

Narrating the Green Gods: Nigerian Military Rulers and the Genre of (Auto) Biography.

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Abstract

The proposed study focuses on autobiographies and biographies of military officers who have dominated the sphere of governance in post-colonial Nigeria. These personnel –‘green gods’- and their sometimes-induced admirers appropriate the medium of life narrative to mediate their paradoxical mortality and inscribe themselves into the historicising consciousness of subsequent generations. Through the genre, the military rulers attempt to re-invent themselves in the image of nationalists and statesmen; philosophers and thinkers of independence struggles. They also seek to reinforce an identity of soldiers as ‘messiahs’ in the crises of governance.

This study is justified by the interconnections of literature and politics on the one hand and life narrative genre as a site for negotiating political history on the other. Without doubt, life narrative provides useful insight into the complexity of power relations in the postcolonial Nigerian society and how this complexity in turn affects the military profession. One also stands the chance of understanding more deeply, the dynamics of dictatorship nurtured by prolonged military rule in post independence years.

The paper observes that many autobiographies and biographies in this category are exercises in self-re-writing. The documentation of military rule is done in a way that is somewhat more pleasant than it is in reality. The common picture one gets is that of a man who rises from a modest background and arrives at remarkable success through hard work, even if evidence from performance while in power belies this. Nonetheless, one thing that also comes out in bold relief is the crisis of identity that haunts the soldier in power ‘promoting’ democracy in one breath and subverting its tenets in another. The list includes David Ejoor’s *Reminiscences*, Olu Bajowa: *Spring of a Life: an Autobiography*, Chidi Amuta’s *The Prince of the Niger: The Babangida Years*, Abdul-Kareem Adisa’s *Loyal Command* and Akin Aduwo’s *30 Days in Power, 4 Years in Command* and Oluranti

Afowowe's *Onward Soldier Marches on: A Biography of Major-General Adeyinka Adebayo* among others.

These non-fiction texts deserve more critical and scholarly attention than they are earning at the moment. In studying them, the paper submits that it is important to pay attention to gaps, omissions, silences and absences perceivable in the narratives. A text, rather than being treated in hermetic isolation or as a complete whole, should be considered along with other texts with which it shares generic boundary and with which it is *a priori* in a dialogic relationship.