

**POST-INDEPENDENCE NIGERIAN LITERATURE AS CATALYST TO
NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY
OF CHINUA ACHEBE'S *A Man of the People* and
OKEY NDIBE'S *Arrows of Rain***

BY

EFFUMBE KACHUA, PhD.

**CENTER FOR GENERAL STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF CROSS RIVER STATE,
CALABAR-CROSS RIVER STATE,
NIGERIA**

Abstract

Commitment literature interrogates issues of contemporary relevance, to ameliorate them. These issues are challenges of good leadership, economic, social and political mismanagement, etc. These are common day-to-day issues that affect the lives of the people and create avenues for sustainable development and societal stability. Many creative writers – novelists, poets, playwrights and essayists – have identified with and risen against the socio-economic and political crises that bedeviled their nations, especially after political independence. Chinua Achebe fired the first salvo with his *A Man of the People* (1966). In this novel, he realized the incipient corruption and leadership ineptitude that are the burden of the newly independent Nigeria. On his part, Okey Ndibe, more than three decades after is compelled to revisit this theme in his *Arrows of Rain* (2000). Borne by the apparent decadence and destitution that this malaise had done to Nigerians, Ndibe is more incisive, provocative and revealing in his novel. He also questions the docile and object status accorded the female gender in Nigeria's patriarchal-dominated society. This paper seeks to critique these literary texts to explore how the two novelists have proffered solutions to the issues identified in their society, to achieve sustainable development, comparative advantage,

and national identity in their beleaguered nation, Nigeria. This study adopts the Functionalist and Feminist theories as the bases for analyzing and critiquing the literary texts studied here.

Keywords: National Integration and Development, Contemporary Relevance, Commitment Literature, Ameliorating, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

The tempo and complexity of Nigeria's socio-political crises ignite a vigorous resurgence in post-independence literature, especially the prose genre, immediately after political independence in the first generation of writers. These crops of writers were incensed and more concerned with the issues of social, political and economic well-being of their kin. The creative works that emerged after the first generation of writers were a little more provocative and temperamental, because of the seemingly insoluble nature of the crises that they were confronted with. This premise is enthused by Bayo Ogunjimi when he advocates that "any thesis on literature and development in Africa must consider the placement of creative imagination in the exposure, diagnosis and analysis of the contradictions and forces of alienation besetting the continent" (87).

Perceptibly, the scenario of the wanton desecration of our common wealth gave unreserved impetus to the advent of committed writers and Literature of Commitment. Elechi Amadi defines the committed writer as "... one who consciously uses his writing as an instrument for furthering the cause he believes in" (35). Committed writers in their works denigrate the untoward situations that despotic rulers, especially in military garbs put their citizens into through their unquestionable extra-judicial decrees and attitudes, and also seek to complement the remediation efforts of other institutions, organizations and individuals. This category of writing interrogates the burning issues of the epoch, to deliver the people from the decadent living created by their bad leaders. Elechi Amadi affirms the invaluable role and significance of the committed writer to society when he averred that "No one can deny that the literature of commitment is necessary. How can a writer just look on placidly

while the struggle for sheer survival rages on around him? (36). Chinua Achebe in his essay, “The Novelist as Teacher”, accepts Amadi’s challenge that the committed writer must brace up to the urgent needs of his people for remediation and development: “The writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must now be done (in Nigeria). He should march right in front. For he is an after all... the sensitive point of his community” (105).

Bayo Ogunjimi lends his support to this invaluable role of the African artist by defining in a clearer perspective who the African writer is and his responsibilities: “The African artist is concerned with the problematization of these historical political, economic, and cultural forces that submerge the people” (86). Ogunjimi seeks to ensure that the African writer exposes and advances relevant solutions to the myriad of problems his society faces. This is the responsibility that Ndibe enunciates when he avers in *Arrows of Rain* that “...I’d like to believe that I have written these words ... to examine where my life has intersected with our wider history, how I have touched larger events and been touched in return. I want to reckon up my journey and Madia’s, ...” (64).

The Nigerian socio-political landscape had for more than five decades since political independence been bedeviled by adventurist civilian and military rulers, with a docile citizenry, who bear the brunt of bad governance. This perceived docility is not without a qualitative civil education. Many Civil Right Organizations had endeavored to sensitize the teeming populace about their plight, to re-engineer them for possible remediation.

Barely six years after independence, the Nigerian military intervened and took over the reins of governance, and held onto power for about two-thirds of the period under review. The military legacy is one of unbridled misrule, absolute degradation of human rights, pathetic deterioration of the quality of life of the citizenry, unprecedented anti-intellectualism and the most scandalous looting of the national treasury. By the time the military left the

political scene on May 29, 1999, Nigeria had become a mockery of the civilized world, which nicknamed her the ‘corruption capital of the world’.

George Orwell’s *1984* is a classical work that premeditated the ugly course of events in Africa. In the novel, Orwell painted a vivid fearful picture of a thorough-bred militarized state where human freedom is severely curtailed, wanton and unabated extra-judicial killings, and dare-devil man-hunt of perceived political enemies. This is a replica of General Sani Abacha’s era (Nov. 1993 – June 1998) in Nigeria’s political history, (two decades after the publication of the novel in 1973) which writers like Okey Ndibe, Debo Kotun, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe seek to deplore in their works. In *A Man of the People*, Chinua Achebe decries the wanton corruption and sharp political practices that pervaded Nigeria’s first Republic civilians’ regime.

The challenges of leadership ineptitude, as the most disruptive central spanner in the Nigerian political crises, is aptly captured by Chinua Achebe in his novella, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. He places the causes of the whole problems on leadership: “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership” (1) Even though he identifies other issues such as ethnicity (tribal loyalty), mediocrity, corruption etc., he queried that the Nigerian leadership has refused to be exemplary: “The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, *to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmarks of true leadership*” (my emphasis, 1). He averred also inadvertently that corruption is the cankerworm that had destroyed the fabric of the nation’s existence, and our leaders don’t have the moral courage to tackle it head-on: “Corruption in Nigerian has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage: and Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is only slightly indisposed” (47-48).

One critical characteristic of a good leader which Achebe identifies as lacking in Nigerian pre-independent leaders is”... The seminal absence of intellectual rigor in the

political thought of our founding fathers” (13). The acuity of the intellect of every leader of note defines the mental capacity with which the person runs the state. When lacking, the leader laps into the mundane and insignificant which Achebe dubs as “... A tendency to pious materialistic wooliness and self-centered pedestrianism” (13).

Debo Kotun’s *Abiku* published in 1999 is the debut of the 21st Century literary exploit in the Nigerian literary scape. It remains one of the most unparalleled portraits of the agonies and ordeals of military dictatorship in Nigeria. The novel reflected a true socio-political Nigerian background for its setting. Kotun portrays the nagging Nigerian leadership foibles the way only a critical intellectual could assess them.

For a debut, Kotun feels compelled to tell the Nigerian story, choosing a hard-to-understand, but the familiar title, *Abiku*, and relates the story in an abrasively bitter and satirical tone and manner that leaves the reader with a sour taste. Impelled by the strong feeling of nostalgia for a homeland, once dubbed “Giant of Africa”, now ravaged and devalued with lost hopes and wantonly squandered opportunities, the narrator/protagonist deplores the unpleasant nature of a lost El Dorado. Kinsley Moghalu in his opus on the way forward for Nigeria’s socio-political and economic crises proffers and defines what good and credible leadership and effective governance is: “... good political leadership must be backed up by good governance. This is the process by which governments and public institutions conduct public life and manage public resources. You could say that the ability to manage well is the acid test to good leadership” (Vision 3, n.p.).

‘Abiku’ is a Yoruba word that can be translated as “predestined to death”, a myth of an abnormal child who is born to die; dies to be born again to die, in an endless circle. The title is a metaphor for a vicious circle of unparalleled treachery, intrigues, back-stabbing and all sorts of evil machinations in the highest echelon of Nigeria’s political/military leadership. This fictional depiction of military rule in Nigeria, like Okey Ndibe’s *ArrowsofRain* and Kole

Omotosho's *JustBeforeDawn*, is an adept admixture of facts and fiction. Kotun has written a novel of immense socio-political relevance not difficult for many Nigerians to identify with. Kotun uses real names of people, places and events that make the disguises in the novel easy to decode.

Abiku remains a very important post-colonial and post-military Nigerian novel. It remains in its predictive nature as nascent as Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* which premeditated the advent of the military that truncated the inchoate civilian regime of the First Republic. *Abiku* was written and published before the death of General Sani Abacha, but it forecasted the untimely demise of the General, in the most mystifying circumstances. How true in the end! It is a portrayal of the sordid era known as the Abacha regime, the most inglorious and fearful military regime in Nigerian history. It is an epoch that leaves the ears of every Nigerian reader tingling *ad infinitum*. The late Singaporean leader, Lee Kuan Yew affirmed in his posthumous letter to Malaysians, circulated online, that the first thing Singaporeans realized is that "quality leadership is non-negotiable". This message should serve as a living principle to all and sundry!

The two novels under study here, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* unwittingly strike an intertextual connection in their enunciation of the inglorious role of the military and civilians in governance in Nigeria. Incidentally, these two structures/elements have played an ingenious and strategically central role in the development of Nigeria's political history; a kind of relay race system, passing the baton of rulership from one to the other. Sadly, it is the military that had occupied the seat of power much longer than the civilians.

Achebe's *A Man of the People* is quite pre-emptive in its somewhat prophetic denunciation of, and the subsequent demise of the short-lived civilian regime in Nigeria immediately after independence, while Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* echoes the gory state of

affairs in many African countries in the immediate post-independence years. The two novels are direly critical of the despondent state of affairs in Nigeria. Nothing has changed at all to date – corruption, lack of social infrastructure, unstable economic policies, recurrent bad leadership, etc. have remained the hallmark, experience and incidence of the daily lives of Nigerians.

Chinua Achebe and Okey Ndibe portray poor governance and corruption as the root causes of the desecration of our national values and developmental strides. The novelists' portrayal of corrupt leaders in their novels bears credence to Frantz Fanon's view on the vicious impetus and self-aggrandizement of the emergent leadership in newly independent African states:

Before independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete forms 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 the company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie (166).

Theoretical framework

This study adopts the Functionalist and Feminist theories in the analysis of the studied texts because the theories predetermine the context and focus of the analyses. Functionalism is a theoretical perspective that focuses on the functions performed in society by social

structures, such as institutions, hierarchies and norms. Within this theory, function refers to the extent a given activity promotes or interferes with the maintenance of a system. Functionalism emerged in the early 20th century and is associated with authors and writers such as Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Herbert Spenser and Robert Merton, who dominated American social theories in the 1950s and 1960s.

There are four basic assumptions that this theory propagates which incidentally are couched around the principal necessities of our livelihood: food, shelter, clothing and good health. The provision of these needs is essential for maintaining a tranquil social order. Good leadership and effective governance, of course, is all about the provision of these essential needs of all humans. Okey Ndibe interrogates this state of affairs in his fictive Madia country in the incisive dialogue between Ogugua and Pa Mathew Ata, father to Hon. Reuben Ata, the Honourable Minister for Social Issues. The duo observed the apparent lack of these basic infrastructures in Madia, and scolded the lascivious life – style of the government officials, who rather choose to waste government funds on wild party ecstasy: “You go to any village and you’re shocked by the squalid life there. The dust roads. Hospitals that have neither drugs nor doctors. The polluted stream water that people drink. The lack of electricity” (140).

In this guise, the Functionalists propose an interdependent social system in the society where the government provides these basic needs, while the people pay their taxes on which the State depends to keep the system running smoothly. Any systematic dysfunction such as that propagated by the studied writers/novelists that goes against the bases of tranquility, peace and progress in the society, and instigates radical reactions by the citizenry, with a view to righting the perceived wrongs is considered an aberration.

Feminism is a theory that questions the disparity between the male and female genders, created, maybe, unconsciously by social structures or the patriarchal-denominated society. This theory is strictly gender-related. The theory’s proponents seek to correct the

objectionable status of otherness, the relegated second-class figure of the woman in our society. They seek a complementary and fellowship relationship between the male and female, which will foster and engender a more equitable and harmonious family. Helen Chukwuma defines feminism as "... a rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy effectual and contributing human being. Feminism is a reaction to such stereotypes of women which deny them a positive identity" (ix).

Social Contradictions in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*

Okey Ndibe's *Arrow of Rain* is a beautifully written work in simple racy prose and style. The narrative portends a skillful writer who desires to tell his story lucidly. The novel examines and portrays the sorrows and pains of individuals facing the truth of who they are and a nation on the verge of collapse. It is a familiar tale of post-colonial corruption in Africa in all its ugly forms.

The novel opens with a gory spectacle of an innocent woman, considered to be a whore, raped by a gang of military men, with the appurtenances of power- government apparatuses, and later found dead on the sandy shores of B. Beach on New Year Day. The police arrives at the scene, and the only person seen there who could know about the probable cause of the death of the lady is a maverick vagrant, called Bukuru. The man, Bukuru is a lunatic, but is a well-educated journalist. At interrogation by the police, Bukuru reveals that the lady was raped by the military task force. He further indicated that a high-ranking military officer had done grave damages to some lady, and many others. Alarmed at the brazen indictment of the hierarchy of power and government, the police instantly begin to hatch a cover-up; discounting Bukuru's report, the police accuse him of culpable homicide on B. Beach. This particular incident portends the evils visited on the Nigerian citizenry by military men who are supposed to protect them. What a grievous case of blatant role reversal!

Rape and sexual assaults are highly injurious victimizations on the psyche of the individual victims. The deprecating effects are dehumanizing and portend suicidal instincts. There are two salient perspectives for the measurement of rape and sexual assaults – the criminal justice and the public health perspectives. These two perspectives are squarely congenial to the victims of rape in *Arrows of Rain*. The universal definition of rape is ‘having carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will’, with further explanation that “carnal knowledge” is penetration (however slight) of a penis into a vagina. All the scenarios explored above are direct replicas of all that transpired in the life of Emilia (Iyese) in the vicious hands of Major Isa Bello, later General Isa Palat Bello. Several cases of rape of many girls/ladies, mostly by gangs of rapists, are replete in the text. It is pertinent to indicate that all these cases are visited on the innocent victims by men and officers of the Madian armed forces.

The issue of rape raised in the novel indicates a predominant mode of female subjugation. Prostitution is a social vice, and in a seeming recognition of this fact the government set up a ‘Vice Task Force’ to curb the practice. Unfortunately, members of that agency, politicians and other elites are promoters of this unholy trade. Girls are serially raped and some are murdered in cold blood. Emilia (Iyese) the prostitute and Major Isa Bello’s mistress is gruesomely murdered by him for refusing to allow Bello the paternity of her son. Bello has daughters only from his marriage, but in accordance with patriarchal norms, needs a son badly. Iyese’s refusal to bow to intimidation, even at the price of her life is a feminist assertion. She refuses to be just an object of procreation: Iyese yearns for self-worth and recognition at the hands of Bello, and at the hands of the male world. It is against this background that Ogun-dipe-Leslie questions the bases of the consistent suppression of the womenfolk: “... women are oppressed as women and they are oppressed as the majority members of subordinate classes which are also in the majority” (546).

Following closely to the above instance of dehumanization is the gross travesty of justice against the very ones for whom the judiciary is meant to protect: the very dregs and vulnerable in society. The story is about a man who is wrongfully accused of murdering a prostitute. Because of the pervading atmosphere of fright of the despotic military government, no one is willing to listen to the truth, instead concoct bizarre falsehoods to cover up the guilt and greed of those in charge – the government agents who killed the lady after a marathon rape by a gang of soldiers.

Nigeria's present socio-political climate can be squarely aligned with the disparate situation in Rwanda, South Sudan etc. The novel is an erudite commentary on the vagaries of leadership ineptitude and the litany of social ills visited on the Nigerian citizenry. To drum home his desired theme of leadership insouciance and greed, Okey Ndibe affirms that "Madia was in the stranglehold of the most vicious kleptocracy anywhere in our continent – a regime in which ministers and other public officials looted whatever was within their reach, and much that wasn't" (137). He further illuminates the vile corruption of the leaders in a dialogue between Ogugua (Bukuru) and Pa Mathew Ata. The father of Rueben Ata, the Honourable Minister for Social Issues, and a key member of General Isa Bello's cabinet. The dialogue is a melodramatic expose on the degree of filth and decay within the corridors of power.

A classic case of social dysfunction exhibited by Nigeria's ruling elite in *Arrows of Rain* is in a dramatic show of betrayal of trust by two distinguished gentlemen, Honourable Chief James Amanka and Professor Sogon Yaw dubbed "the Amanka-Yaw Affair" (94). The former as Madia's Minister for External Affairs had exhibited foreboding indolence when he was caught sleeping deeply at the summit of the Organization of African Unity. This indolence sparked off wild protests, calling for his sack. The most unfortunate situation of dysfunction is in Professor Sogon Yaw, an avowed Marxist scholar who had "... cultivated a

Marx-like beard and wore military fatigues that accorded well with table-pounding, ranting style” (96). Ndibe further indicates that Yaw’s life had been dedicated to the Marxist’s principles of fighting the cause of the masses: “... to peel the mask off the faces of the enemies of the people, to expose local traitors and their foreign collaborators to public view” (96). It beats everyone’s imagination that this man could suddenly abandon his avowed *Avantguard* Marxist’s principles and the cause of the masses, shaved off his Marxist’s beard and joined the perceived capitalist and insensitive government as the Minister for Interior.

The story in the novel sounds realistic and prophetic, blurring the lines between facts and fiction. It lends the novel the credits of apparent immediacy and authenticity. The author himself averred to the universality of his story/theme when he said “The story could have been set in any one of the several African countries whose leaders are deliberately setting them towards a state of anarchy for their interest” (144).

Socio-political dysfunctions in Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People*

China Achebe’s *A Man of the People* is considered very predictive of the future of the new nation, Nigeria, which was just at that time in the throes of political independence. Achebe projected a foreboding situation that sets the consciousness of everyone throbbing with unease. The political rascality and unquantifiable spates of corruption that were displayed by the political leadership in Nigeria of the first republic caused the sudden termination of that regime through a military coup d’ tat. G. D. Killam indicates that “in *A Man of the People* which is set in post-independence Nigeria and treats events almost exactly with its writing, Achebe employs the irony of the satirist to ridicule and condemn the circumstances the book evokes... (83).

The novel recounts the experiences of the narrator and protagonist, Odili Samanu, a self-acclaimed revolutionary, who desires to clean the political Augean stable of his fictive community, Anata, by up-staging Chief Honorable Nanga, Member of Parliament. Odili

seeks to contest election against the incumbent Chief Nanga. In this novel, Achebe returns to the subject of his earlier work – *No Longer at Ease* – corruption and greed in high places. Chief Nanga, the *bete noire* and a corrupt politician, invites Odili, the principal character to visit him in Lagos. There Odili becomes involved in Chief Nanga's world. Odili and Chief Nanga quarrel as the latter seizes his girl friend, Elsie, whom he invited to come and see him at the Chief's home. After this face-off, Odili leaves the Chief Nanga's home for his friend and contemporary, Maxwell. With Maxwell, the duo contrives to form a political party, the Common People's Convention (CPC), as a counter force against Chief Nanga's People's Organisation Party (P.O.P.).

When Odili decides to contest for Chief Nanga's seat in the Parliament in CPC, he is dismissed from school and encounters various difficulties during the campaigns. Chief Nanga tries desperately to bribe Odili, through his father with offers of cash and a scholarship if Odili withdraws his candidacy, but all to no avail. At the end, Odili suffers serious physical molestations at the hands of Chief Nanga's political thugs and loses the election woefully.

The theme of corruption and naivety pervades the novel very predominately. Odili is an apostle of idealism. He believes he could challenge Chief Nanga, Achebe's symbol of filth and corrupt influences in post-independent Nigeria, and replace him in Parliament. What he doesn't know is that corruption had assumed an endemic status, and had eaten deeper into him, because of his naivety and sense of idealism which had caused him to lose touch with reality. Gerald Moore avers that "... there can be no doubt that Odili does idealize himself, even when his creator does not. The reader, ..., is left in real doubt as to whether Odili in power would be as less corruptible than Nanga" (139).

The moral ambiguity of *A Man of the People* is deliberate. The hero, Odili Samalu is, if not 'a typical Nigerian', or at least a member of the young elite. At first, because of his

idealism, he seems to envy and despise Chief Nanga, but accepts his friendship and sponsorship, until the Elsie episode inflames his *amour proper*.

The moral duplicity of Chief Nanga is conspicuously displayed and deplored by Achebe. The Chief's acceptance of a luxurious 4- storey building as "a dash" from a European construction firm, is an abuse of office, and a condemnable offense against all sense of propriety and decency.

Conclusion.

The two novelists discussed here examines Nigeria from a perspective that generates sense of foreboding in the consciousness of every average citizen. Though Nigeria attained independence since 1960, her journey towards the attainment of self-development and social harmony had been tortuous and eventful. It is a journey bedeviled with economic mismanagement, moral decrepitude, political despair and ethnic rivalry for self-determination that breeds national discord.

In Achebe's *A Man of the People* and Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*, Nigeria and Africa in general have been portrayed simulthaneously as a failed continent and a failed state respectively, betrayed by rulers who have mismanaged her economy and destroyed her hallowed political ethos. This is aptly captured by Kenneth W. Harrow when he opined that "the nation-state in Africa is in crisis. Misrule and corruption have danced across the land, provoking widespread skepticism towards the mechanism of government, and a sense of resignation over the inevitable indifference of the wealthy and powerful to the enormous social problems at hand" (33).

Achebe deplores the debauchery, avaricious excesses and insensitivity of the civilians in power, on his part, Okey Ndibe proffers what I consider as 'time-honoured' solutions to the myriads of challenges bedeviling the stability of Nigeria. From the opinion of Pa Mathew

Ata, a representative elder statesman, he questions, "... First, we must ask ourselves what is the identity of this space called Madia? Why does our present bear no marks of our past? What is the meaning of our history?" (143). Ndibe avers that the answer to these questions shall help us to define our national legitimacy/identity, and be bold enough to advocate that "One, that any section of this country is free to leave. Two, that other people not now within our nation can become part of us" (143), albeit, through a constitutional means, not through violence.

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