THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN STATES: A REVIEW OF ADAMU USMAN'S *SIEGED*

Solomon Adedokun Edebor*

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses and contributes to debates on the critical governance challenges faced by post-colonial African states such as bribery and corruption, lack of democratic and participatory governance, insecurity, lack of justice and equality before the law, and illiteracy as some of the impediments to sustainable development in Africa. These issues have been variously discussed by literary scholars with an attempt to portray and expose them. One such excellent attempt is Adamu Usman's *Sieged*.

This paper analyses some of the fundamental threads in Usman's submissions on how lack of good governance and purposeful leadership remain the bane of African states. It then takes the analyses further by showing that no meaningful social, economic, political or environmental development can take place in Africa until African masses demand for good governance and engage in ideology-based social revolution in ending the reins of corrupt leadership.

Keywords: post-colonialism, politics, corruption, sustainable development, independence.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly, prose fiction has come a long way to imprint its relevance on the literary history of Africa- as a literary mode for expressing the worldview of Africans, their hopes, as well as their multi-faceted challenges, even in the 21st century. As a continent, Africa has passed through three epochal mutations after the Second World War: the age of anti-colonial

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* Solomon Adedokun Edebor is of the Department of English and Literary Studies, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, (ABUAD), Ekiti State, Nigeria.

struggle, the age of independence, and the age of neo-colonialism.[1] During the period of anti-colonial struggle, Africans had hoped that an end would soon come to their plights when Africans had access to the corridor of power occupied by the Colonial masters. Little wonder then that in many parts of the continent, Africans were singing songs of hope and liberty as they envisioned a bright tomorrow in a newly re-born African continent. Recollecting the euphoria that accompanied the match to Nigerian independence, characteristic of other African states, Achebe writes:

> The general feeling in the air as independence approached was extraordinary, like the building anticipation of the relief of torrential rain after a season of scorching hot harmattan winds and bush fires. We were all looking forward to feeling the joy... that Ghana must have felt...in 1957. We had no doubt where we were going. We were going to inherit freedom.... The possibilities for us were endless....Nigeria was enveloped by a certain assurance of an unbridled destiny, of an overwhelming excitement about life's promise....[2]

However, African leaders who took up the mantle of power after the colonial masters have not performed optimally in the discharge of their responsibilities. Rather than giving the new states the much needed creative drive to move forward and put the national economy on a new footing, the emergent African leaders demonstrated that they were neither interested in the development of the new states nor in breaking the fetters and domination of the imperialists but in plundering available resources for self-aggrandisement. Ngugi succinctly captures the mood of the people when he asserts:

> To the majority of African people in the new states, independence did not bring about fundamental changes. It was independence with the ruler holding a begging bowl and the ruled holding a shrinking belly. It was independence with a question mark.[3]

It quickly became glaring to the people that the new African leaders were not interested in them, the economy or the society, but in looting the

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1   Ngugi wa Thiong'O, 'Writing Against Neo-Colonialism' in Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (eds), *African literature: an Anthology of criticism and Theory* (Blackwell Publishing 2007) 157.
2   Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (Penguin 2012) 40.
3   Thiong'O, Writing Against Neo-Colonialism' (n 1) 160.

wealth of the nations and in assuming the position of an intermediary be-
tween the Western interests and the people. Frantz Fanon gives us a clearer
insight into the sordid activities of African leaders after independence, stat-
ing that:

> Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspira-
> tions of the people for independence, political liberty and national
> dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, far from em-
> bodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches
> bread, land and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands
> of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become
> the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for
> their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie.[4]

The resultant effect of such actions is that many African nations are yet
to experience real developments in many areas. Indeed, sustainable devel-
opment remains a critical issue that is yet to be properly addressed in most
independent African states. According to the National Strategy of Sustain-
able Development:

> sustainable development is the society's development that creates
> the possibility for achieving overall wellbeing for the present and
> the future generations through combining environmental, econom-
> ic and social aims of the society without exceeding the allowable
> limits of the effect on the environment.[5]

Brundtland Commission's report, *Our Common Future,* published in
1987, similarly defines sustainable development as the development that can
only be sustainable if it 'meets the needs of the present without compromis-
ing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'[6] Kates *et al*
have traced the antecedents of sustainable development to four key themes
that emerged from collective concerns and aspirations of the world's peo-
ples in the last half of the twentieth century: peace, freedom, development

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4   Thiong'O, *Moving the Centre* (East African Educational Publishers 1993) 65.
5   Remigijus Ciegus, Jolita Ramanauskiene, and Bronislovas Martinkus, 'The Concept of Sus-
    tainable Development and its Use for Sustainability Scenarios' (2009) 2 *Inzinerine Ekono-
    mika-Engineering Economics* 28, 30.
6   Jean-Claude Bolay, 'What Sustainable Development for the Cities of the South? Urban
    Issues and for a Third Millennium' (2011) *International Journal of Urban Sustainable De-
    velopment* 1, 2.

and environment. [7] They have equally pointed out that even though the definition of sustainable development in Brundtland Commission's report does not explicitly mention the environment or development, subsequent paragraphs in the report, while rarely quoted, are clear on them:

> On development, the report states that human needs are basic and essential; that economic growth- but also equity to share resources with the poor- is required to sustain them; and that equity is encouraged by effective citizen participation. On environment, the text is also clear: *the concept of sustainable development does imply limits- not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities* (italics in the original).[8]

The fact presented above has equally been noted by Ciegis *et al* who further posit that sustainable development is not about a choice between environmental protection and social progress, but rather more about striving for economic and social development that would be compatible with environmental protection.[9]

The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development marked a further expansion of the standard definition of Sustainable Development (as contained in Brundtland Commission's report) with the three widely used pillars of sustainable development: economic, social, and environment.[10] This was predicated on the need to address the running concern over the limits of the framework of environment and development, wherein development was widely viewed solely as economic development, thereby obscuring concerns for human development, equity and social justice.

Essentially, in an attempt to make bare what sustainable development seeks to achieve, Kates *et al*[11] examine three sets of goals that use different time-horizons: firstly, the short-term (2015) goals of the Millennium Declaration of the United Nations with emphasis on peace; development; environment; human rights; the vulnerable, hungry, and poor, etc, with specific

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7   Robert W. Kates, Thomas M. Parris, and Anthony A. Leiserowitz, 'What is Sustainable Development? Goals, Indicators, Values, and Practice' (2005) 47 *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development* 8, 10.
8   emphasis mine. ibid.
9   Ciegis, Ramanauskiene, and Martinkus (n 5) 30.
10 Kates, Parris and Leiserowitz (n 7) 12; Ciegis, Ramanauskiene, and Martinkus (n 5) 32.
11 Kates, Parris and Leiserowitz (n 7) 12.

targets, including cutting poverty in half, and also insuring universal prima-
ry school education by 2015; secondly, the two-generation goals (2050) of
the Sustainability Transition of the Board on Sustainable Development with
emphasis on providing the world with the needed energy, materials, and
information to feed, nurture, house, educate, and employ the many more
people of 2050- while reducing hunger and poverty and preserving the basic
life support systems of the planet; and thirdly, the long-term (beyond 2050)
goals of the Great Transition of the Global Scenario Group with a focus on
'sustainability Transition', emphasising hunger and the emission of green-
house gasses.

The Policy Reform Scenario of the Global Scenario Group was based
on the group's analysis of the proposed 'sustainability Transition', with a
conclusion that a sustainability transition is 'just' possible without positing
either a social revolution or a technological miracle.[12] The greatest challenge
identified here is the governmental commitment required to achieve it and
the political will to do so. Ciegis lends credence to this submission when he,
quoting Helm, states:

> implementation of any policy depends on the institutional aspect...
> since effective, properly functioning institutions are essential for
> sustainable development in the realisation of the social, economic,
> and environmental aims set by the society.[13]

What obviously emerges from our discussion here is that the place of
good governance cannot be undermined if there will be any fundamental de-
velopment at all, and that sustainable development is only achievable with
governmental commitments. However, given the lack of required policies
and commitments by African leaders, Africa is still faced with a lot of so-
cial, economic and ecological problems, including illiteracy, insecurity, un-
employment, oppression, economic recession, injustice, oil spillage, scarcity
of renewable water, coastal erosion, flooding, depletion of the ozone layer,
deforestation, and others.

African writers, as the conscience of the society, have been conscious of
the vital roles expected to be played by the people and the government with
its various agencies before the continent can experience any meaningful de-
velopment and/or sustainable development. Therefore, in registering their dis-

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12 Ibid 13.
13 Ciegus, Ramanauskiene, and Martinkus (n 5) 33.

pleasure over the prevailing recklessness, especially on the part of government and its agencies, many African writers have captured in their writings the dis-illusionment, cynicism and misadventure into governance by African leaders, evident in such classics like Achebe's *A Man of the People*,[14] Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*,[15] and Thiong'O's *Devil on the Cross*.[16] Eventually, the military took over the reins of power in most Post-colonial African states, citing the need to correct the anomalies of the day as one of the reasons.

These literary activism has however not recorded the expected level of societal change, most especially under various military rule in Africa. The rise of military leadership in Africa resulted in outright disregard for the rule of law and flagrant denial of fundamental human rights. There was an apparent lack of genuine concern in meeting human needs, reducing hunger and poverty, and also preserving the basic life support systems of the planet, among others. Reflecting on the activities of the military, Manivuzzan posits, "Military leaders only aggravated the problems of nation building after taking over power from the civilian political leaders."[17]

In Nigeria for example, the various outcry for positive and democratic leadership never paid off until May 29, 1999, when General Abdusalami Abubakar handed over power to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as a democrati-cally elected President of the country. This ended the sixteen years of uninter-rupted control of the state by the military. Fifteen years later, Nigeria is still faced with a lot of challenges, including corruption, poverty, underdevelop-ment, epileptic power supply, flooding, unemployment, incessant workers' strike, deforestation, electoral fraud, oil spillage, compromise of the judicia-ry and other law enforcement agencies, coastal erosion, organized political murders, hyper-inflation, plane-crashes, economic recession, bad leadership, insecurity, and others. Nigerian authors have continued to capture the pres-ent abnormalities in their writings, as they attempt to reflect and refract the society, hoping to provide enduring solutions to the persistent challenges that confront the nation's development, and Africa at large. One literary mode which has yielded itself as an effective tool in this regard is the novel.

14 Achebe, *A Man of the People* (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd 1967).
15 Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd 1981).
16 Thiong'O, *Devil on the Cross* (Heinemann Educational Books Ltd 1982).
17 Adekunle Olowonmi, 'The Writer and the Quest for Democratic Governance in Nigeria: Transcending Post- independence Disillusionment' (2008) 2 *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 55, 59.

It is against this background, therefore, that this paper has purposively selected Adamu Usman's novel, *Sieged*,[18] to analyse how the actions of the people and the government (with its agencies) pose serious challenges to sustainable development in post-colonial African societies. The paper adopts content analysis approach in this regard. This paper will in section two analyze Marxism as its theoretical base, particularly considering the revolutionary vision the novel embodies. Section three will examine Usman's prescriptions on the level of institutonal and leadership change required for sustainability in Nigeria. The paper concludes in section four with suggestions on the way forward for Nigeria and Africa.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MARXIST LITERARY CRITICISM

This paper adopts Marxism as its theoretical base with a focus on some basic Marxist tenets which Usman embraces in weaving his thoughts together in his novel. Marxism had its springboard in the beliefs and teachings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The duo had called their economic theories 'communism' rather than Marxism and had gone ahead to popularise it in their jointly written *Communist Manifesto* of 1848.[19] Barry makes bare the objective of Marxism in this manner:

> The aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society, based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange... whereas other philosophies merely seek to understand the world, Marxism (as Marx famously said) seeks to change it. Marxism sees progress as coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes. This view of history as class struggle... regards it as 'motored' by the competition for economic, social, and political advantage.[20]

Habib has identified six fundamental principles that underlie Marx's thought, including: critique of capitalist society; adaptation of the Hegelian dialectic; the materialistic conception of history; the division of labour

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18 Adamu Kyuka Usman, *Sieged* (Faith Printers International 2011).
19 Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester University Press 1995) 156.
20 Ibid 156-157.

based on the model of superstructure and economic base, conception of ideology, and economic views.[21]

Trainer has indicated Marx's belief about the impossibility of major social changes without revolution, noting, "Marxists insist that dominant classes will not voluntarily give up power, wealth and privilege. Their control has to be taken away from them, and this might have to involve violence".[22] The purpose of this struggle, Anyadike adds, is to create an alternative structure of ideas, which will usher in equality and justice for all people.[23]

Neither Marx nor Engel presented a systematic theory of literature; rather, it has emerged as a series of responses to concrete political exigencies.[24] All the same, the main tenet of Marxist literary criticism is that the nature of literature is influenced by the social and political circumstances in which it is produced; and a writer's social class and its prevailing "ideology" have a major influence on what is written by a member of that class.[25] Marxist criticism of literature is, therefore, aimed at promoting the kind of literature, which will help in dismantling bourgeois superstructure and enshrining egalitarian values. To achieve this, literature in the Marxist view, must expose the bourgeois overt and subtle machinations in social reality in order to sensitize the masses so that they can be empowered to overcome them. Literature which can be described as Marxist in orientation has, therefore, been labelled radical literature, particularly as it sees the world as being in a state of constant confrontation between two diametrically opposed and irreconcilable classes: the oppressor and the oppressed. It aligns with the cause of the latter in its totality with the ultimate goal of bringing to light the essence of the struggle of the working class (the masses), adopting the class orientation and all the necessary task of revolutionary transformation of the society. Marxist literature, hence, protests about inequality in human society, with the ultimate goal of activating the masses, urging them to come together to rebuff the oppression and eliminate the factors that warranted subservient compliancy in the presence of injustice.[26]

21 M.A.R. Habib, *Modern Literary Criticism and Theory*. (Blackwell Publishing 2005) 528- 534.
22 Ted Trainer, 'Marxist Theory: A Brief Introduction', (2010) <http://www.socialsciencies. art.unsw.edu.au/tsw/Marx.html> accessed 1 November 2013.
23 C. Anyadike, 'Literary Criticism from the Classical to the Present Times' (2001) *The Compedium* 3 &4, 318.
24 Barry (n 19) 158; Habib (n 21) 534- 535.
25 Barry (n 19) 158.
26 Mike Aliu, 'Marxism and Literature' in Mike Aliu (eds), *Linguistics and Literature in Language Arts* (Rainbow Royale 2003) 330, 340; Anyadike (n 23) 318.

3. *SIEGED:* INTERROGATING GOOD GOVERNANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY IN BIVAN'S HOUSE[27]

Adamu Usman's *Sieged* is a novel of twenty one chapters that explores governance and sustainability in Bivan's house- a metaphor for the Nigerian state. As a prelude to his engagement in this biting satire, Usman traces the history of politics in Bivan's house, employing some symbolic words used as tags for politicians occupying various prominent positions:

> Myth had it that...Politics in Bivan's house originated from a society of hunters. The leader of the society of head hunters was called the prime head and so he who was called president or prime minister in other countries came to be called prime head in Bivan's house and what was called national assembly or parliament in other countries was called the house of archery.... A governor was the big feast, ministers were ceremonial feasts, ambassadors were close banquets, commissioners were ceremonial pots, local government chairmen were common calabashes and councillors were hunting bags.[28]

Although the political structure in Bivan's house has a strong affinity with this society of hunters, that is where the similarity ends. Unlike the way politics is now practised, the group of hunters that started politics in Bivan's house was composed of purposeful, loving, concerned, well-meaning, and people-oriented individuals who were serving in one capacity or the other, not for self-aggrandisement but to see to the actualization of their lofty goals and aspirations geared towards making life more meaningful to the villagers. This is summed up in the killing and fair sharing of the games caught among members of the society. The games in this respect could be likened to the resources and potentials of a nation which are expected to be harnessed by leaders, not for personal gains but for the advancement of the people who have conceded leadership to them as their representatives. These leaders, of course, are equally expected to formulate policies that will ensure rapid developments, poverty alleviation, and equal opportunities, among other things.

However, whereas Bivan's house politicians still imbibe the ideals of the noble society in its political formation, they depart considerably in intent

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27 Usman (n 18).
28 ibid 3.

and functionality as political hunters in Bivan's house are self-serving, and are ever willing to remove from their way anyone or group that constitutes a threat:

> In some respects, politics and hunting are two sides of the same coin- the kill-coin.... Hunters hunt for animals, politicians for men. Hunters kill only animals. They do not kill fellow hunters. But politicians kill not only fellow politicians but even the electorates. Hunters share their kill throughout the village. Politicians eat thiers alone.[29]

Again, even though well-meaning individuals started politics in Bivan's house, it has degenerated to a game played by 'street people' with no definite vision and purpose. Ridiculing the sorry state politics has now become, particularly with the in-flocks of miscreants as politicians, Usman notes soberly:

> ...politics in Bivan's house was largely played by street people who had no job because they were not educated or trained for one. In Bivan's house if you had failed at everything, if no one could engage you in any job because you were not qualified for any, you joined politics. When asked what his occupation was, a person without training and skills said politics as if politics were a profession like painting or bricklaying.[30]

Usman's submission here reveals a state that has failed in its responsibility to provide qualitative education to its citizenry, and empower its people with required skills for self-sustenance. The fact that no conscious effort has been taken at addressing many of the multi-faceted challenges facing the people of Bivan's house has, therefore, encouraged many to become street people.

Specifically, the novel focuses on Merima and Jamimi, Primehead candidates of United Action Congress (UAC) and Peoples Liberation Movement (PLM) respectively. Through the activities of these candidates and their parties, Usman delves incisively into the world of politics, revealing the motivating factors of people engaged in it, the atrocities and other sordid abnormalities that often affect free and fair elections, the failure of the law enforcement agents and the judicial system in ensuring justice, and the failure of leaders

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29 ibid 93.
30 ibid 3.

to ensure good governance by living up to the expectations of the people in matters affecting their existence, development and sustenance.

The profile of Merima indicates that even though he is an intelligent and soft-hearted man, his involvement in politics is to feather his own nest as he sees politics as the quickest and most guaranteed way to secure material comfort. This influences his decision not to contest for the office of common calabash which would have drawn him closer to his people, but for the house of archery where there is more money, and, twice he wins, even though he has to rig his way up the second time as his people have lost faith in him. His inordinate ambition later culminates in his aspiration to be elected to the central house of archery. Knowing how unpopular he has become with the electorates, he agrees to marry the unattractive, ill-mannered and self-conscious daughter of Kamalun, a powerful political godfather, and be remitting 500, 000 baduns monthly to his account. His acceptance of Kamalun's conditions for backing him is so gratifying that Kamalun works tirelessly, not for him to become a member of the central house of archery but the prime head of Bivan's house. Merima's candidacy on the platform of UAC is, therefore, accidental.

Merima's portrayal is very significant as it brings into focus those that are largely involved in politics, revealing that the welfare of the people, as well as the development of the nation, is inconsequential in their agenda. This, of course, is evident in the Nigerian situation where many politicians are less concerned about the wobbling state of the nation's economy, education, health services, environment, security, aviation industry, and many others. Closely tied to this is the 'god-fatherism' syndrome that has negatively affected politics in the country. Indeed, it will not be out of place to assert that Bivan's house is a microcosm of the Nigerian state whose development is impeded by the activities of the god-fathers who feed fat on the nation's economy, dictating to their elected or, better put, rigged in political sponges how the state should be run and what financial gains must be accrued to them and their families. Regrettably, often, such 'chosen leaders' have no voice and mind of their own as they always live in the shadows of their sponsors, merely echoing and re-echoing their wishes. This has adversely affected the nation's social, economic and environmental development.

Jamimi's motivation for joining politics, however, differs considerably. His initial plan is to lecture in a university and eventually end up as a professor. He has done creditably well in school to actualize this dream, but he becomes a victim of tribalism and religious fundamentalism, which make him opt for a job in a secondary school. After six years there, he moves to

the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and, from there, to the plastic in-
dustry where he later rises to become the president of Bivan's house national
labour union. It is after his retirement from there that he joins politics and
he is made the prime head candidate of the PLM. But then, for Jamimi, poli-
tics is the last option, until his interest is perked while working as a director
in the ministry, where he witnesses high level of corruption and ineptness of
political leaders. This angers him as he sees political leaders as opportunists
without tangible plans and vision for the people and the nation. It is to cor-
rect this anomaly that he joins politics, as Usman testifies:

> He (Jamimi) began to develop interest in politics while working as a
> director in the ministry of commerce and industry. Politicians- peo-
> ple without much education and much experience, were appointed
> ceremonial feasts over him and relied on him to do the job while
> they took the credit...it did not anger him like the politician's lack of
> interest in planning and executing projects that would improve the
> lot of the people. All they were interested in was ambushing public
> funds for themselves and political layabouts they used as thugs during
> electioneering campaigns.... Because of the quality of people in poli-
> tics in Bivan's house, government was not seen as an agency of public
> service, but of eating public money... it was the eating mentality of Bi-
> van's house politicians that finally angered him into joining politics.[31]

But then, for Jamimi to actualize his dream and prove that he is different,
his PLM has to confront and wrest power from the ruling party which has
been in government for more than thirty years, with no tangible development
of so ever. Under the UAC successively-led administrations, Bivan's house
has faced a lot of backwardness as the wealth of the nation is shared among
the few who have learnt to 'drive fast'. The citizens who constitute the ma-
jority live in abject poverty and want of basic necessities of life. Boyama's
led administration is particularly worse as people groan in pains. Jamimi's
indictment of the UAC-Boyama administration is quite apposite here:

> The roads are bad; there is no water; there is no light; every social
> infrastructure that was healthy before UAC took over the reins of
> power is now sick, limping and wobbling into the grave.[32]

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31 ibid 5-7.
32 ibid 133.

Bivan's house is now a huge shadow of its old self besieged by unemployment, lawlessness, corruption, and miscarriages of values. Lamenting the worrisome state of Bivan's house, Jamimi asserts:

> 'We are sieged by the death of values,'... 'We are sieged by meaninglessness. We are drunk with the greed and corruption the UAC government has infected us with.... Public thieves are chiefs now.... Money meant for water supply and power generation is stolen by those in government.... People can barely feed because food is so expensive.[33]

It is, however, striking to note that despite the non-performance of UAC, its members are determined to remain in power at all cost, employing all gimmicks, including open lies, holding deceitful rallies and ultimately rigging elections to perpetrate themselves in power. As far as UAC leadership is concerned, the masses are insignificant, hence have to be plundered and violated. At a point when Merima becomes worried about their nature, he lets out:

> ...I think even for our own good, we should begin to move politics more towards service than personal aggrandizement. Politics is not about you. It's about people who need your service.[34]

Merima's statement irks other party members, evident in the party chairman's response, 'And you think I don't need some service from power?'[35] In an attempt to remain in power, therefore, UAC members become intolerant of any dissenting voice or action that can rob them of their regular share of the nation's resources. The elderly professor that attempts to voice out his dissatisfaction at UAC government at the party rally in Gazumba Square is almost strangled by the party Organizing Secretary, with the party chairman shouting, 'Kill him...! kill the rebellious swine!'[36] before the intervention of some PLM thugs; Damish, a local politician, who has spent almost thirty years sensitizing the people of Hatto State on the need to demand for good governance and sustainable development is imprisoned several times, and is eventually silenced through poisoning. Also, Chokali who spearheads the

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33 ibid 98.
34 ibid 148.
35 ibid.
36 ibid 27.

revolution that brings Merima's administration to a halt is killed by the po-
lice, so also Benbendo that serves as a stimulus for Chokali's action.

Again, when it becomes apparent that, despite their campaigns to
generate an adequate smokescreen for rigging, Jamimi might still win the
primehead election with his status and the novelty of using a train for his
campaigns, the UAC decides to derail PLM campaign train by removing the
rail bar from the rail track at Okunno forest and even goes as far as digging
ditches and filling them with petrol, leading to the outburst of huge flames
that claim over a hundred lives, with others sustaining varying degrees of
injuries. Reflecting on the heartlessness of the UAC, the assistant driver of
the crashed train observes:

> They must have intended to perish both the train and those in it
> including Jamimi.... Politics! Who said we can be politicians with
> this impolitic attitude....What is the matter with our fingers that
> they soil whatever they touch? Into what have we dipped them?
> Our hearts are not right. So our minds can't manage well what is
> working for others.[37]

It is important to point out here that the action of the UAC members to
derail PLM campaign trail at Okunno forest does not only affect the PLM
members or Jamimi, but also the environment. What is evident by such
behaviour is that UAC leaders are only concerned about satisfying their
greedy nature, even when it greatly affects the sustenance of the ecosystem,
the valuable trees and other wild animals in the forest. As can be gathered
from the novel, Okunno forest is one of the tick forests in Bivan's house
that has lots of wild animals and trees. Rather than preserving such forest
and initiating policies that will ensure sustainable development, which, in
the long run, can contribute meaningfully to the nation's economy and the
well-being of the people, the ruling UAC believes in 'politics of the belly',
which unfortunately makes it a government that lacks purposeful leadership
and great initiatives.

Although Jamimi manages to escape the death trap as he is not on board,
he later loses the election that produces Merima as the new Primehead of
Bivan's house. Usman captures the details of the election in this manner:

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37 ibid 111- 112.

> Merima... (was) rigged into office.... Tales of ballot box-snatching and ballot-stuffing, agents of the opposition abducted into farms and into rivers, locked up in the booths of cars and shot point-blank abounded....[38]

When Merima, shortly before he becomes the Primehead, retrospectively expresses concerns over the way Boyama has led the nation, his party goes as far as taking him to the shrine of Bubuluku, the god of nemesis and makes him swear to an oath of allegiance to Boyama, all in a bid to ensure that he never raises eyebrow over how the nation has fared under his predecessor. But then, Usman's focus is not solely on the leaders, as he equally finds the law enforcement agents, specifically the police and the military, culpable as they have become willing puppets for election manoeuvrings. Ridiculing the uniformed men, Usman writes:

> The UAC in power used the largesse of office to bribe the military to support them during election... the bribed military was called in to rig the party back to power and then used force to crush any public protest against the fraudulent election.... The police were no better. There was the bizarre incidence of a man going to a police station to complain about election rigging in a polling station only to find the police thumb-printing for the UAC at their station.[39]

Usman similarly examines how the degeneration of the judicial system impedes the principles of fair hearing, justice and equality before the law. This manifests itself in how Jamimi's grievances about election rigging, violence, intimidation and falsification of results during election were dismissed on the account that he should have called one hundred and fifty thousand witnesses instead of three hundred and six. Usman particularly notes:

> Each election in the country seemed to spawn injustice.... Candidates who had lost out at the polling units headed to the election tribunals seeking to get in the court the justice they could not get at the polls. However, often the decisions of the courts were rigged the way the election was. Overnight, judges the dispenser of justice became independent judicial marketers selling justice to the highest bidder....[40]

38 ibid 156.
39 ibid 52.
40 ibid 159.

The masses, as well, are not spared as Usman accuses them of encouraging maladministration by creating conducive atmosphere for corrupt leaders to thrive and for their unwillingness to demand for good governance and sustainable developments that will have positive impacts on their lives. Usman notes how totally unlikely it would have been for Damish to be exterminated without protests but for the cigarette seller who inserts *tebi* into his cigarette after collecting fat bribe from Basoi, the then prime head; how impossible it would have been for UAC to hold rallies successfully without the rented crowds (masses) used as mercenary supporters, political thugs and guards; and how unfeasible it would have been for UAC to rig elections effectively, if not for people's general lack of interests and drive to demand for justice. Jamimi, in one of his momentous speeches during campaigns, brilliantly sums up an important defect in the people:

> It is foolish to sell your vote and expect the person who bought your vote to serve you.... Now we are having power on our backs instead of beside us. Why? Because like the donkey which cannot choose its owner, we have not been choosing our leaders.... To what have we sold our present and our future? To lies and dishonesty. Any wonder why our fortunes are what they are? Lies and dishonesty are empty oil wells and whoever invests in them can only drill barrels of hot air.[41]

Earlier, Damish has asserted, 'The problem of Bivan's house is that the poor weren't involved in the struggle for independence.... The poor of this country have always been onlookers of the politics and economics of the nation'.[42] Usman, nevertheless, sees beyond the frailties of the masses who are victims of the manipulations of the leaders as he advocates for a total overhauling of the present political set-up so as to guarantee the desire changes. To Usman, it is not enough to have visionary persons like Jamimi vying for elective positions with the aim of ensuring good governance and sustainable development, as the present crops of leaders will not easily give up power so as to pave way for developments. Usman, in this regard, infuses into the novel some Marxist ideals as he sees radical action as the only potent panacea for the sickening state. Using Damish as his mouth piece, Usman opens the eyes of the people to the injustice that is common in the nation, showing the reigns of two clans, tribes and religions in the society:

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41 ibid 100 – 101.
42 ibid 64.

Today, there are only two clans: the clans of the rich and the clan of the poor; only two tribes: the tribe of the rich and the tribe of the poor; only two religions: the religion of the rich and the religion of the poor. This is how matters currently stand and do not allow anyone in the pursuit of his own selfish interest deceive you to the contrary. Economic tribes are what are important today; not linguistic tribes. The government is one tribe. The governed is another tribe. Emerging tribal wars should be fought between these new tribes.[43]

Damish again adds that election is meant to be an investment for the electorates, but service for the politicians, not the other way round. He, therefore, encourages the electorates to say 'NO' to politicians who see election as a duty for the electorates but an investment for themselves. In demonstrating the potency of people's determination to demand for good governance and development, thereby effecting desired changes, Usman presents us Hatto State which distinguishes itself, among others, as a state where it is impossible for UAC to succeed with deception and easily manipulate elections. When it becomes obvious that UAC employs mercenaries to undermine the people's resolves ahead of its campaigns in the state, the PLM supporters, desirous of a change, besiege UAC secretariat in the state, armed with cutlasses, machetes and petrol, daring the party executives and their mercenaries to come out and welcome Merima and other party chieftains visiting the state for their campaigns.

Jamimi equally embodies the ideals of the Marxists as he calls on the people to defy Boyama government of terror and demand for their rights to ensure a better society. To him, until people fight for their rights, defying death and other threats, their oppressors will never give room for any democratic thinking:

Now is the time for change and you are the instruments of change. Come out and dare the guns of Boyama. In our situation you either die on the street by a bullet of the oppressor or by hunger and misery in your house. You either die at once on the street or by instalments in your house. You either die with honour while seeking to reclaim your right or like a dog clubbed to death by dog-eaters.... The strength of the oppressor lies in your lack of protest, in your

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43 ibid 63 – 64.

lack of fight.... When out of fear and docility you make your hand so impotent that you can't raise it against the oppressor, you give potency to the hand of the oppressor to squeeze out your life blood.[44]

Surprisingly, the much-anticipated changes in Bivan's house never materialize until Chokali, an accomplished political thug, realises the terrible state of the masses that are perpetually exploited by the leaders, and, consequently, he raises a large number of protesters advocating for the extermination of the UAC government. This degenerates into a revolution, leaving in its wake the deaths of Boyama and other high profile UAC politicians. Merima's life is not spared as he is caught in the web of jealousy and the inordinate ambition of his deputy which ultimately leads to further deaths of the deputy primehead, the UAC chairman and Waddo, the senate leader who is made head of the caretaker government after Merima's assassination. At last, the people enthrone Jamimi as their primehead in what is called 'mobocracy'. Noting the transformation in the people's sensibility, a member of Bivan's house asserts, 'From being a cemetery, the graveyard of Africa, Bivan's house is now a theatre where dramas of all sorts take place. All thanks to Benbendo'.[45]

4. CONCLUSION

So far, in this paper, an attempt has been made to examine the state of post-independent African nations, particularly Nigeria. A cursory explication of sustainable development has equally been done with emphasis on a number of factors that affect good governance and sustainability in the African continent. Identified in this respect are issues of bribery and corruption, lack of democratic and participatory governance, lack of justice and equality before the law, low literacy level, and many others. These issues have therefore, been examined, using Adamu Usman's *Sieged* as a theoretical frame and reference point. This paper has demonstrated how lack of good governance and purposeful leadership remains the bane of African states, and that no meaningful social, economic or environmental development can take place in any nation where mal-administration is the other of the day, and where the masses are less-concerned about who governs them.

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44 ibid 103 – 104.
45 ibid 218.

Usman's prescription is for the masses to be more careful in choosing their leaders, even as he advocates for social revolution in dislodging irresponsible and corrupt leaders from the corridor of power, and enthroning justice and good governance. Such action, in Usman's view, will cause the desired changes, not only in Nigeria, but also in Africa as a whole.

Usman's prescription is arguably a viable one given the reckless nature of political appointees in many African states, which unfortunately have aggravated the problems of nation building. For a nation such as Nigeria to make real progress in its quest for sustainable development, citizens must demand for good governance from their leaders and guide electoral mandates jealously, even if it means engaging in peaceful but ideology-based social revolution.