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Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* and Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday* as *Bildungsroman*

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Abstract

The *Bildungsroman* genre is traditionally a male-authored prose genre, yet for so long in Nigeria, the “female protagonist” has been in the limelight in a bid to correct female displacement prompted by the original Western *Bildungsroman*. Consequently, in order to eliminate gender imbalance in the Nigerian *Bildungsroman* variant, there is an intentional effort by contemporary Nigerian male writers to explore the male protagonists’ growth process in Nigeria against predominant issues of post-colonialism such as violence, riot, unrest, corruption, dictatorship and religious/tribal wars. This study examined how male writers have harmonised with or modified the Western *Bildungsroman* to create a unique depiction of the genre. The study analysed *Bildungsroman* tradition in Helon Habila’s *Measuring Time* (200) and Elnathan John’s *Born on a Tuesday* (2015), it reflects national anxieties and contemporary socio-political issues and its detrimental effect on the personal *Bildung* of the growing up male child. Using the Post-colonial and Psycho analytic theories as its premise, this study revealed the fundamental factors responsible for the trauma and disillusionment a character experiences during his “process of becoming” and the survival mechanisms he opts to facilitate growth and transformation. This study proved that *Bildungsroman*

has been indigenised by Nigerian male writers to account for their unique experiences and retell significant historical periods and reflect socio-political, religious and economic realities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Bildungsroman, Formation, Growth, Development, Identity

Introduction

Bildungsroman is a literary genre that encompasses those narratives that deal with the process of formation and self-development of its protagonist carrying phases of realisations and reflections which lead to maturity and understanding or acceptance of several societal realities. Etymologically, the words “*Bildung*” and “roman” originate from German Language. Loosely translated, *Bildung* means ‘formation’ while “romans” means ‘novel’. However, it is also called novels of formation. In the perspective of Golban, Petru and Karabakir, Tamer (2009:320):

We would define the *Bildungsroman* in short as the novel of identity formation. With certain caveats, of course; namely, that the formation of identity is textualised as a process, diachronic and large-scale, from birth or early childhood through adolescence and youth to entering upon adulthood; this process is rendered in a biographical or autobiographical manner as development – spiritual, psychological and moral, rather than physical – leading to the formation of personality. Formation as the end of the maturation process necessarily implies change (inner rather than external); thus, the *Bildungsroman* portrays the protagonists, usually round not flat, as getting rid of their static and ready-made features and becoming necessarily dynamic (...). Formation would promise completion and happiness, but it may also end in failure, or in a combination of both success and failure as

conditioned by authorial message and thematic perspectives.

It is usually centred on male protagonists that often left the familiarity of their homes for parts unknown. Along the way these young men would meet new people and learn about the ways of the world before they would eventually reach a point in their story where they could be content or at ease with whom they have become and with their place in society. M. H. Abrams (1999:255), states that the *Bildungsroman* illustrates, “the development of the protagonist’s mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences- and often through a spiritual crisis- into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one’s identity and role in the world.

The beginning of the story often involves a loss or tragedy that disturbs the protagonist, which propels the character to leave home in a journey to fill the vacuum or to survive. It involves the narration and account of a person who goes out in search of answers to many life questions which he believes would be answered from quest and travelling. This type of novel often features the main character in conflict with society. Following this contact, the struggle is fierce between the character and social values in his /her quest for self-discovery. The protagonist gradually accepts the society and the society in turn welcomes and integrates him/her either negatively or positively into the mainstream of affairs of the society. He/she becomes a member of the society which will mark an end to the loss, anger, disappointment and revolt. In short, *Bildungsroman* is a journey of becoming”.

Growth and transformation are inevitable universal human phenomena. As regards humans, transformation could be positive or negative, but it is an unavoidable feat of humanity. Lately, growing up in a constantly modernising Nigeria has deviated from

the norms of dignity and innocence. Thus, one will not hesitate to inquire about the dynamics for the formation of youths during their journey of maturation. In Nigeria, *Bildungsroman* has been redesigned by modern writers to account for the problems of the modern “growing up child” which emanates socio-culturally, politically or otherwise. Writers like Helon Habila, Sefi Atta, Kaine Agary, Yewande Omotosho, Buchi Emecheta, Chimamanda Adiche and others have employed *Bildungsroman*, to explicate their points. This novelistic outlet employed by some of these writers was originally perceived as being European, male and bourgeoisie. However, Nigerian writers have subverted *Bildungsroman* of its Euro centricity by indigenising it to account for our unique experiences and also address some African socio-political issues. This is unfolded through child/youth protagonists. The child or youth protagonist has effectively become a medium for assessing the growth of a country alongside the development of the child. It has become a means through which writers delineate pressing postcolonial issues which include corruption, violence, racial and tribal conflict, bad leadership, political turbulence and chaos, postcolonial disillusionment, poverty and so on.

Ogaga Okuyade points out that:

The child-figure in postcolonial Africa hardly goes through the normal developmental pattern associated with the African people before the incursion of Europe into Africa. I make this assertion because the impact of global challenges on the bureaucratic repression and the failure of postcolonial African leadership, unequivocally transform the African child into an adult during the prime of their adolescence. (2015:118)

Okuyade implies that the drastic changes of industrialization and urbanisation gradually changed the world. However, the youthful process of growing up becomes hectic and traumatising. The need for the negotiation of a new identity, accepting that something is

missing in one's life and the possibility of restoration therefore becomes relevant.

Abel, Hirsch & Langland (1983:4) opines that it is necessary to include gender as a concept which colours development along with factors such as class and history, as "the sex of the protagonist modifies every aspect of a particular *Bildungsroman*: its narrative structure, its implied psychology, its representation of social pressures" (5). Therefore, *Bildungsroman* written by females about females have undeniably been dominant in the Nigerian literary space. Specifically, *Bildungsroman* written by men about male protagonists has been deprived of sustained attention. So many writers have written about female protagonists struggling to survive and gain an identity in Post-colonial Nigeria and highly patriarchal society. Resultantly, the predominant focus on the female protagonist in the Nigerian *Bildungsroman* provoked Nigerian male writers to explore the formation process of male protagonists.

Some critics felt that the typical re-writing of Western traditions makes it impossible for the theorist to interpret postcolonial *Bildungsroman* from the perspective of a Nigerian, which definitely brings the risk of Euro centrism. Hence, Nigerian male writers did not completely do away with the framework of the Western *Bildungsroman* but reinvented the form within the Nigerian context to suit their aims. There are reasonable incongruities between Western *Bildungsroman* and the Nigerian variant. The Western *Bildungsroman* excluded gender discourse, race, post-colonial issues; contemporary issues that the Nigerian *Bildungsroman* has been made to accommodate. The Nigerian variant alters the traditional form in order to highlight public concerns as inscribed in the private lives of post-colonial characters.

The genre's flexibility allowed for variations and modifications that ensured its contemporary viability in Nigerian literature. Helon Habila and Elnathan John engage their male protagonists with historic events surveying themes of loss, trauma, violence and displacement. Most of the selected texts are set in postcolonial Nigeria, in the era of military governance: in the mid-1980s to later 1990s. These periods in Nigeria are historically marked by a series of military governments. These periods experienced economic oil gains, losses, corruption, human rights abuses, and many others.

The selected novels share a common strand with other postcolonial *Bildungsroman* works – Growth and its prospective psychological and social implications on the lives of the male characters involved, projecting multiple protagonists. Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* (2015) also has multiple protagonists. As an indigenized variant, their *Bildungsroman* does not “solely” deal with one omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscience character. This study traces the developmental process of its male protagonists. Ogaga Okuyade (2009:7) writes that “the personal experiences of the protagonists serve as an index to the larger cultural, socio-historical conditions and thus the protagonists’ personal *Bildung* becomes inseparable from the political agenda of their nations”. The search for identity, violence, trauma, projection of history, crisis of post-independence 1990, are dominant themes in the selected texts. The study shows how these selected male writers have conformed to the traditional *Bildungsroman* and how they deviated in order to achieve a unique variant. The study also analyses how the male protagonists’ various stages of consciousness brings about societal changes.

This study employs Psychoanalytic and Postcolonial theory. The Psychoanalytic theory is championed by Sigmund Freud (1859-1939). According to Monte (1977:8), “Psychoanalytic theories assume the existence of unconscious internal states that motivate an individual’s overt actions”. Psychoanalytic theory suits this

research because it reveals the psyche and functionality of the mind to the readers. This helps readers understand what motivates a character's actions, reactions and defences. Psychoanalytical study of a work of literature requires a look at the mind of even the author and the characters. Since the characters during their growth process are mostly in conflict with their society from childhood, the psychoanalytic theory will be appropriate because it reveals the psychological drives of the characters and their defence mechanisms. Post-colonial study is the academic study of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonised people and their lands. It is a critical theory analysis of the history, culture, literature and discourse of European imperial power. John Lye (2008:2) writing on the subject states that, "the theory focuses on the way in which literature by the colonising culture distorts the experience and realities, and inscribes the inferiority of the colonised peoples and their attempt to articulate their identity and reclaim their past in the face of that past's inevitable otherness". This article is premised on the Postcolonial theory because the selected authors present characters whose existence are deeply affected by the severe contemporary socio- economic and political conditions of their communities caused by the oppressive neo-colonial system. Therefore, the protagonists are in constant conflict with an oppressive structure which tries to mute and suppress their attempt in attaining self-development and self-discovery.

The study examines *Bildungsroman* tradition in the selected novels and analyses the growth trajectories of male protagonists. Additionally, it investigates the key factors hindering the smooth developmental process of the growing up male child in Nigeria and evaluates how the male protagonists' moral growth aligns to national development.

Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* and John Elnathan's *Born on a Tuesday* as *Bildungsroman*

Measuring Time (2006) is a *Bildungsroman* novel written by Helon Habila, published in 2006 which reflects the historical conditions and contemporary complexities of Nigerian society. Born in Kaltungo, Gombe State, Helon created an imaginary village "Keti" in the Northern Eastern region of Nigeria. He captured the historical evolution of the community simultaneously carrying readers through the physical, moral and psychological development of the male protagonists; fifteen-year-old twins Mamo and La Mamo, from when they were born just after the end of the Nigeria Civil War of 1967–70. He pictured life in Nigeria under various military dictatorships and civilian regimes, and of civil war and socio-political chaos in post-independence Nigeria during the 1980s and 1990s. In an interview with RamonuSanusi (2009:1), Habila reveals what inspired him to write *Measuring Time*, "I've always been fascinated by history, by culture, and how culture changes with time".

On the other hand, John Elnathan is the author of *Born on a Tuesday* (2015), a Nigerian novelist and writer; one of Nigeria's most well-known satirists, a Christian minority born and raised in Kaduna. Elnathan John mirrors the rise of Islamic extremism in Nigeria through the eyes and experiences of Dantala, a young Almajiri boy who finds himself caught up in a highly radicalised Islamic community. He extensively captures the political Islam and the traumatic experiences of individuals in the face of religious violence, insecurity amongst others. He explores boyhood in the wake of extremism and fundamentalism. *Born on a Tuesday* delves behind the scenes of the media's portrayal of Boko Haram. He offers a unique and intensely personal look into an under-represented side of contemporary Northern life in Nigeria.

The two Nigerian authors depict the Northern society through their varied male protagonists. They make an attempt in forbearing the

struggles associated with imperialism and its consequence of oppression, war, corruption, trauma and so on in a post-colonial setting. Their novels under study encompass the Post-colonial *Bildungsroman*, War *Bildungsroman*, and Diasporic *Bildungsroman*. Using *Bildungsroman* as a literary analytical tool, Helon Habila and John Elnathan navigate how the moral growth of their male representatives is parallel to the general development of the nation. Thus, they start by indulging the family as a kick off base.

Bildungsroman is usually portrayed through the angle of a child or adolescent; a child (sometimes orphaned or fatherless) who lives in a village or provincial town. In Helon's *Measuring Time*, though the story is told in the third person narrative, it is told through the lens of Mamo and LaMamo who are twins and the key characters for this study. On the other hand, in Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*, the story is told in first person narrative by Dantala, a smart, inquisitive young street kid and Islamic scholar struggling to survive. *Bildungsroman* involves young naïve teenagers still trying to have a sense of belonging, Mamo and LaMamo show their naivety firstly when they intend to discover a new way of seeing the world by rubbing the rheum of a dead dog since dogs "can see spirits and ghost" (MT, 27). Instead of their desired adventure, they suffer from nightmares and develop temporary blindness as a result of eye infection. Dantala in *Born on a Tuesday* is also seen as naïve from how he tags along Banda, their street gang leader for protection from other bullies.

For *Measuring Time*, Mamo is the principal protagonist. Mamo and his twin have diverse physical dispositions, while Mamo battles with sickle anaemia, introverted, directionless, and always moody. La Mamo is strong, extroverted, assertive and preferred by their father. They are motherless and despise their father because of how he mistreated their mother before her death. They are convinced that he made their mother's life so miserable that she

died at a young age. Also, because he shows them no love or concern. In *Born on a Tuesday*, the young street Quranic student, Dantala is fatherless but also despises his father. Clearly seen in his nonchalance towards learning of his father's death after his Quranic training. His friend, Jibril too who is a secondary male protagonist also despises his elder brother Mallam Abdul Nur, the deputy to the Sheikh in the mosque because of how he maltreats him.

This corresponds with Karen Horney's Theory of Personality (1942) where she postulates that psychological disorders were caused by disturbed interpersonal relationships during childhood. If a parent's behaviour towards a child is indifferent and hostile, the child feels a need to repress the hostility induced by their parents due to a feeling of helplessness, need for genuine love, guilt, or fear. This repressed hostility manifests into a condition called "basic anxiety". Thus, this is evident in Mamo's life as his father's ill treatment, harsh words and constant comparison towards him makes him unhappy, isolated and depressed. He alienates himself from everyone around him.

Inclining to the *Bildungsroman* tradition, there is a sense of awakening that spurs an immediate feeling to leave home in order to survive. This often involves a loss or tragedy that disturbs the protagonist. Mamo and LaMamo are thrust upon an inhospitable and hostile world, like stranded castaways at the mercy of surrogate parents who do not experience motherly or fatherly love. The hatred the twins have for their father however ignites a passion to become famous by leaving the house and becoming soldiers. Being inspired by the heroic attention which their uncle, Haruna who was a Biafran war soldier got by the villagers upon his return, they nursed a deep desire to leave Keti town and join the military. While Mamo could not escape or embark on the journey as planned by him, his twin and his cousin as a result of sickle cell anaemia attack (an inherited disease of the blood), his twin and his

cousin Asabar, successfully continue the journey to faraway Libya to continue their quest for fame and an envisioned better life.

Similarly, in *Born on a Tuesday*, after attending Quranic School for six years Dantala lives among a gang of street boys who sleep under a Kuka tree in Bayan Layi. During the election, the boys are paid by the Small Party to cause trouble and intimidate members of the Big Party. When their attempt to burn down the opposition's local headquarters fails. It dawns on Dantala that he must run for his life especially as he had watched his gang leader, Banda shot. With the police in pursuit, Dantala flees the village to Sokoto, where he meets Imam Sheikh Jamal and his deputy Abdul-Nur who adopts him and he begins to reside in their Mosque.

The second stage of the *Bildungsroman* genre embodies 'the journey' which is a most common and dominant feature in any quest narrative. The selected writers for this study adhere to this, as it is instrumental to the growth process of *Bildungsroman* characters. Marta Mazurkiewicz (2012:9) says, "In the novels classified as *Bildungsroman*, a protagonist (usually male) makes an actual or metaphoric journey, experiencing many obstacles and difficulties but finally achieving a better understanding of himself and of the society in which he lives. The writers explore the moral, physical, psychological and spiritual journey of these protagonists right after they had stepped out of their tragic or discontented zone. Of course, journey effects the expected growth or transformation but not without obstacles along the line. It is also said to entail education which facilitates maturity.

Mamo's journey starts in Keti after he returns home. He is highly traumatised after his brother leaves for Libya, feels like a prisoner doomed for death, but finds solace in studying books. He secures admission into the university and leaves home but the anaemic attack limits his stay in the university as he only stays for two years after missing a session's exams due to illness. But while in school, his discovery starts, "And it was as a student that he discovered the kind of anonymity he had always wanted. He begins to feel lonely and withdrawn after his brother's departure,

because he has always been shielded by him. The narrator says “LaMamo had been the leader who always came up with the wild, edgy ideas, which would then be reviewed and tempered by Mamo’s less assertive, reflective nature. But now Mamo had to do everything for himself and he was finding it hard to cope” (MT, 66). The excerpt shows that he begins to convince himself that LaMamo has always been the one who calls the shots while he just follows. But facts prove it is actually the other way round. It is Mamo’s idea that they pursue fame and immortality. It is Mamo that brings up the idea of killing the blind witch’s dog while LaMamo asks “How?” It is Mamo’s idea that they join the army. It is Mamo who insists that LaMamo and Asabar must go on without him when sickness holds him down. This is a clear example of “denial” which is a defence mechanism under Sigmund Freud’s Psychoanalytic theory. The ego blocks overwhelming experiences from awareness, causing the individual to refuse to acknowledge reality.

Mamo begins to gradually transform, hence his onetime diary of hate and fame becomes childish to him. He begins to see life differently. He now cared less about being famous as he distinguishes tragedy from fame. He realises that uncle Haruna’s celebration upon his return and at his funeral which used to be his inspiration for fame was not really famous but “tragic”.

Bildungsroman involves mentorship or apprenticeship of the protagonists. Mamo’s apprenticeship continues when he accepts a job offer as a history teacher from his uncle, Iliya, in the Ketu Community Secondary School. His uncle is seen as his mentor who tries to change his ill-fated perspective about life and motivates him to believe in his capabilities. Having withdrawn from the university he decided to take up the job instead of just sitting in his room and reading all day. This decision further expounds his maturity as he never dreamt of being a teacher, “It

was a mark of how far he had matured in the last few years that he saw immediately the sense in his uncle's offer" (MT, 72).

Habila portrays LaMamo, Mamo's twin as the one who represents a trans-African experience of post-colonialism, recurring civil Wars, and neo-imperial struggles across the African continent. He is the migrant who travels to discover his identity and with hopes of a better future. Jerome Buckley (1974:13) notes that, "a geographical movement which brings to the protagonist both freedom and corruption is essential to the process of individualization". LaMamo's apprenticeship kicks off as soon as he arrives in Libya and through his letters to Mamo, we are exposed to his growth process. He gradually begins to mature. He undergoes martial training, gains general knowledge and acquires military skills.

On the other hand, in *Born on a Tuesday*, Dantala is faced with the aftermath of the presidential election crisis that led to the death of Banda and other Kuka tree boys. He escapes for his life as he returns back to DogonIcce, his hometown in Sokoto. He encounters a fatal accident on the road, while trying to reach home, to see his mother whom he has not seen for eight years. While he seeks for aid, he discovers a Mosque, led by a mild, wise, enlightened Sheikh. The Sheik becomes sympathetic towards him due to his modesty and decides to make him his disciple and helper, if his family consents. The Imam, Sheikh Jamal, adopts him, and Dantala starts working with him as his mentee, learning English, calling prayers, and also becomes his official assistant.

'Journey' also encompasses a quest for self-discovery, transformation/change which the character does not achieve easily as he is seen facing obstacles interwoven with societal values. Mamo and LaMamo become separated early in the story. Each takes a different life route even though they maintain a strong filial and psychological bond throughout the narrative. In contrast to

Mamo, LaMamo's experiences and views are rendered predominantly in the form of four letters addressed to his brother and written from the places where he wanders throughout the larger part of his life. He travels across West and North Africa—Chad, Libya, Mali, Liberia and Guinea—where he fights, first as a child soldier and later as an itinerant mercenary. Thus, while the view of one protagonist is articulated from a position that is relatively fixed (in geographical terms), that of the other assumes a more mobile and transnational character.

Mamo advances intellectually as he starts teaching, doing more research on the history of Keti and studying more books. Consequently, he gains a good command of the English Language and the history of the people. He writes an essay about the history of Keti village, and the positive reviews it gets, attracts the attention of the entire village. As a result of that, he is appointed by the Mai as the Palace Secretary and is commissioned to write a book on the history of the people. LaMamo, on the other hand improves his mercenary skills, gains more general knowledge, fighting so many wars, being engaged in armed conflict and surviving deadly war crises. For Dantala who now becomes an apprentice to the Imam, Sheikh, and his assistant, Mallam Abdul-Nur. He meets Malam Abdul Nur's brother, Jibril from Ilorin who has come to live with them at the Mosque and eventually becomes his roommate. He's presented by Habila as an auxiliary character, also the secondary protagonist who helps shape the character formation of Dantala. Dantala's quest for self-discovery starts as he yearns to learn English. Dantala comes from illiteracy, yet he is bright, extremely curious; he is thirsty for words and their meaning, dictionaries and all sorts of reading. He eventually learns how to speak English and becomes capable of memorising pages; pages in Hausa, Arabic, and English.

According to Buckley (1974), one of the requirements to be met in order for a novel to be classified as *Bildungsroman* is that:

the protagonist gets into at least two love affairs or sexual encounters, one debasing, one exalting, and demands that in this respect and others the hero reappraise his values. He might also have to resist trial by love and embark on a sentimental career. Therefore, the male characters come in contact with females who influence them positively or negatively and transform them sexually or otherwise.

Our selected Nigerian writers create female characters who facilitate the male protagonists' growth. On this note, Mamo's childhood friend, now girlfriend, motivates him into pursuing the "historian" career and gives him reasons why he should feel competent. When he comes across "Reverend Drinkwater's *A Brief History of The Peoples of Ket*", she gives him moral support. She also helps him to send it to a Professor at her alma mater which helps him attract international recognition. Through her, his sexual innocence is revealed and sexual growth achieved as well. The first time they make love, Zara tells him, "it will be better next time" (MT, 105). The narrator tells us the next time that, "the next time was better. They were more relaxed, and she cried as she came, her body shaking and bouncing on the bed. Afterward she broke into tears and kissed him all over the face" (MT, 107). Dantala on his part falls in love with Aisha, one of Sheikh's daughters, "I think I am 'obsess' (BOT, 150)" he self-diagnoses. Unlike Zara, she doesn't directly influence him but indirectly triggers him to man up to his desire. Dantala decides to be a man and so makes a proposal to the girl he likes directly, through a phone call.

Through Jubril, Dantala's innocence is made known. He says "I wanted to lie to him that I had touched so many girls in Bayan Layi..." (BOT, 156). Jubril is concerned about Dantala's sexual life and forces him to try some sexual adventures. The first time Jibril takes him to a brothel, he shares his experience as a first timer. He had ejaculated too quickly just from a mere touch. LaMamo as

well meets Bintou who he saved from his colleagues who had wanted to rape her. She influences him as he re-evaluates his life. He describes the moments he shared with her as, “Those were the best days I have ever known in all my life...I threw away my old uniform, I cut my hair” (MT, 137). It’s symbolic for him to throw away his old uniform, it’s more like rejecting his old ways of killing and shedding blood. However, the writers present them as initially naïve and innocent but experience ‘loss of innocence along the line.

The *Bildungsroman* involves the “maturity stage” which basically spearheads transformation. Maturity is not easily won; it is a long and arduous process, with many mistakes, tests, and internal obstacles that the character must face in order to finally gain maturity. Mamo, the first born of the twins, inherited sickle cell anaemia from his mother, who died during childbirth. So, from an early age Mamo, fragile and prone to health crises, does not expect to grow into adulthood. This makes him reflective and withdrawn, always waiting for something to happen: first death, later on fame, fortune or something else. Being despised and verbally taunted by his father as a result of his sickly disposition, his father would refer to his body as “weak and useless (57)”. Therefore, Mamo felt inferior and preferred to be alone, he is socially alienated.

This is in line with Karen Horney’s Psychoanalytic Social Theory, where she postulates that neurosis grows out of extreme need to feel loved. She further observes that the anxiety can be combated by moving towards other people, against other people and moving away from other people, Mamo’s case was alienation, he alienated himself from other people and gilded towards his aunty, Marina and his brother LaMamo for hope and closure in order to overcome the anxiety of not being loved by his father. According to Mamo, the stories Auntie Marina tells him “far into the moonlit night” saved him “from early death, [and] taught [him] how to live with ” his anaemic body (*Measuring Time*, 19). Ironically, the sickness

provides the circumstances in which his mental faculties of observation and articulation are sharpened. His reflexive disposition and frequent solitude afford him distance from society which facilitates the development of his intellectual faculties. His survival strategy was books. He uses the sublimation defence Psychoanalysis strategy by averting his consciousness to one of his hobbies, “reading”, in order to traverse another world and feel better.

Even when he accepted a teaching job offer from his uncle, his psychological trauma continued; He often asked ironical questions which preceded “what if...?” Because he lived in uncertainty. Mamo had a hard time expressing himself properly because he was always unsure of what to say. While teaching, he lacked the confidence to properly express himself. This is as a result of the inferiority complex already instilled in him by his father making him feel like he is not good enough. He would express jealousy over his brother, wishing he had his brother’s body. On the other hand, Dantala is emotionally traumatised after some of his street cliques were killed in a violent clash between them and the police, especially his leader and friend Banda. He questions Allah for the loss. Dantala, just like Mamo, desired the company of his late friend Banda. He experiences insomnia and tightness of breath as he wishes Banda was there to keep him company. He again experiences trauma after catching two men who also live in the mosque having sex and is tormented by the image as he finds himself thinking amorously about the men. He was also having sexual dreams as a result of what he had seen earlier.

The psychoanalytic theory is applied here as what Banda had seen in the unconscious disturbs him in the conscious. He could not sleep as a result of this, as it keeps replaying in his mind. This triggers his id as he begins to wake up with a hard penis and still has wet dreams. It was so bad that even when his benefactor, Mallam Abdul Nur put his hand on his shoulder to commend him,

his penis got hard again. He tried the repression psychoanalytic defence mechanism as he struggles to eradicate the thoughts from his consciousness, "I struggled to block out all the images flying through my head: good thoughts, chasing each other until I felt dizzy" (BOT, 63). Through Dantala's disgusted impression, one gets a glimpse of how the average Northerner, and Nigerian as a whole, views homosexuality, and queerness. It shows that Nigerians are homophobic and especially the conservative Northerners frown at homo-sexuality.

Dantala's ego comes into play, as it forces him to satisfy the cravings of the id. He goes into the toilet, brings out his penis and begins to masturbate till he has ejaculated on the floor and made a mess of it. But he says, "I tried hard not to, but the feeling was strong and raging in my body like the fast running water in a river during the rainy season (BOT, 63)". The effort at self -denial proves his consciousness at defeating trauma from psychological insecurity. He deals with trauma after losing his mother, he also deals with the trauma of not being close to his siblings. He is always seen questioning himself, and most times incapable of expressing himself satisfyingly. Yet, he remains un-flinched and refuses to be influenced. Habila and Elnathan John present these characters as linguistically deficient as a result of environmental influences. They both face voicelessness, self-judgmental disposition, and alienation. Dantala is always either seen complaining of tightness of intestine, running away feeling, amongst other things. He also continues to be disturbed by the images of the man he struck during the election violence back at Bayan Layi.

These authors indigenise the traditional *Bildungsroman* by uniquely expressing post-colonial concerns through these male characters. The characters undergo moral journey/growth. The protagonists are morally conscious, they are seen judging their moral compass, and struggling with their conscience to do what is

right as against societal values/ills. Through these characters, electoral malpractice in Nigeria is revealed, Dantala mirrors the stereotypical “Northern jobless youth out to incite violence and chaos willing to die for whatever cause”. He is mobilised with his friends to cause chaos on the Election Day and help rig elections, they go out burning offices, killing security guards. Banda is also seen saying, “They have switched the numbers”. Through Dantala too, the corrupt act of registering under-aged children in the North to vote is exposed. The authors represent through the male characters exactly what is obtainable in the society today, how poverty is weaponized against youths and used to destroy them. Dantala later regrets his actions.

Change which is an important factor in *Bildungsroman* also takes place. Dantala rises up the ranks to become the favourite assistant of Sheikh Jamal. Dantala becomes a changed man who is entrusted with authority because his new environment affords him a decent means of attaining his materialistic aspirations of a home-food and clothes, unlike in Bayan Layi where all he knew was street life with his companions who lived under the Kuka tree. Those who could communicate in English, Hausa and Arabic were the influential and privileged ones, like Sheikh Jamal and Mallam Abdul-Nur, who had also gained a formal education; formal education that the many followers of either Sheikh Jamal or Mallam Abdul-Nur did not have access to. Luckily enough, Dantala could now speak and read English. Dantala is now privileged to sit for meetings with dignitaries like the Governor, Deputy Governor, and other important personalities. In one of these meetings, he’s disgusted at how our leaders abuse human beings:

The deputy governor has so many people around him. He has someone holding his bag, someone pulling out a chair for him, someone holding his phones and someone writing when he speaks. I wonder why one

man needs so many people as if he were a cripple.
Sheikh does not even let me carry his bag. (MT, 140)

He observes the underground irregularity that goes on at the foundation of the Mosque such as homosexuality, betrayal, stealing and corruption, as well as cover ups for friendly politicians in the society with large bank accounts. For example, Dantala notices that Abdul-Nur, Sheikh Jamal's erstwhile deputy, steals money from the donation box and even bags of rice meant to be shared at the Mosque on Fridays to ensure his own survival. He also questions the Sheikh who he initially perceived as a highly respected figure in the Islamic community, who he now sees as another opportunistic creature trying to survive through the means he knows best, religion – Islam for collecting money from our corrupt leaders. In *Measuring Time* too, Asabar gathers his friends to produce fake ballot cards ahead of the elections in order for his uncle Lamang to win the local government chairmanship. Mamo catches them and writes a short notice to the police not minding that it would jeopardise his dad's success. He was more concerned in doing the right thing.

Similarly, in *Born on a Tuesday*, a Palace Chief, Waziri invites Mamo to write a biography of the Local Emir (king). Although his fortunes rise as he mingles with the military top brass and royalty following a journal article in which he attempts a re-writing of local history. He soon discovers that he is being manipulated by the Waziri, a palace chief who invites him to write a biography of the local Emir (king) for the celebration of his tenth anniversary. However, plagued by drought, they decide to organise a fundraising meeting which would feature dignitaries in order to construct wells for the people of Ketu. But to his utmost disappointment, He observes that the Mai had employed incompetent labourers to do the job and that the millions of Naira donated to build wells in the village for the common good has been shared by members of the palace who are willing to offer him a

share of the loot. He vehemently refuses this offer and even confronts the Waziri, Mamo asks, “You mean the money, the fifteen million that was raised...was shared and nothing is left for the original project?” (MT, 281). This annoys Mamo, who rejects the offer of a bribe and accuses him of deceiving the villagers. He was so angry that he even considered a resignation.

The above excerpt shows that Mamo was beginning to grow into an audacious adult who is no longer scared of expressing himself. He is also seen standing up to his father, “He was facing his father defiantly, unblinking” (MT, 78). Habila exposes bad leadership and other societal ills through him. The authors present their protagonists as exploited adolescents. The most obtainable theme is the use of poverty and religion as a tool to incite anarchy, and political disruption. Banda and his gang- the Kuka Tree Boys are bribed with N200 (two hundred naira) each to buy fish and bread, in exchange for their participation in property destruction, and political violence. Asabar is used as a political thug in exchange for peanuts by Mamo’s father in *Measuring Time*. Politicians take advantage of the pain and deprivation of the youth to co-opt them into violence in order to achieve their selfish intentions especially during elections. Dantala represents the average youth from the North and provides an insight into reality. The writers through their protagonists discern the need for the system to provide social welfare and dividends of democracy to its citizenry in order to avert the catastrophe of youths controlled by their stomach and not their brain. Dantala and his friends in Bayan Layi, Asabar and his group of friends in Ketu are products of a dysfunctional society and political system that does little or nothing to cater for the welfare of the poor.

Mamo’s transformation takes place as he transforms from a sickly reclusive child, despised by his father and despairing for life, to a young adult who is a passionate lover, respected community figure, and enthusiastic intellectual. Mamo’s fortunes seemingly

rise as he mingles with the military top brass and royalty following his appointment at re-writing of local history. Just as the function of the post-colonial theory is to correct wrong impressions and marginalised viewpoints made by the whites about the history of others, Mamo is determined to write a revisionist version of the history of Ketu in order to right the wrongs he read about in the book. He observes obvious discrepancies in Drinkwater's accounts and his interviews with people who could be considered the real custodians of Ketu's history. He says of the whiteman's account of Ketu that the whiteman was more interested in;

(...) telling his imagined home audience how really backward our culture is (...) His first three pages are dedicated to comparing our geography to that of his native Iowa, and he seems to blame us for having only two seasons instead of four, and for not having snowfall (...) a whole chapter is wasted on trying to expose the fraudulence of our traditional healers. (MT, 144)

For Mamo, "A true history is one that looks at the lives of individuals, ordinary people who toil, dream and suffer, who bear the brunt of whatever vicissitude time inflicts on the nation" (MT, 152). Therefore, Habila through Mamo interacts with the colonial discourse, by [re]telling the story from the perspective of the ordinary oppressed person, what Young (2003:6 & 8) describes as "a down to top perspective" meaning, telling the story not from the top (the empowered) to the down (the disempowered), but from the down to the top.

Mamo's moral standards continued to be tested when he realised during his research for the Mai's biography that the Waziri had ulterior motives for asking him to write about the Mai. This Motive had to do with selfish reasons of usurping the throne and becoming the next Mai. The Waziri tries to bribe Mamo so he would write the book by threatening to leave his arrested aunty, Marina, in jail. He boldly confronts the Mai and stands his ground.

This goes to show that Mamo has now transformed; now mature enough to understand his environment, smart enough to figure out manipulative tactics and bold enough to confront and make tough decisions for himself, as against the previous dependent pessimistic Mamo. It is confirmed, “Suddenly he was no longer the awkward bumbling idiot his father had so mercilessly derided. He felt strong and unafraid, he had somehow outwitted his sickle-cell anaemia, it had been over a year since he’d last fallen sick (MT, 164). Even his pessimistic disposition of awaiting death and feeling useless had now changed thus, “He felt like screaming out aloud, I am alive and I am useful and everything will work out fine!” (MT, 164). Mamo becomes more aware of his passion, more intentional and positive about his future.

It is through Mamo and Dantala’s consciousness the readers learn of the corruption, unemployment, lack of infrastructure and other several ills dominant in the neo/post -colonial Nigerian society. Habila’s and John’s narratives focus on the consciousness—perceptions, thoughts, emotions, beliefs—of Mamo, LaMamo and Dantala respectively thus facilitating the overall representation of the transformation of these protagonists. However, these writers expose the dysfunctionalities and socio-political problems that have persistently continued to besiege the political terrain in Nigeria through their male voices.

The selected writers interrogate dynamics of fragmented family bonds and its negative effects which include troubled identity and trauma. The writers through their protagonists epitomise post-coloniality and its impact on family space. Dantala’s predominantly violent memories of his father, the mental disturbance of his mother and the conversion of his brother to the Shiites have all caused Dantala to be estranged from his family. Dantala experiences emotions that come with dealing with the loss of loved ones. Dantala learns that due to the heavy floods that have ravaged his village, and surrounding villages, his childhood home

has been washed away, and his twin sisters which he never got to meet were carried away by the flood. This makes him sad as he accepts and understands that kinship is more about relationships than blood. Dantala's brothers, who are Shia, are distant and he feels closer to Jubril, Abdul-Nur's brother, and Sheikh than to anyone else.

All these tragic events leave him with wonders of 'whys' and "I could have's". The boy lives through them as a boy, coping at best, figuring how to survive them. He goes by trial and error, asking questions, getting all the wrong answers, or incomplete ones he will need to get back to, slowly uncovering a more credible version of shifting reality. This is the reality of an Almajiri in Northern Nigeria. Helon Habila through Dantala reflects the government's lack of response to natural disasters and terrorism, contributing to the displacement of families from their own homes and how it leaves them battling internal conflict. Umma's dementia due to flood depicts environmental insecurity and its psychological effects. Her reaction on seeing her son shows a deterioration in her cognitive function due to damage in the brain connected to her loss.

Mamo too experiences family abandonment as his mother dies while giving birth to him and LaMamo, his twin brother. Hence, they are raised by their widowed aunt Marina because their autocratic father Lamang, a politician and a business man is distant and not interested in them in the same way he is apathetic towards their mother Tabitha. The breach of the ties between mother and children (and, by extension, between father and sons) symbolises a form of alienation from nature as maternal essence, nurturing, protective, therapeutic and remedial. The impression of the world gained by the twin brothers is that of existential xenophobia, cosmic ennui, despair, and meaningless misery. As a consequence, an adversarial antagonism builds up between the boys and society, embodied as it were, by a domineering figure, their father. The

breakdown of the family or the disappearance of family values of parental love, support, care and warmth seems to be at the root of the myriad of social pathologies afflicting contemporary society. The selected writers use the family as a paradigm to mirror the unsavoury state of affairs of the family as a social unit in the contemporary world.

Opposed to the traditional *Bildungsroman*, Habila and Elnathan John present the consequences of war. These writers encapsulate the war *Bildungsroman* variant in their character presentation. La Mamo alongside his brother also experiences growth and trauma. LaMamo joins a rebel group near the Chad border, trains in Libya, then fights alongside Charles Taylor's rebels in war-torn Liberia. He endangers his life as a mercenary fighting for a cause he no longer believes in. He says, "I asked myself what all these fighting is for? I am a soldier for almost ten years now and I live by fighting but sometimes it doesn't make sense... I don't feel like fighting anymore. I even began to plan how to come home" (MT, 130-131). Having seen so much human suffering and the debasement of human life through mindless blood lust and mass killings, LaMamo loses his innocence and zest for life. Through him, the negative effects of war are mirrored.

LaMamo goes through his dark era, as he is highly traumatised, watching a young girl get raped by his colleagues and being forced to shoot one on the eye. He keeps reiterating how much he was tired of fighting; a once long- time desired goal. He says, "I felt tired and I was actually crying like a small boy" (MT, 135). He applies the *Regression* defence mechanism, whereby the individual moves backward in development in order to **cope with stress** (e.g., an overwhelmed adult acting like a child). He continues, "I want to tell her that war is, sometimes you kill without thinking, but it won't make sense" (MT, 137). Mamo thinks of himself as a beast and doesn't get it easy psychologically. He battles with unrest, nostalgia and trauma. LaMamo typifies the tragic abortion of hope

and possibility which the diasporic youth in Nigerian society represent. They leave Nigeria with hopes of a better life, only to get there and start to deal with other factors which bring about fear, trauma and Nostalgia. LaMamo's first-hand reports of the tragedy and trauma of civil war in three West African countries also proves the transnational view of the effects of war showing that the negative effects of war are not limited only to Nigeria.

The subject matter of postcolonial literature is marked by its concern for ambiguity or loss of identity. It investigates the clash of cultures in which one deems itself to be superior and imposes its own practices on the less powerful one. Analysing "*Measuring Time*" through the postcolonial theory, **retelling history** in the novel is dominant. This is seen when Mamo scripts the Christmas play Aunt Marina's group at the village church always present at Christmas time. The play passes a message of how Reverend Drinkwater's arrival in Keti in 1918 had liberated the society from a culture and religion that was backward. The narrator says:

The climax came when the reverend stormed the villages central shrine to knock the peaceful looking idols from their stands and then, Bible in one hand and idol in the other, he angrily turned and faced the surprised crowd outside, eyes blazing, advanced the front and shouting quoting Joshua 24:15, "Choose for yourself this day whom you will serve (...) Then he hurled the idols into a bonfire. (MT, 34)

The play titled "*The Coming*" (34) rather echoes Keti's precolonial and colonial experiences. There seems to have been a harmonious way of life that previously existed until the coming of civilization as introduced by the Westerners. It is also important to note how the play, when scripted, becomes too difficult for women in their forties and fifties, "not by any means the most mentally agile age" (MT, 34), to recall their lines and efficiently act. These are women

who without the scripted version had displayed dexterity and confidence. The narrator observes, “Mamo could see that the raw, unpremeditated vitality had gone out of the performance” (MT, 35). This saddens him. This is symbolic because Mamo's attempt to script the play is “foreign” as against the usual local performance of the woman. However, attempting to copy the westerners by writing down the lines takes away the “originality and indigeneity” of the play which results in a poor stage performance. This goes to show that our way of life, even though seen as backward by westerners (colonial masters) was beneficial and prestigious to us. Habila corrects their barbaric impression of our culture; through Mamo’s observations and eyes.

Habila’s attempt at retelling history is typical in his account of the civil war as regards Haruna’s story. Habila relays the effects of war through Mamo’s uncle, Haruna’s flashback and narrations. Provided by Uncle Iliya and Toma who fought in the Nigerian Civil War), Habila depicts the tragic child soldier character that has become a recurring dystopian feature of recent African narratives. In *Measuring Time*, this is highlighted by the tragic death of LaMamo and also of Haruna who is the twins’ uncle. Haruna had fought in the Nigerian Civil War as a teenager and is presumed dead when he does not return home after several years. He, however, resurfaces in Keti as a destitute man who has lost his mind and commits suicide six months later. Through, Haruna’s suicide, the reader experiences the psychological effects of war. Helon Habila and Elnathan John also portray “religious violence and tribalism” as an apparatus for identity dislocation. For Dantala in *Born on a Tuesday*, there was a serious tension between Izala (Sunni) and Shiites in Sokoto which resulted in riots that consumed a number of lives and properties from both sides including schools and mosques. The author describes the steady rise of terrorist groups in Nigeria, with the most obvious one being Boko Haram. Jibril and Dantala are separated, while Dantala’s role at Sheikh’s side grows more crucial as he is confronted with a

bigger task of handling the affairs of the Mosque. Yet nothing could be done to placate the hostilities, worsened by political corruption and irrational military interventions. There is also rivalry between the Christians and the Muslims in *Measuring Time* which results to violence. This affects Mamo thus, “Mamo felt weak and numb; the news was so sudden, so unexpected. Somehow, he knew his auntie would be in the congregation on the hill” (MT, 278).

The selected writers represent Northern Nigeria as a violent place where different factions of Islam are at war with one another, and the only consistency is political corruption. They reveal the irresponsibility of political leaders and their culpability in fostering violence and chaos in communities. Elnathan John also gives his reader an exposition into the fact that different groups/sects exist not just in other religions, but also in Islam. The clash of interest which often plummets the society into riots and war, in the long run, accounts for the despoliation of nature and its elements. Aside from the human elements of existence, the non-human elements of the environment are gravely affected by these violent and bloody altercations. In one of his letters to Mamo, LaMamo details how the environment is polluted due to wars. Back in the village of Ketu, a riot breaks out between fanatical religious adherents and the aftermath of the riots is the pollution and degradation of nature. In a bid to bring the perpetrators of the riots to order, the police, in the novel, set the hills ablaze.

In *Bildungsroman*, having experienced a journey which effects transformation, the protagonists progress to the acceptance and remedy stage. “In this stage, the characters return to their place of origins, where they use their new found knowledge to help others. The characters experience epiphanies that lead to their final initiation and formation (complete or relativistic, or not existing at all), that is to say that the final stage of the formative process implies the dichotomy, success/failure, or a third possibility of

parental success or partial failure. Conforming to this, LaMamo returns to his native land a one-eyed detritus. He was informed of the threats the Waziri had issued his twin and hears about the fake promise of digging the wells for the villagers. Resultantly, LaMamo rallies the villagers, enlightens them on the issue, thereby exonerating his brother Mamo from the villager's rage. He then leads a revolt against oppression and injustice. He knocks down policemen, killed one of the water engineers. And even when Mamo gets there and tries to stop him, he says "No, this has to be done" (MT, 293). The Waziri is killed instantly by the villagers. LaMamo is seen as Keti's Messiah even though he later gets shot by the police. In *Born on a Tuesday*, Dantala is caught as a prisoner, is long tortured in order to obtain information about Jibril but refuses to betray his friend. Through Dantala's eyes, we encounter a community ravaged by flood and disease; the flood that renders many homeless in his village, including his mother; the terrorism brought about by extremist Muslims; the pains and sufferings suffered by humans; the death and detention of innocent persons.

The characters are presented by the writers as non-conformists, revolutionary, forceful and determined to make a change in the society. By amplifying the heroism and intelligence of their protagonists, these authors reinvent the adolescent experience. Their mental liberation is accompanied by social liberation. They are hopeful of a better future, having fought and gotten rid of corrupt leaders; LaMamo says on his deathbed, "I know everything will be alright (MT, 297). According to the narrator, he says of Mamo; "Suddenly he realised that the worst was over, they had survived, life had hurled its arrow on them and now it was out of missiles" (MT, 320). In *"Born on a Tuesday"*, Dantala when asked who he is after being released, says, "Black Spirit" (BOT, 259). This symbolises patriotism, hope and survival. The characters being liberated mentally, socially and nationally, are all optimistic about the future.

Representing the change they seek, they are not just psychologically liberated but nationally liberated. The protagonists however are presented as compelling modern protagonists. This is evident in how Mamo blatantly refuses to accept an incentive from the Waziri in order to sabotage the will of the people even when his aunt's life was at risk. Also seen in how LaMamo was still strong-willed even on his deathbed, "He says, "I am not scared of dying" ...I want my child to grow up here... beneath the hills like we grew up" (FB, 297). This shows maturity and cultural reaffirmation on his part. This is because he used to be someone who thought that to be successful, he needed to migrate to another country. But now his perception is different as he wishes on his deathbed that his brother ensures his wife is brought back to give birth in his country (Nigeria) and raise his child here.

To show that alongside the liberation and transformation of the protagonist is also the transformation of the nation. *In Born on a Tuesday*, after Dantala is released, when he returns home, he observes the changes, "All over the partly demolished fence of our school is the phrase "NO MORE HAQIQY". Most of them have HAQIQIY cancelled out and replaced with MUJAHIDEEN" (BOT, 258). There is an obvious change as there's a cancellation of HAQIQIY (Muslims who represent the truth), not being wanted to MUJAHIDEEN (Muslims that fight for the faith of the Muslim communities) not being wanted. The group causing violence has now been cancelled by the society.

Elnathan John clearly drew inspiration from the Nigerian Boko Haram situation, and this is insinuated from how he projected his male characters; that illiterates are the easiest to indoctrinate into dangerous and extreme ideologies, as is the case in *Born on a Tuesday*. Dantala was from childhood, indoctrinated into committing acts of violence in the name of Allah; the Kuka Tree Boys who knew no better, were used as puppets in the political games of higher forces; Mallam Abdul-Nur used illiteracy to his

advantage in recruiting followers to further his agenda, and anyone that had contrary beliefs or ideas, was considered an infidel that deserved death. No questions, or debates, no understanding or room to doubt; as long as their leaders said it with just the right level of charisma, they followed it. Therefore, these writers come off as intellectual activists interested in sensitising the society and galvanising citizens into action through male voices. Their action is to change the political leadership in their environment, political unrest in the Northern parts of Nigeria. The selected authors enlighten the readers on the kind of politics that is being practised in the country and in the North particularly.

In *Bildungsroman*, emphasis is placed on the primacy of a harmonious reconciliation and integration of the protagonist to his society. However, it's as if Mamo accepts his fate after losing his brother and watching his love interest go through mental illness; He says, "... but see where we ended up---I, tired and defeated, and she, she is losing her mind" (MT, 313). He further comes to terms with his identity (self- realisation) when he says to himself, "All my life I've lived literally in the shadow of death" (MT, 299). To further buttress his realisations, he tells the doctor, "Sometimes we seek answers where there aren't any, he thought. Questions fill us with fear and anxiety. We fear not knowing. Sometimes the answers come, but they don't fill us with the enlightenment we seek, and sometimes they even lead to madness" (MT, 314). At this point, his disappointment and mistakes are over, he has come to terms with his society. The painful awareness of change and growth had hit him. He passes through the rites of passage which symbolises the climax of the quest for identity formation when he says "The rain will fall today" which concurs with what he read on Zara's manuscript, "The world is as new today as it was when it was first created" (MT, 314). This confirms to the reader that he has attained maturity and is ready for a fresh start as Mamo declares that it is clearer to him now what he wants to write on, "People around him (301)".

On the other hand, Dantala survives and is finally released, when religious and political moods further change. He paid heavily for his bosom friendship with Jibril as he merely survived death after nine months in military custody. He gets to the point of self-realisation on his way back to the mosque after getting released. He says, "I touch my face. I do not know this old, shrivelled person whose eyes look like that of a rabbit". The excerpt shows apainful self -awareness. A rediscovery of identity takes place when he says, "I think of all the things I must do: cut my hair, wash with hot water, and start writing out my story" (BOT, 201

According to Campbell (1986:31) who associates the hero's journey to the rites of passage from childhood to adulthood in which the rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return* must be complete to perfect the initiation into maturity. The male characters having passed through these processes can be said to have achieved a "definite denouement" which is a requirement of a typical *Bildungsroman* meaning that all issues are resolved, they successfully attain a sense of self and place within the world. The selected writers defy the Western norm of the character being successful as a criterion for having achieved a complete *Bildungsroman* as neither Dantala nor Mamo is successful at the end, but each has developed a sense of purpose.

Conclusion

Helon Habila and Elnathan John utilise the literary space *Bildungsroman* has created to envision modern identities. Suggesting that these protagonists perfectly fit within the prototypical *Bildungsroman* genre is impractical, yet the flexibility of the *Bildungsroman* genre *has* created space for their stories. Hence, while the traditional *Bildungsroman* emphasises on the harmonious reconciliation-cum-integration of the protagonists into their society, the selected writers deviate from this norm as they show us microcosms of society through a unique lens: the perspective of non-compromising adolescents. The selected writers

present their male protagonists as non-conformists, even as victims of abject lack in the society. The male protagonists' acts of rebellion are a way for them to reject dominant negative social values and practices. They confront the world with 'fierceness, and firmness' and illustrate how to thrive even in the face of extreme prejudice, loss, alienation, psychological disintegration, insecurity, religious violence amongst others. Through them, we observe the impact of one's environment on the outcome of one's life.

The selected Nigerian writers share a strong appeal for morality. Indeed, the current surging challenges of Northern Nigeria are deeply rooted in lack of moral edification and haphazard style of governance. Poverty and religion are used as tools of weaponization against adolescents/youths. The authors portray characters in conflict with society, by highlighting experiences of disillusionment and portraying their constant struggle to attain individual and national freedom from the shackles of post-colonial marginalisation. Nigerian male writers have proven to understand the society having grown up as children in Nigeria in the 1970s and 1980s and experienced the brunt of the military regimes. They have attempted from time to time to depict the struggles that accompany identity negotiation through tides of time, realities and the sensibilities of the Nigerian society. Nigerian contemporary male writers have symbolised their narrative by childhood figures, images and memories.

In conclusion, Postcolonial issues like insecurity, war, violence, trauma, riot, unrest, crime, dictatorship, corruption, religious and tribal wars, and religious extremism are the key negative factors responsible for the psychological disintegration (trauma) faced by youths growing up in a consistently deteriorating country.

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