

Protest, Democracy and Social Development in Nigeria: Reflections on Contemporary Nigerian Writings

Author(s), ADEYEMI AMOS ADEGBOYEGA

Abstract:

Literary productions from Nigeria since inception have envisioned a utopian society. Driven by protest to foster sociopolitical development, the literary artist from the days of Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*** engaged in and has remained relevant to emerging trends of discourses in Nigeria. While forebear nationalists protested against colonial incursions and the attending destabilization of the hitherto organized Nigerian society, contemporary postcolonial writers contend with realities militating against the nation's fragile democracy. Their creativities beyond entertainment capture the striking fears, yearnings, hopes and aspirations of Nigerians. Consciously, the artists instruct, enlighten and mobilize the society in the pursuit of nationalist objectives. This has been at the heart of literary expeditions across generations of writing in Nigeria. In the contemporary times, literary artists thematise on issues that impede Nigeria's drive towards nationhood. They make their works reflect the frightening realities of Nigeria's

IJARBAS

Accepted 15 December 2019
Published 08 January 2020
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3598132



democracy. This is the crux of this study. I hope to demonstrate here that literary engagements in Nigeria especially in the contemporary era have been in the interest of utopia attainment. Through selected works, this study argues that literary artists base their literary expedition on protest, challenging the dysfunctional democratic system in Nigeria. It concludes that by conscientiously objecting to the prevailing sociopolitical atmosphere in the country, these writers champion the discourse of nationhood and nationalism in a bid to consolidate Nigeria's democracy against prevailing neocolonial tendencies and postcolonial disillusionments.

Keywords: Protest, Democracy, Social Development, Reflections, Contemporary Nigerian Writings,



About Author

Author(s), English Program; College of Liberal Studies
Bowen University, Iwo, Osun State, Nigeria.

(Corresponding Author) Email: adeyemi.adeboyega@bowen.edu.ng



Introduction

Literature can entertain, in fact must entertain, but it is only the dim-witted or brainwashed artist who is content merely to entertain, to play the clown. The primary value of literature seems to me to lie in its subversive potential, that explosive charge which lies hidden behind the façade of entertainment and which must be controlled and made to [explode] for the use of our people, of mankind... Literature must be used to play its role in the advancement of our society, in the urgent struggle against neo-colonialism and the insidious spread of facism. (Osofisan, 1993, p. 84).

Femi Osofisan in *Excursions in Drama and Literature: Interviews with Femi Osofisan*

Literary creations in contemporary Nigeria have adequately engaged the prevailing sociopolitical situations in the country. Since the return to democratic rule in 1999, literary artists have been preoccupied with developmental issues in the country. In the words of Marius Kwasniewski, their works 'reflects the changes that are happening in the social order'. Accordingly, woven into the plots of their creativities are historical and sociopolitical events on the home front. Through this, their works mirror the realities in Nigeria thus serving as a means of education, celebration, protest, and a (re)awakening of social consciousness. They become dynamic forces and complex cultural products which provide the vigour that drives the society towards sociopolitical education and reinforcement. In the words of Egya (2011), this kind of writing

[...] belonging to the domain of protest literature, shouts, barks, screams, cries, curses, swears and prays in dire resignation, with the intent, most often, to awaken the consciousness of its audience, and to challenge, even if ineffectually, the regime of oppression silencing the society. [...] Ingrained in, but not limited to post-colonial literatures, [they are] manifestations of committed writings that comes with the realization of the artistic vision. (p. 14).

Literary artistry in the vision of the artists through generations have thus, engaged realities that have had and still has direct bearing and impact on the lives of Nigerians. The artists have demonstrated concerns for the nation from the days of colonialism, through independence, military despotism into an inconsequential democratic system.

Sensitive to the plight of Nigerians, they have raised issues and questions bothering on poverty, nationalism and nationhood, leadership failure, political rejuvenation, peaceful and mutual coexistence among the different ethnic nationalities of the country, religious tolerance and different civil unrest in the country. Falola avers that 'the overriding themes in literary works during this period addressed leadership, ethnicity, colonial legacies, neocolonialism,

poverty, and religion' (p. 838). All of these issues have railed against the fragile democratic system in Nigeria. In contemporary times, literary artists have continually challenged the powers that be, question the complacency of the populace and raised concerns inflected with sociopolitical undertone for the development of the country. These functions of literature although not peculiar to the literary space in Nigeria have been the basis of literary creativities lately. Ogundokun (2013) avers in this regards that

Literature [in Nigeria] is an essential platform for socio-political, cultural and economic struggles among other things. This creative art called literature is a source of dialogue, debate, exchange and innovation. A form of creativity which enhances transfer of culture and knowledge that are useful for coping with societal tasks. In other words, it paints life with a view to share human experiences, feelings, imaginations, observations, findings, predictions and suggestions for prevailing social realities. (p. 120).

In addition to the above, I have argued elsewhere that literary artists in Nigeria are conscious of the downward turn of events in the society as their creative vigor have thrived more on politics and other related political subject matter, than any other issue. There is therefore a sense of social commitment which in the words of Chinweizu e.tal is 'mandatory upon the artist' (p. 1) in the Nigerian environment. The artists become more preoccupied with political, social, economic and sociological issues trending in the society and this makes their artistry relevant to the sociopolitical discourse of Nigeria. They engage a failed society, occasioned by the recurrent leadership failure in the country. Their works do not shy away from the prevailing realities of their society.

The patriarch of Nigerian, nay African literature recognized this himself. Achebe no doubt knows the importance of literary creativity from this perspective such that in his early debuts, he 'decided to tackle the big subjects of the day – imperialism, slavery, independence, gender, racism, etc.' This is what he term in his writings as 'the politics of representation' (2012, pp. 54–55). His works capture the realities of the day and challenge the complacency of nationals in tackling the menace. Guided by the moral obligation 'to ally oneself with power against the powerless', Achebe posits that

[i]t is impossible to write anything in Africa without some kind of commitment, some kind of message, some kind of protest. [...] The whole pattern of life demanded that one should protest, that you should put in a word for your history, your traditions, your religion, and so no. [...] The reality of today [...] is and can be important if we have

the energy and the inclination to challenge it, to go out and engage with its peculiarities, with the things that we do not understand. (2012, p. 58-59).

As a leading literary figure, Chinua Achebe has no doubt been outstanding for his engagement in the postcolonial discourse of Nigeria specifically and Africa in general. As a nationalist and a postcolonial writer in Nigeria, Achebe never shied away from the prevailing unpleasant political atmosphere in his country home. His works are not only rooted in politics but they also engage critically the dysfunctional and despotic nature of politics in postcolonial Nigeria. As such, Achebe has been reckoned with by all and sundry as a politico-literati beacon of Nigerian literature. His dissatisfaction with and subsequent engagement of the numerous crisis that bedevil the Nigerian state, coupled with his approach as a dissident are all in the fulfillment of his roles as a nationalist. Izevbaye (2009) submits that 'Achebe's most important influence given his goal as a writer, is his contribution to the advancement of a new postcolonial consciousness, [...] It is in the novel form that Achebe has made his most enduring contribution as a postcolonial writer' (p. 33).

It is in furtherance of the above that Ogunbesan (1974) describes the role of the writer in the African environment. He avers in 'Politics and the African Writer' that 'The African writer has been very much influenced by politics, probably because the African intellectual is a part of the political elite. The writer is a sensitive point within his society. Thus, African literature has tended to reflect the political phases on the continent' (pp. 43). He asserts further that '[T]he writer is a member of society and his sensibility is conditioned by the social and political happenings around him. These issues will be present in his work, but they must be more implicit than otherwise' (pp. 43). In essence, the writer in the Nigerian society having recognize the role of literature as a weapon for social change stands on this platform, eager to point out the social ills in the society and their remedies. This is the practice of literary artistry in contemporary Nigeria.

The preoccupation of literary artist in using his artistry to engage and respond to prevailing sociopolitical realities in Nigeria is what I hope to demonstrate through selected contemporary literary works. My concern here is to delineate key imaginations and issues of nation and nationalism in contemporary literary creations in Nigeria. It is on this ground that the study explores the nationalist imaginations, artistic philosophy and the political dimensions of literary creativities in Nigeria.

Problematic

Widely proclaimed is the assertion that literature in its different manifestations in Nigeria reflects the prevailing sociopolitical realities in the country. This is true but simplistic, occasioned by the failure of critics to look at literary endeavors in the country beyond the idea of reflection. Aware that the sociopolitical landscape in the country is becoming more tensed, literary creators have done more than passive reflection. They have as I hope to demonstrate here actively engage and responded to postcolonial issues in Nigeria. Recognizing the indispensable roles of literature in every human society, they lend their voices to the discourse of nation building. They protest and establish hegemonic discourse against prevailing postcolonial disillusionments and neocolonial tendencies in the country to foster social development. This as will be demonstrated here is the ultimate cause in their writings.

Literary Artists, Social Vision and Nationalist Imaginations in Nigeria

Writing in Nigeria has been driven by a perceived social vision. This social vision is nationalistic as it has been in the interest of the state. Achebe (2012) avers in this regards that

A major objective [of writing] is to challenge stereotypes, myths, and image of ourselves and our continent, and to recast them through stories – prose, poetry, essays, and books [...] My own assessment is that the role of the writer is not a rigid position and depends to some extent on the state of health of his or her society. In other words, if a society is ill the writer has a responsibility to point it out. If the society is healthier, the writer's job is different. [...] We sought ultimately through our art to create for Nigeria an environment of good order and a civilization – a daunting task that needed to be tackled in a country engulfed in crisis. (pp. 53–57).

It is in the light of this that Okolo (2007) writes that 'Achebe sees his writing career predominantly as a political mission [...] [and his] works provoke a critical re-evaluation of ideas and beliefs that might have been overlooked, in an effort to understand basic social facts and institute enduring national policies for their societies' (p. 53).

Enraged with nationalist imaginations, writers have angrily channeled their creative vigor to attack a deaf country which despite the ceaseless warnings and cautions appear to have been jinxed. No matter the genre of writing, there is a single focus, nation and nationalism. In the words of Falola (2017), these writings which

[...] articulate, respond to, and interrogate the Nigerian state are dense, the philosophy is complex, the expressions are clear, the truths are undisguised, and expressed without any sugarcoating. The generation of knowledge, the space where that knowledge is expressed and the politics of expression are consistently guided by a genuine nationalism to free the country from internal and external domination and

exploitation. The various literary texts, oral and written, have struggled to liberate Nigeria from colonial domination, to decolonize our minds, and fight, after 1960, the misrule of members of the political class, both military and civilian. Political engagement and activism mark the core essence of the literary imaginations about the Nigerian space, clearly expressed in anticolonial writings and postcolonial criticisms. (p. 827).

The artistic philosophy and political imaginations of literary creativities in Nigeria therefore is in the construction of counter narratives which responds to contradictions mainly internal in the agitations for true democratization of governance, government agencies and political institutions in line with the rule of law with which the nation is governed. This is why Egya (2017) submits that 'the institution of literature, the entire process of literary production, in Nigeria is one that seeks to *respond to*, (emphasis original) not merely represent, incidents, discourses, and narratives that are produced by institutions one of which is constituted power' (p. 8). As such, writers attempt to chronicle the years of despondency, historicize the years of plundering and deal with disillusionments in every facet of the country.

In contemporary Nigeria, a typical demonstrator of this belief is Remi Raji. Popularly referred to as a poet of nationalist imagination, Raji (cited in Egya 2011) explains his commitment to this social vision and his indebtedness to the nation thus,

There are levels of nationalism. I mean there are false nationalisms and critical nationalisms. The idea was to look back at my country and do a critique of society because most people, poets, sometimes, try to run away from the possibilities of connecting poetry to pure nationalism. Even though I wrote these poems all at different times, I suddenly realized that most of the things I was talking about had to do with the country, all forms of oppressions, different kinds, of silences. One major thing that connects all of them is that nationalist imaginations. (p. 18).

Raji's view on commitment, social vision and nationalist imagination here is the manifesto for literary artists in Nigeria across the lines of generations and genre of writing. As a leading contemporary postcolonial poet in Nigeria, Raji's poetic discourse has been responsive and refractive to the prevailing sociopolitical contradictions which are the characteristics of the Nigerian polity. This has transformed literary creations in Nigeria from passive artistry to passionate and strong activism in the interest of the state. Treading this critical path, writers serve and function in the Nigerian society as watchdogs against oppressive, brutal, and anarchist political regimes. The altruism in their creativities is however marked by optimism. Unarguably, they

engage in intimate dialogues and interrogation of years and decades of despondency, to confront the outrage of tyranny, to plant hope where none is imagined, to explode the myth of silence and give voice to the speechless, to pluck laughter from howling winds [...] and, above all, to be the active child of Optimism in the midst of dire Pessimism. (Raji, 2003, p. 3).

While it is clear that the national realities from the antecedent of creative writing in Nigeria did not elude the grasp of the literary artists, it is also clear that a defining attribute across the lines of genres and generations is the optimism expressed by the literary artists with the hopes and aspirations that Nigeria will recover from her past and having learnt her lessons, she will match on to fulfill her great potentials as a postcolonial state. Prevailing contemporary realities in the nation has however proven this wrong.

Writers in the contemporary era as such have had to grapple with the problem of engaging and responding to the different sociopolitical realities in a country that appear deaf to the numerous ceaseless cautions. The effect of this in the words of Adepitan is that the writers labour 'under too many anxieties' (p. 125). They seek to dissect these realities with a view to unravel the unknown and the intricacies of the political landscape in the country. With this conviction, they have continued to use literature as their weapon to undermine and challenge the powers that be that continue to undo the society in its bid to attain nationhood. In their narratives, they have been historical, radical and discursive. While the prevailing realities might make it seem that their nationalistic battle is a lost one, their indelible imprints with such optimism in the passage of history it is hoped will be visible in due course.

Theoretical Construct

To domesticate the concerns of this study to the Nigerian environment, the literary tool of postcolonialism will be adopted. The adoption of this theory will be from the home critique paradigm in which the concentration is largely on nation and nationalism. In difference to concerns in this field of inquiry which centers largely on African scholars, writers and thinkers responding to the disparaging Eurocentric views about Africa and Africans, its adoption and engagement here will be from the point of African (Nigerian writers) engaging and responding to the postcolonial imbalances and unevenness that have become the bane of sociopolitical development.

Postcolonial scholars from this perspective examine a text as a part of the larger culture that produced it. They examine these texts as attempting to respond to disillusionments in the society by engaging a given historical condition and the controversies which attend to it in the aftermath of colonialism. Two strong focuses at the heart of postcolonialism therefore are the ideas of nation and nationalism in a postcolonial state. The continued global discussion of nationalism and nation building is an indication of the growing disillusionments in different



states of the world and this suggests the continued relevance of postcolonialism in both literary and nonliterary discourses. This stance has been adopted into the literary discourse of many postcolonial states especially in Africa. Literary artists in Nigeria through their works convey the numerous disillusionments in the country. In this way, they contribute to the concerted discussions towards a progressive social renewal in the Nigeria. The literary artist consequently has changed in his textual preoccupation. He seeks to support and advance true nationalism in his works. In the words of Frantz Fanon (cited Ashcroft. et al. 1995), the postcolonial writer, now ‘... progressively take on the habit of addressing his own people’ (p. 155).

Thus, they make literature an engagement of the disillusionments in the postcolonial society. As such, there has been a continued commitment in expressing the harsh conditions and the devastation of the polity in a postcolony. A critical look at Nigerian and by extension African literature will confirm this stance. This emanates from a deep desire to institute a discourse against the despotic and hegemonic control of the society by a few minorities. This is a sense of social commitment. This social commitment or what Caminero Santangelo, (cited in Egya 2017), calls ‘literary engagement’ (p. 131) has become the preoccupation of the writer in the Nigerian environment.

Protestantism, Democracy and Social Development in Nigeria: Reflections on Contemporary Nigerian Writings

To demonstrate and domesticate this commitment of contemporary Nigerian writing, to the contemporary Nigerian society, artistic pieces covering poetry, drama, and a non-fictional writing will be engaged. The selected works will be critically and analytically examined to demonstrate the discomfort of the artists with the prevailing sociopolitical atmosphere and their protest in a bid to advance for true development in the country.

Poetry: “My Lord, Tell Me Where To Keep Your Bribe?” by Niyi Osundare

Famous for his second generation Marxist poetic piece ‘Poetry Is’ which sought to counteract the formalist and idealist conception of literature as being an exclusive preserve of the elite in the society, Niyi Osundare has since the days of ‘Poetry Is’ used literature particularly poetry to reflect and engage prevailing sociopolitical realities in Nigeria. The recent indictment of some top and high ranking judicial officers in the country in high profile corruption cases and abuse of official powers for selfish private gains did not go unnoticed by this ace poet. In his characteristic manner of protesting against issues such as this, Osundare engaged and protested against the corrupt practices and high handedness of these judicial officers in his poetic piece, ‘My Lord, Tell Me Where To Keep Your Bribe?’

The interrogative presentation of the title depicts the poet's confusion and uncertainty on the safest place to drop the bribe of his Lord. 'My Lord' as they are officially and professionally referred to are judges who preside over legal matters and pass judgment in law courts. The level of their professionalism coupled with the presentation and examination of facts and figures by legal counsels, in legal matters, it will be assumed that the final decision to be taken which is usually an exclusive preserve of the judges will be impartial. However, contemporary realities in the country indicate that these legal umpires have failed in this regards. They have brought into disrepute the sacred entity of the judiciary. Because it is against the ethics of the judicial practice to accept any form of and especially financial inducement to influence judgment unduly, the poet doesn't know where to deliver the financial inducement. He ask whether it should be dropped in the 'venerable chambers' or should be carried to 'the immaculate Mansion' which of course would have been built with proceeds such as this, or should it be buried in 'the capacious water tank' or in the his (the Lord's) 'well laundered backyard'. The confusion raged on that the poet even offered to drop the proceeds with 'each of your paramours' who he thinks 'will surely know how to keep the loot / In places too remote for the sniffing dog'.

The poet laments that the judiciary, the 'last hope of the common man / Has become the last bastion of the criminally rich'. As a result of this, 'A terrible plague bestrides the land / Besieged by rapacious judges and venal lawyers'. This is because behind the legal jargonistic cacophony and dramas which are usually staged in Nigerian law courts, 'Corruption stands, naked, in its insolent impunity' and victory is auctioned 'For sale to the highest bidder'. This is made possible by different instances such as 'Election Petition Tribunals' which the poet describes as 'those goldmines and bottomless booties!'. The judicial situation in Nigeria as such have become so jeopardized that the 'buyable Bench and conniving Bar' now guarantee that 'money can deodorize the smelliest crime' as 'Scoundrel vote-riggers romp to electoral victory'. This is such that 'They kill our trust in the common good'. The law eventually becomes 'a vulture / Fat on the cash-and-carry carrion of murdered Conscience'. The result of all these is that 'The "Temple of Justice" / Is broken in every brick / The roof is roundly perforated / By termites of graft'.

In the end, it is the country that suffers. Nigeria's democracy is ridiculed, the common man loses hope in the judiciary, seeks for other means to get justice which may include violence and taking up of arms. A critical appraisal of the militia upsurge in contemporary Nigeria will reveal that it is either hinged on the idea of reclaiming the stolen political mandate of the people, or the demands for impartial judgment to address their grievances. In the words of the poet, 'Unhappy the land / Where jobbers are judges / Where Impunity walks the streets / Like a large, invincible Demon'. The polity is overheated, the system is crippled and Nigeria becomes

'a huge corpse / With milling maggots on its wretched hulk / They prey every day, they prey every night / For the endless decomposition of our common soul.

This poem engages the unscrupulous manner of Nigeria's judicial officers who have become so unprofessional in their profession, a strong bane to the democratic process in Nigeria. Financial corruption no doubt has spread across all facets of Nigeria. It is a national ill that is capable of crumbling the nation. Osundare himself recognized this when he asserted that 'corruption has become the grand commander of the federal republic of Nigeria' (Osundare in Egeya 2017, p. 280). To however imagine that the judiciary, the last hope of the common man will be brought into such disrepute is unpardonable. Despite their jumbo salaries and allowances, plundering the nation to a fault, high ranking judicial officers shamelessly engage in this demeaning estate of financial corruption such that they store up more cash in their private residence than will be found in some financial institutions.

In all, Niyi Osundare's preoccupation and engagement in the poem under study is characteristically his style of poetic creativity. As an ethical man and an ardent believer in humanism, he has championed the equality of all men and social justice for all. His artistry he has used to emphasize the role of art in the numerous struggles of human, to (re)shape human's destiny and portray possibilities of infinite hopes. Symbolical of this preoccupation, his poem "My Lord, Tell Me Where To Keep Your Bribe?" is as such a dissident and hegemonic discourse protesting against the culture of corruption, challenging the financial avariciousness, culture of greed, impunity and selfishness that have become so pronounced in the Nigerian judiciary, a bane of the much professed democratic ideals and the highly desired sociopolitical development and utopianism in the nation.

Drama: *Melancholia* by Dul Johnson

Dramatists since the nascent days of drama and dramatic engagements in Nigeria have been critical of the state of affairs in the country. For them, only the critical path is opened and they have treaded this critical path through satire. Hiding under this umbrella, they have instituted hegemonic discourse against prevailing sociopolitical realities in the country. In their dramatic creativities, they demonstrate a sound knowledge of the sociopolitical situations, engage and protest against neocolonial tendencies in the nation. Dul Johnson belongs to this category. Johnson demonstrates his familiarity with and engagement of the polity in Nigeria in a recent dramatic piece, *Melancholia*.

Published in 2014 by Sevhave Enterprises, *Melancholia* engages and protests against the myopic, visionless and the level of highhandedness of political actors in Nigeria. The titular choice of the book indicates the author's discontent with the *modus operandi* of the political

system in Nigeria. Rather than being the vehicle through which the aspirations of the society materializes, politics in Nigeria has become depressing: a form of psychiatric depression. Ene, Ene et al. (2015) avers in this regards that the prevailing political situation in the country 'is a clear indication that politics in Nigeria has been the opposite of what it is in the developed countries [...] politicians are still backward in terms of their values such as unfulfilled promises, political corruption, greed, violence, tribalism and intimidation' (p. 6).

The inability of political actors in Nigeria to define in clear terms their motives and objectives before venturing into politics, thus bastardizing the polity and making Nigeria ridicule in the comity of nations is what Johnson satirizes in *Melancholia*. The book mocks Nigerian politics, mocks the lack of political will, purpose, hypocrisy, over ambition and myopism of Nigerian political actors. These among other issues have hampered sociopolitical development and utopia attainment in Nigeria. Through the actions and dispositions of the lead character, Mumude Bawa who the author describes as an over ambitious politician running for the Presidency, the reader is introduced to a political system in which simpletons and opportunists because of their wealth vie for political offices. Mumude is a complete representation of an average Nigerian politician.

Mumude Bawa's sudden venture into politics to run for the highest political office in the land without a clear cut vision, strategy and mission demeans the political system in Nigeria. Typically, he sees politics as happenstance and refuses to come to terms with the political realities in the country. He believes in the false self assurance of victory after he claimed to have 'bought the khaki boys over' (Johnson 2014, p. 14). The cautious warning from his nephew Dangiwa in this regards fell on deaf ears. Mumude's confidence and high hopes to win the elections and become the next president is overwhelming to such an extent that he borrows money from banks to finance his campaign. According to him, 'I have borrowed a lot of money from banks and from friends; my political associates. I've also sold off or should I say mortgaged ten of my buildings in the state and five in the Federal Capital, which I hope to get back on becoming the President' (Johnson 2014, p. 15). With mindset such as this, politicians after winning the elections engage in looting the state's to regain every penny spent during the electioneering process.

This lack of political vision and mission of Mumude is such that he named his cabinet members before elections were held. His friend Jatau he named as his campaign director and the future minister of information when they win the elections. This is on the claim that 'They've not had a good Minister there for many, many years' (Johnson 2014, p. 20). At his political manifesto, he goofed. His display of myopism got to the apex. In a bid to impress party members and the electorates, his emergency political mission is to

[...] create more ministries so that we can have more Ministers and Permanent Secretaries. For instance, they now have a ministry for Women Affairs. We will make it Women Affairs and Marriage. We may even create a new Ministry for Marriage. [*Heavy Applause.*] The present Ministry of Health is a misname. I will split it into two: a Ministry of Health for the healthy and a Ministry of Sickness for the management of the sick. [*Applause.*] I will then create a new ministry, to be known as the Ministry of Death. [*There are murmurs of objection.*] Hold it, my people I have two good reasons for creating this ministry: to fight against death and to take care of those who will inevitably die after everything has been done to keep them alive. (Johnson 2014, p. 27).

A ready example in this regards in the contemporary Nigerian society is the incumbent Imo State Governor, Owelle Rochas Okorocha who aside from building statues all over the state to immortalize leaders across Africa recently created a Ministry of Happiness and Couple's Fulfillment, appointing his biological sister as the commissioner. Establishing a completely needless ministry in a state where workers are not paid regularly, where pensioners are not catered for is not only a misnomer but also a lack of political will, mission and vision to rejuvenate the country's collapsing democratic system.

In the end, Mumude lost the elections; his whole world came crumbling before his very eyes. When the reality of his electoral waterloo dawn on him, he became affected psychologically. He blames his self-appointed aides, ministers and family members for his failure. His failure to come to terms with the present realities around him, and pay off the debt incurred during the electioneering process makes him a laughing stock by his nucleus family, friends and associates some of whom hitherto supported his political ambition. He continues to parade himself as the President and complicated issues for himself. Because he has conceptualize the elections as a must win for him, he couldn't come to terms with his eventual failure at the polls and he became traumatized psychologically.

Dul Johnson protests against the political system in the country where looters and saboteurs are celebrated, gaining accolades and traditional titles in places where they are not known. Against Mumude's thought of organizing a thanksgiving service after his expected and much anticipated victory at the polls, Dangiwa, says that 'Every time someone does a Thanksgiving in this country, it is to announce that they have stolen too much public money' (Johnson 2014, p. 37). The references that come to mind are that of Chief Bode George a former chairman of the Nigerian Ports Authority and Chief James Ibori, a former governor of Delta State both of who returned to the church to offer thanksgiving service after their release from prison having been found guilty of looting, embezzlement and financial misappropriation. The conversation at the hospital between Dangiwa, Mumude, Kalo, Jatau the doctor and the nurse reinforces the author's message. Here is an excerpt:

Dangiwa: The whole country is on fire. Death has come over it.

Mumude: [*looking from face to face*]. What does he mean?

Kallo: It is in a state of inertia; a state of inactivity, or at best, sleepwalking

Jatau: In a state of coma. Comatose. Half-dead or dead like zombies.

Mumude: And what does all this mean?

Dangiwa: That something is seriously wrong. That the body is sick.

Mumude: Traitor! Whose body is sick? Are you the doctor?

Jatau: It means that the vital organs are failing.

Mumude: Whose organs do you mean?

Dangiwa: Not yours, my nephew. We are talking about the State.

Mumude: Lairs! What State?

Dangiwa: The country. It is sick. It is dying. It has failed.

Jatau: It is in a state of prolonged coma.

Mumude: Even you too, Jatau? Even you?

Jatau: Take it or leave it, the country will soon die unless urgent steps are taken to revive it.

Dangiwa: This blackout is our dungeon of death and nothing, absolutely nothing is working!

Mumude: And who is responsible for all this?

Jatau: The Police, the Air Force, the Navy, the Army

Dangiwa: The Judiciary. The law's arms are now too short.

Kallo: Only in our country.

Jatau: The Legislature

Kallo: Legislooters and bribe takers

Jatau: What about the agencies that should fight corruption?

Kallo: Greater criminals have we now (Johnson 2014, p. 71–73).

This is a portrayal of the dysfunctional democratic system in Nigeria which the author protests against. The irony of Nigeria's democracy explicated in the above conversation is such that the three arms of government; the executive, the legislature and the judiciary, and the different agencies of government have all contributed to the decay in the society. The Police, the Air Force, the Navy, the Army and even the antigraft agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission, (ICPC), and the Code of Conduct Bureau, (CCB), as well as its prosecuting arm, Code of Conduct Tribunal, (CCT) are all stake holders and contributors to the ruin in the contemporary Nigeria. The *modus operandi* of Nigeria's democracy contrary to that of advance democracies across the globe is such that those in government and their agencies are sacred cows shielded by extant laws of immunity, legislative manipulations and executive conspiracies. These conspiracies on the one hand are such that high profile corruption cases involving members of the aforementioned categories are usually ended abruptly on the basis of lack of merit, wanting of evidences and inability of the prosecuting agencies to prove the case against the accused. This indicts the judicial system in the country where the judicial umpires would have been bribed to divert judgment and pervert judgment. On the other hand, the antigraft agencies have become tools to threaten members of the opposition and perceived threats to the reigning government.

In the end, Johnson expresses optimism and points out the solution to the myriad of the postcolonial issues militating against Nigeria's drive towards nationhood. This, as argued earlier is a defining attribute of contemporary literary engagements in Nigeria. The cure to the country's ills as revealed in the text will come through a revolution, a people's revolution.

Doctor: But the cure for the country, just like yours must come from a painful dose of the antidote of the decay that has overcome you and the country

Mumude: Which is?

Dangiwa: A people's revolution

Mumude: You mean my people will –

Dangiwa: Not your people. The people of this country!

Nurse: The Nurses' Union! The Doctors' Union!

Jatau: The Teachers' Union! The Bar Association!

Dangiwa: The Road Transport Workers' Union!

Kallo: [*excited*] Yes! Yes! The Road Transport Workers' Union! They are far far more organized than our governments! (Johnson 2014, p. 73).

In all, *Melancholia* unearths the clandestine games played on the political arena in Nigeria. It berates the political system in the nation where simpletons without clear cut vision venture into politics not in the interest of the society, but in their own private interest. It is the author's way of protesting against the political atmosphere in the country, raise the sociopolitical consciousness of the masses to consolidate Nigeria's democracy and advance sociopolitical developments in the nation.

Non Fiction: *There Was a Country* by Chinua Achebe

Beyond the controversies that greeted the erudite author's 2012 publication most of which are hinged on the titular choice of the book, a critical reading of *There Was a Country* will reveal that it is in furtherance of Achebe's discontent with and protest against the *modus operandi* in Nigeria which as explicated earlier is to 'create for Nigeria an environment of good order and a civilization – a daunting task that needed to be tackled in a country engulfed in crisis'. (p. 57). This explains why Achebe in *There Was a Country* examined the past events and how they weigh on the present and contemporary happenings in the country. A recurring motif in the book therefore is the role of history in addressing contemporary issues that impede nation building efforts in Nigeria. That there seems to be no any solution in foresight to these issues puts the posterity of the nation in jeopardy. Corroborating the above argument, Tsaiior (2015) argues that

Achebe summons the past history and imposes on it the sacred duty and cumbersome burden of answering to the contingencies of present history and the challenges that await the nation in future history. This dialectic between the past, present and future is important to Achebe because his role as a private, public and prophetic figure who



is ordained to bear the burdens of society is precisely located within this temporal configuration. (p. 58)

This aptly explains that *There Was a Country* is in its entirety, the fulfillment of the role of the author as a nationalist, protesting against happenings in the country to push for a radical change in the societal status quo to guarantee development in Nigeria. He laments the failure of the state, the failure of the political and ruling elite to transform the country beyond her colonial pedigree many years after her political independence. The state has failed because politicians have proven incapable of performing their statutory functions of stabilizing the polity. He protests against the dysfunctional *modus operandi* of politics and political participation in Nigeria in which political actors and gladiators pursue their private interest against the interest of the state. In his words,

The political class, oblivious of the growing disenchantment permeating literally every strata of Nigerian society, was consumed with individual and ethnic pursuits, and with the accumulation of material and other resources. Corruption was widespread, and those in power were using every means at their disposal, including bribery, intimidation, and blackmail to cling power. (Achebe, 2012, p. 72).

Fagbadebo (2015) submits in this regards that the political elite have 'constantly manipulated the people and the political processes to advance their own selfish agenda, the society remained pauperized, and the people wallowed in abject poverty' (p. 28). Similarly, Tony (cited in Ene, et al 2013) affirms that

Power seekers in Nigeria see politics as an avenue for making money, a sort of open cheque to wealth, to be in power and to control state resources which are often converted to personal uses correspondingly, to lose elections is to be out of power and to be denied access to the opportunity for aggrandizement. To maintain incumbency, those in power use all sorts of strategies to ensure that the election results favour them. (p. 9)

To correct this ugly trend, Achebe (2012) submits that

A new patriotic consciousness has to be developed, not one based simply on the well-worn notion of the unity of Nigeria or faith in Nigeria often touted by our corrupt

leaders, but one based on an awareness of the responsibility of leaders to the led – on the sacredness of their anointment to the led – and disseminated by the civil society, schools, and intellectuals. (p. 253).

It is only with this understanding that the political atmosphere in Nigeria will be stabilized and citizens will enjoy full dividends of politics which *inter alia* is to serve the populace for the development and advancement of the society.

Conclusion

In this work, an attempt has been made to dissect the preoccupation of literary artists in contemporary Nigeria. The foregoing discussion have revealed that literary creativities in Nigeria especially in the contemporary times is largely political, driven by protest and the social vision to foster development in Nigeria. Through their writings, they participate in the democratization process of the country. Although these works appears not to have been able to establish a common nationality for Nigerians across religious and ethnic lines as the nation is a conglomeration of ethnic nationalities, an amalgam of different micro nations with different cultures and varied religious beliefs and practices, hence, the need to forge a national ethos that will guarantee and bind communities together for stability, social growth and development. However, collectively, the social vision of writers engages sociopolitical conditions that seem to be peculiar to the Nigerian environment. It is thus directed at raising the consciousness of the masses against the contemporary pseudo democratic conditions that have become perpetuated in Nigeria. In their discomfort and in pursuant of utopianism in the country, they engage the state, challenge the establishment and complacency of the elite, expose the striking realities of absence of governance, and the anxieties of a postcolonial nation. It has also been undoubtedly revealed that contemporary writers in Nigeria through their commitment to the welfare of the state have instituted hegemonic discourse against the contemporary despotism in the country. The critical sociopolitical issues that confront them has made them angry in pursuit of their mission to save Nigeria's democracy from total collapse and guarantee development in the country. They as such protest against the blatant flaunting of the rule of law and the social imbalances in the society. Ultimately, they have stirred up emotions, and instigated actions to enhance nation building in Nigeria.

Notes

*TFA** Things Fall Apart*. Often regarded as the first canonical novel by the standard of the West, *Things Fall Apart* was written by Chinua Achebe and published in London by Heinemann in 1958, at the eve of Nigeria's political independence.

References

- Achebe, C. (2012). *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. London: Penguin Books.
- ... (1983). *The Trouble with Nigeria*. London: Heinemann.
- ... (1966). *A Man of the People*. London: Heinemann.
- ... (1964). *Anthills of the Savannah*. London: Heinemann.
- ... (1960). *No Longer at Ease*. New York: I. Obolensky.
- ... (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
- ... (1995). Colonialist Criticism. In Bill Ashcroft. et al. (eds) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. (pp. 57–61). London and New York: Routledge.
- Adepitan, T. (2006). Issues in Recent African Writing. *African Literature Today*. (pp. 124–148). 25. Ibadan: Heinemann.
- Alexander, M. (1980). *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Azuah, N. (2005). Interview with Nnorom Azuonye. *Sentinel Poetry Quarterly*. (pp. 24–35).
- Dugga, V. (2003). *A Bridge of Strings*. Lagos: Dat & Partners Logistics Ltd.
- Egya, S.E. (2011). *Poetics of Rage: A Reading of Remi Raji's Poetry*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- ... (2014). *Nation, Power and Dissidence in Third Generation Nigerian Poetry in English*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- ... (2017). *In Praise of Dissidence: Power Relations, Artistic Creativity and Nigeria's Democratic Process*. Inaugural Lecture Series: University Seminar and Conference Committee; IBB University, Lapai.
- ... (2017). *Niyi Osundare: A Literary Biography*. Markurdi: Sevhave Enterprise.
- Ene, E. I. (etal) (2013). Corruption Control and Political Stability in Nigeria: Implication for Value Re-Orientations in Politics. *Global Journal of Human Social Science Interdisciplinary*. 13 (1).
- Fagbadebo, O. (2015). Corruption, Governance and Political Instability in Nigeria. (pp. 028-037). *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*. 1 (2).
- Falola, T. (2017). Literary Imaginations and Nation Building in Nigeria Since 1914. In *The Toyin Falola Reader on African Culture, Nationalism, Development and Epistemologies*. (pp. 825– 852). Austin, Texas: Pan African University Press.
- Ikime, O. (1980). *Groundwork of Nigerian History*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Izevbaye, D. (2009). Chinua Achebe and the African Novel. In Francis Abiola Irele. (ed) *The Cambridge Companion to the African Novel*. (pp. 31–50). Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Johnson, D. (2014). *Melancholia*. Markurdi: Sevhave Enterprises.
- Nnolim, C.E. (2006). African Literature in the 21st Century: Challenges for Writers and Critics. (pp. 1-10). *African Literature Today*. 25. Ibadan: Heinemann.

- Ogundokun, S. (2013). Literature and Society: A New Reading of Sembene Ousmane's *Le Mandat*. (pp. 120-134). *Journal of Studies in Social Sciences*. 5 (1).
- Ogungbesan, K. (1974). Politics and the African Writer. (pp. 43-53). *African Studies Review*. 17 (1).
- ... (1980). Nigerian Writers and Political Commitment. (pp. 20-50). *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*. UCLA, 5 (2).
- Okolo, MSC. (2007). *African Literature as Political Philosophy*. London: Zed Books.
- Osofisan, F. (1993). *Excursions in Drama and Literature: Interview with Femi Osofisan*. Ed. Awodiya, Muyiwa. Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Tanumo, N. T. (2011). Keynote Address: Nigeria at 50: *Gaudeamus Igitur? Nigeria At Fifty: Issues and Challenges in Governance 1960-2010*. (pp. 3-27). (Eds). Bawuro M. Barkindo etal. Markurdi: Aboki Publishers.
- Tsaaior, J.T. (2015). From Cultural Nationalism to a National Democratic Culture: Chinua Achebe's *There Was a Country: a Personal History of Biafra*. (pp. 56-72). *SMC Journal of Cultural and Media Studies*. 2 (1).

Cite this article:

Author(s), Adeyemi Amos ADEGBOYEGA, (2019). "Protest, Democracy and Social Development in Nigeria: Reflections on Contemporary Nigerian Writings". Name of the Journal: International Journal of Academic Research in Business, Arts and Science, (IJARBAS.COM), P, 51- 71. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3598132> Issue: 4, Vol.: 1, Article: 4, Month: January, Year: 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.ijarbas.com/all-issues/current-articles/>

Published by

