody in this town to ensure that we keep our place, that we maintain our position.*

His sexual escapades speak much about his pursuit of pleasure and self-preservation at the expense of family and collective survival. Nonetheless, Chief Toje's gait, in addition to names like Emuakpor, Oghenovo, Mukoro Oshevire, Okumagba, and the title, Ototа, are unmistakably drawn from the context of the Urhobo tribe from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This means that, The Last Duty, largely contextualizes the concerns and the socio-cultural life of the inhabitants of Urukpe, a fictional "tribal border town between the Igabo and the rebel Simba" or of the Urhobo people within the larger matrix of the Nigerian civil war.

This is true also of the opening sentences of the chapter that introduces Emuakphor, the herbalist, and the use of indigenous forms of greeting and exclamations like "Migwo," "Vren doh," and "Shuo", which belong to the linguistic palance of the Urhobos. And so when Chief Toje visits Emuakpor over his

impotence, the latter chants away, characteristic of an Urhobo man and the calling of his trade:

> *It was I who circumcised the tortoise!*
>
> *It was I who scaled the elephant's rump to scoop the curative flea from its crotch!*
>
> *It was I who caused the mad dog to stray to damnation, by pouring poisoned broth on his urine-spots that could have traced for him his homeward journey!*

This catalogue of praises and the ensuing discussion between the duos is couched in indirectness and poetic innuendo. Also proverbs like *"a little ache can spoil a good head," "jiggers are funny insects"* are used not only to spice up the narrative but also as indicative of the Urhobo language resource. Thus, systems of culture like the deference expressed in the gestures of greeting and response, the profiling of the personalities of the characters, and their names, the existence of the herbalist institutions as well as the state institutions like the army, the tribunal, the prison, and the press, all provide the contexts of history.

This is also true of the human scale of the war situation which drives the entire population *"once again to the limits of anxiety and despair"* (pg 94). The air raids by the Minicons flown mostly by foreign pilots, and the guerrilla attacks did considerable damage to the peace and happiness of the town. In one incidence,

> *Six poor lives were destroyed…; fourteen persons injured… most of them critical cases, four houses blasted to the ground, all of them completely burnt by the resulting flames; (pg 94).*

Similarly, in another incidence, "*the toll was too bad, Wallahi! Too bad"* (pg 202). In that air raid, 2 soldiers and 57 civilians lost their lives, whole families wiped out

and several houses destroyed. Also in the subsequent querrilla attack the number of death is *"15 civilians and 113 soldiers. Numerous persons, soldiers and civilians alike were badly wounded in both encounters, a large number of them critical cases"* (pg 202).

To be sure, the Biafran air attack was first launched on 22 May 1969. Thus, the examples cited above of the recontextualization of the events of the war together with Okpewho's glib references to dates like 11th of April 1968 and 23rd May 1968 undeniably contextualizes the narrative as a reconstruction of the Nigerian civil war. The parchments are emplotted to present the larger picture of the civil war, the picture which remains is intelligible, coherent, consistent and persuasive, and does not disappear by pointing to the gruesome psychological dislocation of the characters as well as the grievous atmosphere of the war. Although, Isidore Okpewho in The Last Duty may not have set out to aim at exactitude or being faithful to what happened, but even the verisimilitude of the narrative is in the shape of historical records, as already demonstrated, which are in the form by which the war is perceived.

In the same fashion, but different reckoning, Elechi Amadi's Sunset In Biafra adopts the diary form and autobiographical sketches as a surfictional account of Amadi's personal experiences of the civil war. It is a story *"created out of the fragmented historical events as he remembers them,"* (Oppermann: nd). The Verisimilitude of this account is heightened by its representation as an aesthetic experience through self-reflexivity and emplotment. As a personal recollection,

Elechi Amadi's narration of the civil war oscillates between the possible and the probable thereby *"balancing truth to the facts against the need for those facts to make sense"* (Hamilton: 1996). Amadi's narrative therefore lends credence to the putative causes and effects of the Nigerian civil war even against the backdrop of aestheticism.

In Sunset In Biafra, Amadi thus lines up sequentially series of historically documented causes of the civil war along side the real and imagined palpable occurrences during the war as well as their telling effects on himself, the Nigerian soldiers, and the Biafran soldiers and the entire population. When Amadi notes that after the January, 1966 Coup, *"the Ibos were jubilant over the turn of events… Among the elite there was cautious hope for a brighter future in which the spectre of domination personified by the giant north would be absent"* (pg 9), it is a reference to one of the remote causes of the civil war acknowledged in documented historical sources, and the all pervasive herd instinct. The remote causes of the civil war are the structural imbalance in terms of the population size and geography of the country; the seemingly, intractable educational disadvantage of the North; and the unequal economic development of the regions at the point of independence.

It is on record that because of the late start of the North in education, it had few representatives in the Federal Civil Service as against the large number of representatives from the South. Frederick Forsyth (1976) captures this situation succinctly thus:

> *In the sixty years from Lugard to Independence the differences in moral attitudes and values between North and South, and the educational and technological gap, became not steadily narrower but wider (pg 18).*

According to him, at Independence in 1960, the North which had half of Nigeria's population of 50 million had only 41 Secondary schools against the South's 842; and that the first graduate from the North graduated nine years before independence. While by 1967 when the war started the "Eastern Region alone had more doctors, Lawyers and engineers than any other country in Negro Africa" (Forsyth: 1976). This provides the context for understanding the following passage in Sunset In Biafra:

> *Then 24 May 1966 came, and with it the famous Decree No. 34, which sought to bring the country back to a unitary government. The regions were abolished, at any rate theoretically and were referred to as the Northern, Western, or Eastern 'groups of provinces.' The less literate North, with fewer sons in the Federal Civil Service, was alarmed (pg 12).*

This no less created the fear of possible Southern domination of the North, just as the South too feared Northern domination in terms of its population size. As a result of this fear, and the killings of leading Northern politicians and top army officers *"in May 1966 there were disturbances in the North and some Ibos were killed"* (Amadi: 1973). The implicit factor in all this is the all pervasive herd instinct coupled with the fact that *"our leaders were too parochial and uneducated"* (pg 12).

Apparently, these twin factors of the herd instinct and the parochialism of the elite class can be placed in the context of the divisive utterances made by regional leaders and elites at various points leading eventually to the civil war. For instance, in 1945 an Ibo Lawyer was quoted as saying *"Igbo domination of Nigeria was only a matter of time"* (Falola, *et al*: 2003). Similarly, in 1947, Chief Obafemi Awolowo

referred to Nigeria as a *"mere geographical expression"* (Falola, *et al*: 2003). Also, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa accentuated this view when he said in 1948, *"this presence of unity is artificial and it ends only in this chamber"* (Falola, et al: 2003).

These statements did not only reveal the mindset of these leaders and their warped sense of value, they also point to the entrenched regionalism and tribal loyalty or the herd instinct which Amadi says *"are strong enough to generate civil wars"* (pg 23). Amadi properly contextualizes this when he notes that:

> *Ours was, and still is, a tribal society. The herd instinct is strong, and most people feel far more at home among members of their own tribe than in any other company (pg 10).*

Amadi further stresses that *"…in a multitribal country like Nigeria herd instinct is a formidable stumbling – block"* (pg 10). This observation is historicized by Frederick Forsyth (1976) when he points out that regionalism is *"the disease which killed Nigeria"* (pg 21). He similarly notes that *"in Africa as elsewhere political power means success and prosperity, not only for the man who holds it but for his family, his birth place and even his whole region of origin"* (pg25).

It is for this reason that Amadi and his fellow tribesman and the minority tribes in the East received Gen. Ojukwu's secession agenda with suspicion. The fear of possible domination by the Ibos put the minority tribes on edge. Thus, in the first consultative Assembly summoned by Ojukwu on 31 August, 1966, at Enugu *"several delegates spoke on the privations suffered by minorities"* (pg 17), Chief Dappa – Biriye especially complained of the *"remote control of the affairs of the riverine areas from Enugu"* (pg 17). This fear is rooted in the fact that, as Amadi puts it,

"cultural domination in Nigeria also implied political and economic domination" (pg 21). And true to type, no sooner had Ojukwu proclaimed The Republic of Biafra, than the Ibos who *"some thirty years ago… began to move in to trade in the riverine area… settled and by sheer force of numbers began to dominate the smaller tribes"* (pg 21), *"became aggressive and tyrannical"* (pg 52). Amadi points out that:

> *They would walk into private property and harvest plantains, oranges and pawpaw in spite of protests from the owners. This is Biafra land; was all they said (pg 52).*

In this situation, Amadi together with the people from the minority tribes of Ijaw, Kalabari, Okrika, Ogoni, Etche, Ekpoye, Engenni, Abua, Ogba, Egbema, and Ikwere, suddenly become quarries to be hunted down under the nefarious activities of *"combing".* According to Amadi, "*combing"* was crude intelligence work on a massive scale" (pg 39). He points out that *"having proclaimed their Biafra, they ignored or under estimated the fears of the minorities. These fears were fed daily by cruel arrest and detentions. Gradually even those of the minority groups who had lost relations and property in the north came to feel that their salvation lay in a united Nigeria"* (pg 52). In reconstructing his story of the Nigerian Civil War, Elechi Amadi thematises the herd instinct not only as the compelling motive force of the war but also as the basis of the relations of oppression and repression. He also utilizes diary entries, autobiographical sketches, records of eyewitnesses accounts, illustrations of torture, suffering and bombardment, and procedures of repression as signs that illuminate war motifs and experiences which collectively provide a view into the Biafran society's self understanding and history.

This is indicative of the fact that Amadi's *Sunset In Biafra* evolves through a process that synchronises the various experiences such as the social issues and the political events that shape the immediate post independent period in Nigeria. This is implied, for instance, in his recontextualisation of the accounts of the Coup and the Counter Coup of January 15 and July 29, 1966, respectively. Apparently, these coups put a lot of strain on the already frayed nerves and the mutual distrust amongst the peoples of the regions that made up Nigeria. While reiterating the imbalance in the killings in the January 15, 1966 coup, Amadi acknowledges that "no leading politicians of Eastern origin were killed, again apart from Lt. Col. Unegbe, all the high ranking army officers killed were from the North and West, and the leaders of the coup were of Ibo stock, the majority tribe in the East" (pg 8). As a response to this coup, a counter coup was staged on 29th January, 1966 by Northern officers in the wake of the spate of reprisal killings of Ibos. This eventually led to the exodus of Ibos from the North.

Amadi thereafter reveals, in fragments, details of the way he and the Biafran civilian population, particularly his kinsmen from the minority, acquired a beleaguered mentality and descended into a "pathetic sub-human level of existence" while the war lasted with Amadi especially feeling "like a hunted animal." All this confirms historicism's claim that literary text is a social discourse whose understanding is clearly underscored by linking its "relationship to the discourses that helped fashion it and to which the text is a response" (Bressler': 2002). In this way, the text invariably 'becomes a battleground of competing ideas among the author, society, customs, institutions, and social practices that are all eventually

negotiated by the author and the reader and influenced by each contributor's episteme" (Bressler: 2002). As an illustration of this, Amadi's actions during the war and his beliefs together with the concerns for his people and his society form the discourse and constitutive elements of the text. As a testimony to this, apart from registering the travails of his minority kinsmen, he also punctuates his narrative with particular references to the actual date and time when some of the incidents occurred, while also animating it with names of historical personages. For instance, Amadi relates that:

> *By 14 May, shells had began to land on the outskirts of Port Harcourt… The Federal troops had burst out at Obigbo on the Aba – Port Harcourt road, which was now blocked. The only escape route was through the old Port Harcourt – Owerri road… The great exodus, according to my observation, began in earnest on Thursday 16 May, 1968. I could see streams of people moving along Aggrey Road (pg 128-130).*

This is certainly a fossilized data which says a lot about the historicity of the narrative, more so, as Frederick Forsyth's account shows:

> *By the middle of May, Afam, Bori and Okirka had fallen… With a fast right hook the Nigerians cut the road northward out of Port Harcourt towards Aba, and on 18 May advance units occupied the eastern outskirts of the city. A fierce shelling bombardments had been going on for days, and the road northwards from the town towards Owerri was chocked with nearly a million refugees pouring out for safety* (pg 132).

At this stage of the war, the human scale, in terms of casualties, suffering, the refugee situation, was horrifying. The war then acquires a Sordid spectacle of

horror, devastation, dehumanization, in which the people suffered in silence with ghostly smile on their faces.

To all intents and purposes, Elechi Amadi's Sunset In Biafra and Isidore Okpewho's The Last Duty invariably demonstrate *"how the texts of history enter into fictional contexts while at the same time retaining their historical documentary value"* (Oppermann: nd) or a sense of history. The two novels point to the *"fictionality of the writing of history"* as well as *"assert the historicity of their writing"* (Oppermann: nd). The writers give their stories *"greater historical authenticity through the use of dates, places and personages that we can relate to within the larger collective historical destiny of Nigeria"* (Anyokwu: 2008). They also demonstrate what Dominick Lacapra calls *"multiple interactive contexts"* whereby *"texts interact with one another and with contexts in complex ways…"* (1983). And so, while underlining the historicity of the texts, this also affirms the novel form as a polysemic discourse or what Bakhtin calls the polyphonic novel. Structural linguists like Voloshinov and Bakhtin argue that the situation or context always enters into the utterance, or text, as an essential constitutive part of the structure of its (text's) import (Hartland: 1999). Or as F.R. Ankersmitt puts it the language of cause and effect has entered the domain of the substance thereby making the substance present itself as the cause of its effected, hence, its history.

The two novels are better understood within the contexts of their import, that is, the peculiarities of the Nigerian society and the civil war as well as other signs and symbols like the presence of historical personages in Amadi's Sunset In Biafra which

hitherto exist in the public sphere as systems of culture. These cultural or historical contexts both limit the possibilities of the texts and facilitate the distinctiveness of their utterances.

By recreating in the readers the subjectivity of their expression or narration of the past, achieved through self-reflexivity, the writers have provided the basis on which to understand the cultural language or context of the past (and of the texts). And so, in the words of Yuri Nagibin (1985) both writers seem to suggest that the Nigerian civil war may be past but *"will never become the past for those who still carry bits of lead in their flesh and bones, the lead of the losses in their hearts, and the eternal burden on memory and mind…"* And Hugh Hodges (2009) attests to this when he says *"the Biafran War is in some ways still going on,"* and quoting Karl Maier who also observes, in his book This House Has Fallen, that *"disabled veterans of the Biafran army can still be seen begging at road sides"* and then concludes that the war is *"still in the mind of everyone in eastern Nigeria"* (Hodges: 2009).

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CHAPTER THREE:

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AS A HISTORICAL EVENT IN BIYI BANDELE'S *BURMA BOY*

Given that historicists are concerned with the prime importance of historical contexts to the interpretation of texts, this chapter will attempt to connect Biyi Bandele's Burma Boy to its historical contexts. The remittance of this task is reinforced by Bandele in his admission of the fact that the novel is shaped by various historical accounts both oral and textual.

In his acknowledgement, he expresses his indebtedness to the following sources: Sergeant James Shaw's "unforgettable account of his Chindit experience, The March Out; Captain Charles Carfrae's Chindit Column which "proved similarly invaluable; Brigadier Michael 'Mad Mike' Calvert's Classic war memoir, Prisoners of Hope, a *"first-hand accounts of the Chindits".* He also stresses that these books are salutary chronicles of:

> *…instances of the courage and resourcefulness shown by the Africans who served with them in Burma, and enabled me in no small way to rediscover that searingly vivid and yet dizzingly phantasmagoric world of the jungles of mainland South East Asia into which my father's stories of carnage, shell-shock and hard-won compassion first immersed me when I was little more than an infant.*

Other sources that gave the writer the leeway in his rediscovery mission are the Imperial War Museum where he *"spent many afternoons delving into declassified military files about the Second World War and its least documented and most brutal theatre, the Burma campaign,"* Orde Wingate by Christopher Sykes; Orde Wingate:

Irregular Soldier by Trevor Royle; Five in the Night by John Bierman and Colin Smith; War Bush by John A.L Hamilton; West Africans at War by Peter Clarke; and The Last Public Execution in Sokoto Prison by by H.A.S. Johnson which he said he borrowed from quite liberally. No doubt, these sources not only shape the narrative and provide the historical contexts from which the novel materializes, they are also various voices in which the text is discursively couched.

Nonetheless, it is pertinent to premise this study on three suppositions, if only to expand the contexts of the novel and to assert its verisimilitude. These suppositions are that, as a Nigerian, Biyi Bandele's interest in the roles played by Nigerians in the prosecution of the Second World War invariably shaped the novel, Burma Boy (this interest is whetted by his father's participation in, and account of, the war); that the war situations depicted in the novel represent the substance of the story of the Second World War (as the novel's historicity copiously indicated), and not those of the First World War or any other war, for that matter; and as such the eventual story as depicted in the novel is not only its historicity, it also comes across as the war between imperial powers brought about by their struggle to own and control colonies in the wake of the great world economic depression, and the subsequent subjugation of Africans in that struggle. These suppositions are in line with the three criteria in the cultural poetics for unlocking textual meaning, which are, the life of the author, the social rules and dictates found within a text, and a reflection of a work's historical situation evidenced in the text (Bressler: 2002).

Apparently, in his textualisation of history, Biyi Bandele utilizes protocols of narratology and linguistic *energeia* such as the story telling mode, deformation or defamiliarisation of the characters and situations of the war, as well as the general emplotment of the narrative. And so, through series of simulated war actions and referentialities, Biyi Bandele recontextualises the Second World War as the story of a world order into which Nigerians were despicably tossed to fight in a war that was detrimental to their interests. He therefore presents it as a senseless and brutal war of imperial powers to which Africans served as Canon fodders, appendages, and as "a nuisance, a pack of stray dogs let loose in the jungle" (pg 173).

The entire story begins and ends in strikingly peculiar ways. In the prologue and the last chapter, the writer presents sharply contrastive situations of madness which metaphorically point to the senselessness of the war effort. In the prologue, Major Wingate, who later metamorphosed into Janar Wingate, is presented as a drugged, diseased, utterly deranged and incoherent officer who has "lost his marble," yet is saddled with the task "to help kick the Japanese out of Burma." At the end of the story, Farabiti Ali Banana is left maddened, "unarmed, and without so much as a table knife on him, and naked as the day he was born" (pg 210), he survives only on a diet of leeches. The contrast is that Major Wingate is a Whiteman who is dressed even in his state of drudgery in a "British army uniform that hung loosely on his shrunken frame," survives on Atabrine, Farabiti Ali Banana, a child and inchoate soldier, is a Blackman who is naked with dozen leeches feasting on him as he also crunches them between his teeth and appears despicably war wary. This contrast underscores the fact that Burma Boy is a representation of the relations of

oppression and power. This point is sharply buttressed by a Japanese soldier who says:

> *Black man! The Whiteman is no friend of yours. The Whiteman is your oppressor. Why are you dying for him? Leave him now. Let him fight his own war by himself* (pg 165).

In another way, Bandele begins and ends the story in the fashion of the telling of Hausa Tatsoniya. On page 42 and on the page before the back cover he uses the statement, "that is all, off with the rat's head (i.e. kurunkus kan dan bera). Thus, using this Hausa anecdote, Bandele begins telling "the story of the day" which is that:

> *King Joji, monarch of Ingila, is fighting a war in a land called Boma and he wants our help. He wants all able-bodied men to go to Kaduna and join his band of warriors* (pg 43).

This anecdotal opening not only prefaced the substance of the narrative, it is also charged with the language of imperial power relation. In other words, it is the substance to which the language of cause and effect is extended thereby relating the entire narrative to the larger context of colonialism as a proof of the fact that the Second World War is an ultima ratio of political manipulation and control through the Empire system. To be sure, countries like Nigeria, Burma, India, and Egypt which feature in the novel formed part of the vast stretch of the British Empire which Colin Cross describes as "the empire where the sun never sets." According to Colin Cross, the British Empire:

> *Controlled well over a quarter of the human race and over a quarter of the world's land surface. The British Empire contained 450 million souls, comprising representatives of practically every race and religion… The land area of 14 million*

> *square miles stretched to all five continents, the biggest slice being in Africa, and the next biggest in North America…the British crown the symbol of sovereignty (Daily Trust: March, 2005).*

It is this expansive British possession that became the subject of controversy, tension, diplomatic crisis and tense rearmament among European powers in early 1930s. In the wake of the economic depression and Hitlerian Nazism, the Germans, faced with acute unemployment, loss of foreign markets, and lack of foreign exchange to buy raw materials, began to demand a return of their hitherto ceded colonies as panacea to economic recovery (Wallbank: 1955). In fact, as T. Walter Wallbank (1955) put it, *"Germany must have colonies to have easy access to raw materials; she must have room to expand, she must have her own markets for goods and investments."* Consequently, Germany was joined by Italy and Japan to demand 'their place in the sun! The scramble for the soul of Africa portends the fact of its strategic and economic importance to the Western powers. It is on record that the United States and the Western democracies depended upon such raw materials as *"Copper, Chromite, Iron, Manganese, Sisal, gold, tea and coffee, cotton, and radium – all produced in substantial quantities in Africa"* (Wallbank: 1955).

This background provides the context for the Japanese attack on both the British Colony of Malaya and the U.S. Navy as mentioned in the novel, Burma Boy. After all, Raymond Aron is of the view that the significance of an event can only be established by relating a part to the whole. In other words, the war between Britain and Japan which forms the crux of the novel, Burma Boy is caused mainly by their scramble for colony and their expansionist drive. Its consequence is the drafting of

Africans by Britain into the fray. The Nigerian contingent which formed the Thunder Brigade and the D-Section is part of the 146,000 native troops drawn from the British West Africa. As T. Walter Wallbank's (1955) account show,

> *The African troops played a significant part in gaining ultimate victory: they fought in Somaliland and Ethiopia against the Italians and later took part in the difficult jungle fighting against the Japanese in Burma.*

This account is corroborated referentially in the novel, Burma Boy, by Samanja Damisa thus:

> *You were all there tonight when the Janar said my name in front of the whole column. He said my name because he's a gracious man. He said my name because he remembered me from Abyssinia. He remembered not just me, but all those thousands of Nigerians, including Dogo here, who fought bravely alongside the two thousand men he had directly under his command in that ferocious war with Italians (pg 70).*

Samanja Damisa is one of the brave fighters and hardworking Nigerians who fought in Somaliland and Abyssinia. These Nigerian men now formed the only black brigade, the 3rd West African Brigade a.k.a Thunder, out of the six brigades that made up the Chindits, in the expedition to Burma.

The aptness of the description of the Chindits by Kyaftin Gillafsie who put it in the words of Brigadiya Calvert smacks of a metafictional textualisation, and reveals in equal measure Bandele's indebtedness to Brigadier Michael 'Mad Mike Calvert's Classic war memoir, Prisoner of Hope, a first-hand accounts of the Chindits. In Burma Boy, Bandele uses the character of Kyaftin Gillafsie to appropriate Calvert's description of the Chindits, as he says:

> *'I've heard talk; he said in Hausa, 'that we are guerrillas… We are not guerrillas. We are, in the words of the late Janar Wingate, a Long Range penetration group. Brigediya Calvert, C-in-C of Emphasis… who worked closely with Janar Wingate… has come up with the most appropriate description of what we are. In the Brigediya's description, the eight columns of Emphasis, and the six of Thunder… will separately penetrate every type of country, like the outstretched fingers of one's hand spread in every direction … In other words, men of Thunder, we march divided but we fight united* (pg 76).

Similarly, the account of Major Wingate in Cairo which is contained in the prologue reveals equally Bandele's indebtedness to Orde Wingate by Christopher Sykes, and Orde Wingate: Irregular Soldier by Trevor Royle. His indebtedness manifests clearly also in his appropriation of H.A.S. Johnson's The Last Public Execution in Sokoto Prison. As a proof of his liberal borrowing from this text in circulation, he uses Damisa to reminisce:

> *So they both hit on the idea of sending us to work with the executioner who had put word out that he was in need of assistants. We did not know this at the time, and nor did the executioner, but we started our apprenticeship on the very day the last public execution took place in Sokoto* (pg 149).

His graphic detailing of the event of the execution invariably points to the inter-textuality of the discourse. Equally, his use of names of places like Sokoto, Cairo, India, Lagos, Kaduna, Zaria, and the likes as well as the names of historical personages not only animates the story but also significantly strikes a chord of realism within the matrix of the fictionality of the narrative. This no less gives the story greater historical authenticity and a heightened sense of history.

He achieves this by deftly scouring through, and synchronizing, archaeological details which he forms sequentially and coherently and represents as 'the story' of

the Second World War. This does not only reveal the process of textualisation and the history behind the text, it shows also how Biyi Bandele transposes himself and the readers alike into the past in order to relive it as an aesthetic experience, while relying on historical backgrounds. In the same manner, to paraphrase Catherine Belsey, Bandele undertakes his rediscovery of the past by reading and citing records or accounts of the events, experiences and activities of the Second World War which had hitherto passed into history as past. In other words, by using the apparatus criticus, he reconstructs, or texualises and thematises, these events and experiences through the questions he asks or wishes to investigate. He then presents them aesthetically resplendent as new experience, as relived activity conformable to the patterns of literary discourse or convention. It is, therefore, in this context that historicism is thought of as a "perpetual present." This textualisation process is aided by self-reflexivity which is necessary for the understanding of past events which betokens as a sort of empathy. In this regard, historicist like Wilhelm Dilthey (1996) opines that:

> *Transposition is made possible by the interpretation of publicly available signs and symbols; it is dependent on permanently fixed expressions being available so that understanding can always return to them.*

Empathy thus ensures that 'the story' acquires a presence, that is, a life of its own which experiences an increase in being, and this enlargement of being, of the story's historicity, is ultimately the ontological basis (or substance) of the story. As H.G. Gadamer would have us believe, all expressive art like stories is a being expressed. This is because, as he points out:

> *Unlike a mere sign for something else, the picture does not disappear in pointing to something else but, in its own being, shares in what it represents.*

It can be ascertained that the present of that past of the subjugation of Africans to the empire system and of their eventual role in the Second World War is the empathetic re-living of the war situation as an aesthetic experience and its understanding as a continuing process in the present world order. This heightens understanding of the story as well as provides its historical context. The states of mind of the actors of the war, Britain and Japan, which is winning the war by all means further adds to the understanding of the story. And this is captured on pages 26-7 thus:

> *The enemy will come at you with all he's got. He has one mission in Burma and one mission only. He's there to kill you. He's there to kill you for Emperor …Our mission in Burma is to insert ourselves in his gut. Our victory is already half won, …There will be no rest, no leave, no return until the battle has been won.*

This represents the declared intention of the main actors of the war and it clinches the significance of the subsequent actions. In the same vein, the dictum 'in quietness and confidence shall be your strength' is a proof of the tactical brainwashing of the troops who were possessed by the Janar's visions and drunk on his words. It is also a further reference to the subjugation of Africans by the imperial power, Britain.

It is in this context that the battles of Mawlu, White City, and the ambush on the way to Nyaunggaing are best understood. For, as Raymond Aron opines, the intentions in the actor's mind coincide at almost every point with the course of the

battles. This demonstrates not only the verisimilitude of the narrative but also the deliberate use of what Christopher Anyokwu (2008) calls *"protocols of narratology"* or the emplotment effects. Nonetheless, in these battles Nigerian contingents suffered heavy casualties, fatigue, debilitating injuries and psychological dislocation. The scenes of gun-battle, bombings, ambush depicted in the novel are unmistakably recreation or simulation of the ferocity of the Second World War. For instance, in Mawlu, the Chindits wait along the road to ambush the Japanese soldiers ready with rifles, Brens, Mills grenades, and shoulder-fired anti-tank piat guns. And as the Japanese truck file through, in the pitch darkness, firing started:

> *…every man and his gun was now in the killing team. Weapons fired in rapid bursts ripping into metal. The truck at the front and the one bringing up the rear were the first to explode. The night ignited into great balls of flame.* (pg 113).

Similarly, at Fort Reno, close to the Muddy River, rocket- propelled spin-stabilized projectiles roared for several seemingly endless seconds:

> *The 6-inch mortar bomb exploded somewhere behind them, amidst the trees next to the Dakota landing strip. So powerful were its splinters, several trees toppled over as if a giant saw had sliced through them* (pg 143).

And whenever the battles get tough and fierce the Americans will lend a helping hand. In one instance,

> *Two American P – 51 Mustangs came from broadway to give White City a hand. From a great height, the P – 51s repeatedly shelled the enemy positions. The Mustangs had just returned from strafing a Jap airfield where they'd wiped out ten zeros in one fell Swoop* (pg 152).

However, the 'awe-inspiring' zeros used to drop the 6-inch mortar bomb known as the 'coal scuttle' are part of the fearsome Japanese armory. These legendary carrier –based war stallions of the Imperial Japanese navy would, in a relay, drop bombs "near Up Hill, across Bare Hill, past Fort Reno, over Dummy Hill and ended right by Muddy River" (pg 146). Usually, the falling bombs, as the writer paints the scene, "were accompanied by the blunt rat-a-tat-tat of the medium machine guns aimed from the zero's wings and cowlings at the ground below." Sometimes, the ferocity of the coal scuttles together with the bombing raids of the zeros and the actions of the Bangalore torpedo suicide squads would claim more Chindit lives, and at other times they would kill only:

> *Two men and three mules, to maim a few men, to scare several into wanting to crawl back into the shelter of the womb and never to come out again, and to make many never want to see another war and to so infuriate some that they became, without even knowing it at the time, men whose whole existence had meaning only when they killed or were killed while trying to kill* (pg 147).

As men whose lives only have meaning when they killed or are themselves killed, the black characters in the novel belong quite despicably to the killing team as "agents in the trade of war" (pg 169). Their psychological state is sharply conveyed by Ali Banana who declares in Chiringa that "I here for to fight na Boma. I here for to kill di Janpani" (pg 33), and Bloken who introduces himself at Aberdeen as "Bloken Yahimba – Jap killer, Sir" (pg 83).

Although, having being invested (or infested) with the killer instinct, Ali Banana is nevertheless white-washed with terror and fright in the midst of the horrifying

actions. He sees the faces around him all covered in dust, stones and debris, and the raw flesh of man, mule and pony traveling through the air and landing on rooftops of the dugout trenches in which he was hiding with his colleagues. Given these frightful scenarios, "the heady feeling of purpose that brought a new spring to the steps" of Ali Banana and his killing mates, as they marched through dense forests, steep valleys and jungles, gradually gives way to a "numbing, if not disabling, anxiety" (pg 81). Nevertheless, as Ali Banana progresses in the war, as the ferocity of the war intensifies, he experiences a psychological growth as Damisa testifies:

> *Damisa shot him a worried look but said nothing. He'd noticed a gradual change come over Banana during the past week or so. Gone was the haughty young man who loved nothing better than the sound of his own voice making long-winded speeches. He seemed instead to have shed the all-knowing mask and become an innocent child of seven.*

Ali Banana's situation is not only a showcase of child soldiering that can be linked to the discourse of child abuse and human right violation; it also significantly enlists the empathy of readers as he struggles to shed his innocence and to come to terms with the demands of the war. Bandele thus captures Ali Banana's epiphanous mindset thus:

> *Banana had now killed many men in his time and he'd seen many men die. The men he'd killed had been faceless. He didn't know them and didn't hate them. He felt nothing about killing them. They would have done the same to him. He was a foot soldier fighting a crazy war. He didn't understand why king George was waging a war in Burma from far away England. And it didn't matter to him.*

This summation about the war and Ali Banana's state of mind indicate the way in which the language of cause and effect enters the domain of the substance in order to authenticate the historicity of the history being reconstructed. In other words, the many men Ali Banana had killed and the men he had seen die is the narration of the effect and description of the crazy war king George waged in Burma from far away England; it is also the cause and the substance of the story of the war respectively. This shows also in the graphic description of the severity and the ferocity of the battle scenes such that the story achieves an existential increase by not disappearing while metaphorically representing the actual history of the war. This is what H.G. Gadamer in Paul Hamilton (1996) means when he says that the "existence or being which art brings into play is not an enlargement but the sheer authenticity of things."

Nonetheless, the severity of these incidents is deflated by the appropriation of the Yan Kama performance tradition of the Hausa people of Nigeria which undergird the plot structure of the novel and reveals its social and cultural contexts. By and large, the use of Yan Kama performance tradition effectively introduces comic relief to douse the grim and tense situation that war entails, and also draws attention to the fictionality of the novel's otherwise "neutral factuality" (Hodges:2009). To be sure, Graham Furniss (1996) describes Yan Kama performances as a kind of 'comical pastiche' that "makes use of the elements of surprise and disguise to confuse the boundary between the real and the feigned." This makes dan kama a satire and parody performance. The dan kama also "subverts the business of other people's serious performances by disrupting them and drawing attention to the conventions

surrounding them" (Furniss: 1996). The dan kama performance thus dresses, speaks and acts in a funny and comical way. That is why, Ali Banana "took to hanging the boots by their laces around his neck," which he calls barrack-necklace. This is the import of the many funny stories Ali Banana spins, of his tongue-twisting jokes, and the pathetic and the emotionally rousing act he puts up at the end.

Ali Banana, a child soldier who disguised his age in order to fight for Kingi Joji in Burma, is in every inch a dan kama whose actions are comic relief in an otherwise serious theatre of war. This means that the deployment of comical pastiche in Burma Boy represents a perpetuation of that tradition which is always the case when a conversation is enacted with the past. For, as Raymond Aron (1978) notes, *"conversation with the past always perpetuates tradition".*

As a comic relief, therefore, Farabiti Ali Banana's mannerisms and theatricals lend a satirical bent to the entire narrative. This is true to the type. For, as Graham Furniss (1996) points out *"a performance by Yan Kama relies upon repartee between two or three people, and the crux of the humour lies in the imitation of recognizably distinctive styles of speech".* The pattern of speech adopted by Farabiti Ali Banana, and the style of naming of characters by the author is unmistakably Hausa in origin. In this instance, the accentual system of Hausa language is parodied in English language form to create what Graham Furniss calls a *"dialogue between languages".*

For instance, Farabiti Ali Banana renders the following statement completely in Hausa accent using English language as a medium of delivery:

> *Do you know who I am? I'm the son of Dawa the king of well-diggers whose blessed nose could sniff out water in Saminaka. I'm the son of Hauwa whose mother was Talatu whose mother was Fatimatu queen of the moist Kulikuli Cake, the memory of whose Kulikuli still makes old men water at the mouth till this day. Our people say that distance is an illness; only travel can cure it. Do you think that Ali Banana, son of Dawa, great grandson of Fatima, has crossed the great sea and traveled this far, riffle strapped to his shoulder to look after mules?*

This verbiage by all means smacks of the style of praise-singing in Hausa culture thereby manifesting the distinctive features (its accentual system and its structure) of the language being parodied. Similarly, words or terms like Farabiti (private), Kofur (corporal), Janar (General), Samanja (Sergeant-major), Kyaftin (Captain), Furofaganda (propaganda), Preetown (Freetown) and the likes as well as the names like Damisa, Dogo, Guntu, Danja, are all parodies of Hausa intonation drawn essentially from Hausa cultural context. It is also in this context that Bandele's hint at the social background of Damisa and Dogo makes sense. According to him:

> *The two boys were both Almajirai – pupils at allo schools, derelict open air madrasahs where the children of the poor were sent to learn the Qur'an by heart. The pupils often numbering in the hundreds, lived in the squalor of a house provided for them by their Mallam, an Imam, who wielded his authority with a cowhide switch. In return for board and tuition, the pupils went out of the house in small groups into the community to beg for food for themselves and money for their master* (pg 149).

This is an apparent reference to the social and religious institutions in Northern Nigeria that permit and perpetuate such sleazy and slovenly living by the lowly and the less privileged in the society. By this very fact, Bandele introduces the discourse of poverty and social stratification which no less form part of the whole construct of the relation of oppression that history is said to record.

In all ramification, this exemplifies what historicists, old or new, variously term the poetics of culture or systems of culture, which Wilhelm Dilthey explains as covering "a broad band of religious, legal, political, social and aesthetic institutions" (Hamilton: 1996). In the same vein, states of mind of the characters are revealed not only through their personal social interaction but also in the form of parody which provides the contexts of history. In other words, the seeming verbiage and theatrics of Ali Banana, Damisa's ecstatic dance which he calls 'tape worm spasm,' the verbal exchange of invectives between members of the D-Section and a Hausa speaking Japanese soldier further foregrounds the narrative in the Hausa cultural context from which the characters are drawn. This also reveals the underlining paradox of the entire narrative which is a mixture of the unserious and the serious, the comic and the tragic.

In the final analysis, Burma Boy redoubles understanding on the history of the Second World War, and heightens empathy for the Africans, nay Nigerians who died in the course of the war and for those still living. Although, the story achieves a heightened historical distance, it is nevertheless expressively rendered empathetically in the here and now. It thus succeeds as an aesthetic experience which gains an increase in being, and this beingness serves as the historicity or the ontological basis of the story in the same way that genuine experience is the experience of one's own historicity.

Given this praxis, it becomes possible to understand the deployment of troops in Burma by relating the various battles to the causes and consequences of the

struggle by imperial powers for colonies. And it is only by putting the expedition in Burma in the context of the empire and colonial systems is it possible to fully understand the roles played by Africans, nay Nigerians in the prosecution of the Second World War. Similarly, it is only by relating the character, Farabiti Ali Banana to the Yan Kama performance tradition is it possible to understand the cultural context from which he is drawn. Thus, Burma Boy is in all respects an account by a Nigerian of the tragic-comedy that took place in the course of the Second World War, and the roles played by Nigerians in that theatre of war. It is born out of the questions the present asks of the past.

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CHAPTER FOUR:

CONCLUSION

This study deploys Historicism as a literary discourse to the analysis of selected novels of Isidore Okpewho, Elechi Amadi, and Biyi Bandele. This is purposely to determine and underscore the constitutive processes of the novels with a view to situating appropriately in their contexts. The study is therefore based on the premise that, writing as historicists, these writers appropriate historical events, vicarious and personal experiences, and recorded or documented activities, all of which had hitherto passed into history as past; and that these variegated experiences, having been refined and reconstituted, appear aesthetically resplendent as novels and new experiences or what is termed 'perpetual present,' conformable to the patterns of literary discourse.

Apart from proving the applicability of the discourse of historicism to Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty,* Elechi Amadi's *Sunset In Biafra* and Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy*, this study also articulate the poetics of historicism and relate them to the internecine Nigerian Civil War and the reconstruction of the roles of Nigerians in the prosecution of the Second World War. Hitherto, treatises on the application of Historicism as a literary discourse on Nigerian war literatures has been sparing. In this regard, it substantiates the historicists claims that any statement or text can be situated in its historical context. It also proves that it is possible to apply the discourse of historicism to the texts used in the study; illustrates the discourse of historicism with the historicity of war literatures as a way of authenticating their distinctiveness within the economy of other texts; and elaborates the boundary of knowledge

especially on the constitutive process of war literatures and the discourse of historicism generally. This, therefore, constitutes the analytical framework which is then guided by the library method of data collection that entails secondary sourcing of materials through the library, bookstores, internet and the likes.

The crux of the discourse of historicism is the assumption that texts of all kinds can be situated in their putative contexts. This contrasts sharply with the assumptions of formalism and New criticism which negate the important correspondence between literature and the reality that shapes it. In deed, to the formalists like Viktor Shlovsky, in literature it is the conflict of customs as can be seen in the motif, which provides material for plot construction; however, the origin of this conflict in historical reality is beside the point. Shlovsky specifically points out that the story is a pre-aesthetic material for plot, and that the difference is not in what is presented but the way in which it is presented. In other words, formalists presuppose that the specificity of literature could only be solved with reference to the formal properties of literary texts, not necessary to take into account the historical forces operative in the construction of such texts.

In contrast, historicists argue that historical contexts provide the basis for the understanding or interpretation of texts of all kinds. And so, to them the fragile boundary that exists between history and fiction is often blurred by narrativity. In the main, this is indicative of the fact that external factors or the exteriority of accidents form important discourse of historicism. Thus, as a literary discourse, historicism gains ascendancy by transforming the raw historical data into an object of aesthetic

experience. This is what Louis A. Montrose calls the textuality of history, by which he means the textual traces of lived material existence of a given society. What is, however, obvious from the assumptions of historicism is the fact that both notions of contexts or historicity of texts and text or the textuality of history contest for space within the ambience of the dynamic form of the novel as a narrative or expressive prose.

Given this praxis, this study draws at least four conclusions. Firstly, historicists, like the structural grammarians, regard the text as a word whose meaning inheres within a hermeneutically understood structure, whereby a text is related to other texts or contexts in order to establish its meaning. It is in this way that historicism adopts the true statement model which has the subject – term relating to objects in reality, and the predicate-term attributing properties to the objects. This then means that the meaning of a text inheres within the structure of its relationship with its various contexts; the text as a social production, that is.

Secondly, in this connection, a process of multiple interaction is enacted by the text with its putative contexts thereby making the contexts seem as texts themselves. This means that historical writing possesses no authoritative materiality instead it is composed of diverse influences or discourses that are themselves independent as they are integrative. This effectively brings out the dialectics of the negotiation between the past and the present. Similarly, it confirms also the novel form as a polysemic discourse capable of achieving such a negotiation between the past and the present.

Thirdly, in this regard, the texts studied are shaped respectively by authorial borrowings from non-fictional discourses such as the discourse of a diarist, of Marxist revolutionary tropes, of the system of cultures of the respective settings of the texts, of memoirs, travel-writers, and archival materials. These discourses are then represented as aesthetic objects in form of the texts studied which are presented as the stories of the wars depicted. The texts which bear a heightened historical sense also manifest pulsating stories in the present, and are relativised by being also the stories of the past and vice versa. This is called a perpetual present.

And fourthly, it is claimed that the thin line between fact or history and fiction is blurred. In other words, when raw historical event is presented as an aesthetic experience in the mould of story – telling or as an artifact, what is important is not the truth of the matter but the story itself. These conclusions show that historicism is a process of transforming raw historical data or event into an aesthetic object. This aesthetic object drawn from objective mind or system of cultures or historical contexts remains constant by being intelligible, coherent, persuasive, and so is the historicity or ontological basis of the lived material existence of a given society.

Basically, these conclusions are made possible by the illustration of the texts used for this study whose writers arguably wrote as historicists in the sense that it is possible to situate the texts within their historical contexts. Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*, being a vicarious recollection of the experiences of the civil war, recontextualises the entire sociological climate of the war. It thus draws attention to the process of historical representation of events of the civil war. This is couched in its persuasive, intelligible,

coherent and consistent presentation of the human scale of activities and referentiality, which altogether evokes a sense of history behind the narrative.

Okpewho also re-echoes the ideological debates on Marxist revolutionary trope prevalent during the period of his writing the text. At least, Agbeyegbe, one of the characters in the novel articulates this viewpoint and regards the period of the civil war as a time for "positive action." This is allied with detailed references to cultural life in the communities as well as the use of the Urhobo linguistic palance. Hence, it can be deduced that Okpewho deftly fuses together the ding-dung of the battle-fronts and the bombing raids with the dislocated socio-cultural life of the inhabitants of the border communities, in this case the Urhobo, to create not only a sense of history but to show the devastation of the war on the lives of ordinary citizens of eastern Nigeria. Although, Isidore Okpewho in *The Last Duty* may not have set out to aim at exactitude or being faithful to what happened, but even the verisimilitude of this narrative is in the shape of historical records, as demonstrated, which are already in the form by which the war is perceived.

By different reckoning, Elechi Amadi's *Sunset In Biafra* adopts the diary form as a surfictional account of his personal experiences of the Nigerian civil war. As a personal recollection, Elechi Amadi's narration of the civil war oscillates between the possible and the probable. He lines up, sequentially, series of historically documented causes of the civil war and palpable occurrences during the war as well as their telling effects on himself, the Nigerian soldiers, and the Biafran population and soldiers alike.

Sequentially, Amadi reveals, in fragments, details of the way he and the Biafran civilian population acquired a beleaguered mentality and descended into a "pathetic sub-

human level of existence" while the war lasted, with Amadi especially feeling "like a hunted animal." He animates his narration of these war situations with particular references to historical personages, dates and time the incidents occurred. At this stage in his narration, and of the war, the human scale, in terms of the casualties, suffering, the refugee situation, was horrifying. The war then acquires a sordid spectacle of horror, devastation, dehumanization, in which the people suffered in silence with ghostly smile on their faces.

Biyi Bandele's *Burma Boy* no less draws inspiration and debt from various archaeological sources which are: *The March Out* by Sergeant James Shaw; *Chindit Column* by Captain Charles Carfrae together with *Prisoners of Hope* by Brigadier Michael 'Mad Mike' Calvert, and others he lists in the acknowledgement. This signification is achieved by Biyi Bandele through the use of the protocols of narratology such as the story-telling mode, deformation or defamiliarisation of characters and situations of the war, as well as the general emplotment of the narrative. And so through series of simulated war actions and referentialities, Biyi Bandele recontextualises the Second World War as the story of a world order into which Nigerians were despicably tossed to fight in a war that was detrimental to their interest. This account is animated by the deft deployment of comic repartee that is couched in the tradition of the Hausa Yan Kama practice. Not only is the dissembling of the character's names done in the mould of Hausa pronunciation, the comic streak runs through the utterances and mannerisms of the characters, especially Farabiti Ali Banana, a Child Soldier, meant to satirize the grievous atmosphere of the war.

Thus, to all intents and purposes this study finds that historicism as applied to the texts studied is a template for an enhanced understanding of texts of all kinds as they are

made to yield their contexts and variegated influences. Literary historicism is a process of transforming raw historical data or event into an aesthetic object. This aesthetic object drawn from objective mind or system of cultures or historical contexts (slime of histories) remains constant by being intelligible, coherent, persuasive, and so is the historicity or ontological basis of the lived material existence of a given society.

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