

Fiction as Alternate Reality in Obinna Udenwe's *Colours Of Hatred*

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Abstract

This paper explores Obinna Udenwe's *Colours of Hatred* in its portrayal of the socio-political and cultural realities in contemporary Nigeria. The paper examines how the selected novel bears on the tone of social realist discourse in Nigerian fiction. The analysis is predicated on the theoretical groundings of social realism, a strand of realism which focuses on the problems of living today. By examining the socio-political developments and contemporary realities, the study highlights how the world of fiction intersects with the world of real characters with flesh and bones thereby justifying the fact that every novel is a country of its own and all the characters within the text are citizens of that country. Thus, this work of art becomes interpretive as it illuminates some aspects of human life or behaviour. It also makes present, an insight into the nature or conditions of existence giving a keener awareness of what humankind is to be like in a society that is sometimes friendly and sometimes hostile, even as it broadens the knowledge and understanding of individuals. In order to analyse not just the content but also the form, the paper employs the Formalist literary criticism as a supporting Theory. The general findings reveal that,

social realism offers new insights into the contemporary Nigerian fiction and the selected text, over and above its pre-existing criticism.

Keywords: Fiction, Social Realism, Udenwe's *Colours of Hatred*.

Introduction

Contemporary Nigerian literature keeps enchanting its devotees with new entrants as each newcomer shifts the space and context of contemplating the craft of storytelling. Indeed, contemporary Nigerian and African novels have already established an indisputable presence in the global literary universe with an avalanche of thematic preoccupations. The substance, variety and stylistic merits of this prose writing remain a dominant space in the public consciousness as well as in critical cycles of literary appreciation. (Inyang and Inyang, 242)

The main thrust of this paper, therefore, is to reveal that one of the functions of literature is to entertain, but it could also be utilized to effect some social changes. Literature transcends the boundary of its entertainment value; it utilizes the theatre of entertainment to make some critical comments on social evils with a view to social reform. This is why Sartre's position on the relationship between the creative writer and his society, is worth quoting that whether the writer "...wants to or not and even if he has his eyes on eternal laurels, the writer is speaking to his contemporaries and brothers of his class and race". (49). His assertion places the creative writer in the position of a mediator between society and its people. It is from the above line of thought that Ernest SekiruOgundokun in Abdullahi Haruna, opines that "literature has a significant role to play in the reconstruction of human society for a better living. An activist who writes literature and seeks the establishment of a new way of life exposes the misery caused by the existing institutions, which in other words, is the disclosure of a new and friendlier system. (12) By this,

Ogundokun could be implying as Sartre did that “Literature should be, a catalyst provoking man to change the world in which they live and in so doing, change themselves” (p.x). Literature should be function-oriented and not just to be read for its aesthetic value. This paper is, therefore, of the view that Udenweis among the Nigerian authors who have embraced the functional role of literature and have utilized their prose form to make their contribution in liberating the common man from the shackles of corruption and poverty in which he has found himself as a result of man’s inhumanity to man.

Social Realism comes handy in this research in line with Udenweis’s assertion that realism is the adopted ideo-aesthetic mode of narration in contemporary Nigerian fiction. (271). Social realism is thus, an international art movement and artistic exploration which flourished between the two World Wars in response to the social and political turmoil as well as hardships of the period when writers tend to make literature easily accessible to the wider public. Such writers often portray their subjects as symbols of persistence and strength in the face of adversity. They tried to show people and their lives in a realistic way, so they beamed their searchlight on the plight of the poor and working classes and the degrading conditions under which they lived and worked. Examples of social realism abound in the writings of Charles Dickens, with his depiction of workhouses, the homeless and the downtrodden.

Social Realism as a Critical Concept

The term ‘Social realism’ was a combination of two different terms – the first is ‘social’ and the second is ‘realism’. The combination signifies an artistic movement which focuses on the social injustice, racial discrimination and economic backwardness and draws unvarnished pictures of life’s struggle of working-class protagonists. These artists were generally motivated to demonstrate the social and political protest with the sharp edge of satire. Realism began as an

artistic movement in 1860 in France, spreading to England, Russia, and the United States. In France, the major realist proponents included Honoré de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, Émile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant, among others. In Russia, the major realist writers were Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy. In England, the foremost realist authors were Charles Dickens, George Eliot, and Anthony Trollope. In the United States, William Dean Howells was the foremost realist writer. In the United States, regionalism and local colour fiction were American offshoots of Realism.

Realist writers sought to narrate their novels from an objective, unbiased perspective that simply and clearly represented the factual elements of the story. They became masters at psychological characterization, detailed descriptions of everyday life, and dialogue that captures the idioms of natural speech. The realists endeavoured to accurately represent contemporary culture and people from all walks of life. Thus, realist writers often addressed themes of socio-economic conflict by contrasting the living conditions of the poor with those of the upper classes in urban as well as rural societies. There are many strands of realism such as magical realism which blurs the lines between fantasy and reality; socialist realism which glorifies the struggles of the proletariat; and close to it is naturalism which explores the belief that science can explain all social and environmental phenomena. Psychological realism which focuses on what motivates characters to make certain decisions and why (Masterclass.com).

It is however, important to re-emphasize here that, the strand of realism adopted for this study is the social realism. David Huck describes social realism as that which focuses on the problems of living today. Social Realism developed as a reaction against idealism and the exaggerated ego encouraged by Romanticism. Ferdinand Asoo affirms that social realism

emphasizes not just the social relevance of art but focuses on the accessibility of texts to the mass of the people, presentation of realistic characters and situations (10).

Social realism is thus the most significant and outstanding quality of modern literature. It offers an opportunity for new insights into Nigerian writing, and unarguably, the realist site continues to be flooded with literary and critical concerns. Realist writers, unlike the Romantics, like to focus on groups of people. They give the big picture: a panorama of a village, a city, or a society. And because social realism is about giving the big picture, it tends to be associated with the novel genre, which is huge and flexible.

Arising from the above, the scenario in the novels selected for this study demonstrates ample evidence that the authors have established themselves as gifted story-tellers by peeping through a keyhole into the lives of ordinary people, which are full of drama.

Formalist Literary Criticism

As a supporting theory, the paper adopts Formalist criticism which is a school of literary criticism and literary theory having mainly to do with structural purposes of a particular text. It is the study of a text without taking into account any outside influence. The formalist movement of communication and cooperation of the Moscow linguistic loop was formed with the society for the study of the St. Petersburg poetry language. Boriseikhenbaum, Yury Tynyanov, Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson and Boristomashevsky have been prominent members of this group (Eagleton, 6).

The emphasis of the formalists on the form of artwork and of the normative practices led them to consider literature as a special language use that by diverting from standard and everyday language and breaking its rules, it is preferred to other uses of language (Safavi, 47).

Russian linguists such as Yuri Titianov, Viktor Shkolovsky, and Roman Jakobson ... have expressed the relation between formalism and linguistics: "Formalism is essentially the use of linguistics in the study of literature." (Eagleton, 6), With the deep interest in the structure and form of texts credited to Formalist criticism, it therefore, constitutes the supporting framework for the myriad of techniques reflected in the selected text, in order to achieve form and content analysis.

Textual Analysis of Obinna Udenwa's *Colours of Hatred*

Colours of Hatred unravels how the effect of violence, political upheaval and revenge can alter the lives of individuals irrevocably. It is explicitly concerned with politics in post-colonial Africa. Thus, it is useful to place it against the socio-historical realities it seeks to articulate as well as the attitude it adopts towards these realities. In Sudan, political identity becomes a problem when the bias it generates for one's group induces distrust and hatred for persons or things alien to one's group. Britain and Egypt jointly ruled Sudan for the first half of the 20th century and essentially treated the north and the south as two separate colonial territories. That division carried over when Sudan became independent, with Arab Muslims in the north dominating the country, alienating African Christians and other groups in the south and the west. Sudan has a wide range of ethnic, linguistic, and tribal differences. Residents in remote parts of the country feel the elites in Khartoum monopolize the country's limited resources.

The south was held to be more like the other east-African colonies – Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda – while northern Sudan was more similar to Arabic-speaking Egypt. Northern Arabs were prevented from holding positions of power in the south with its African traditions, and trade was discouraged between the two areas. However, in 1946, the British gave in to northern

pressure to integrate the two areas. Arabic was made the language of administration in the south, and northerners began to hold positions there. The southern elite, trained in English, resented the change as they were kept out of government. After decolonization most power was given to the northern elites based in Khartoum, causing unrest in the south. The British moved towards granting Sudan independence, but did not invite southern Sudanese leaders to participate in negotiations during the transitional period in the 1950s. In the post-colonial government of 1953, the Sudanization Committee had only six southerners in its 800 senior administrative positions. The second war, recreated in Udenwe's novel, was partially about natural resources. Between the north and the south lie significant oil fields and thus significant foreign interests (the oil revenue is privatized to Western interests as in Nigeria). The northerners wanted to control these resources because they live on the edge of the Sahara Desert, which is unsuitable for agricultural development. Oil revenues make up about 70% of Sudan's export earnings. Due to the numerous tributaries of the Nile River and heavier precipitation in the south of Sudan, it has superior water access and more fertile land.

From Udenwe's novel, it is obvious that the killings are just a climax of a simmering hatred that has always existed between the northern and southern regions in Sudan. It is from this understanding that the novel opens with the level of hate that can occur when the monster of extremism is let loose. *Colours of Hatred* reveals the carnage which comes in the wake of the war in Sudan. In the early pages when Leona as a child is forbidden to play with other children because of socio-cultural barriers, the narrator records:

Mum forbade me from entering Halima's apartment ever. Halima's husband was fighting in the government's army against the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and she did not like us because we were from the south. Mum was not happy with her too.

She said there was no need being friends with someone who abhorred everything you did... I once tried to sneak into Halima's apartment when she was pregnant. I wanted to play with Jemima, but she told me Jemima was not around, even though I could hear her voice in the living room. (12)

On this ominous note, Leona and her family becomes the channel through which the novel unravels the pressures of living in a highly volatile environment. It is the psychological result of such hardening of attitudes on both sides of the divide that has thrown the country into a brutal civil war, leaving behind colossal destruction of lives and property and leaving the characters in perpetual fear that the war may not end. This is what James means when responding to Grand Pa's enquiry about his work with gum-Arabic, he says "Business is crumbling, the company may fold and move back to England. The unrest is killing everything. The economy is in shambles, there is corruption everywhere imaginable, and people are dying." (14). This comment, reveals how the methods of neocolonialism are economically controlled by the stifling of indigenous economies through multinationals and political control through 'puppet' regimes.

Sadly, the Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi is not making effort to bring the war to an end. Grandpa's comment is worth quoting here "... How would he want the war to end when he is benefitting? "(27) It is this kind of feeling that forced James to deploy the Igbo proverb which means "When there is chaos in the land, the leader benefits." (28). James's business fortunes are dwindling, and he is gradually becoming a sad man in Sudan. The Prime Minister's insensitivity to the plight of the people reveals how Africa has its fair share of monstrous leaders whose only perfection is in the art of repression.

James, in comparing the problem in Sudan with Nigeria during a discussion with Grandpa, opines that Africa's problems are caused by Britain. One 'legacy' that British colonial rule bequeathed to Africa is the segregation in society along ethnic lines. They encouraged the solidification of ethnic identities by promoting ethnically based settlements so that long after they have gone, and despite rapid urbanization and increased mobility, particular tribes hold numerical sway in given regions or areas. These same structural arrangements prevail in Nigeria where the north has been empowered by the British. James says:

In Nigeria, we Southerners are quite different from the people of the north. We have oil, we have rich agricultural fields, and we have water bodies. Yet, they merged us with the North because with the southern and northern protectorate as the same country, it is easier for them to transport produce from the north through the water bodies in the South. Now, there is no trust between the two regions. In fact, things are worse than it was before the independence and the war. (19)

The above brings home the bitter truth of British contribution to the contradictions in Africa., and James continue in his discussion with Grandpa, "Look, Britain has caused so much hardship in Africa, and now they pretend they are doing us good, pacifying us with the Commonwealth stuff... And they still have the temerity to call us barbaric. All these ethnic cleansing and war wouldn't have happened if people with distinct history, religion and culture weren't nailed together with a British hammer" (30).

The above comments present a comprehensive study of neo-colonial Africa in the death grip of an emergent, cynically corrupt leaders subservient in the whims and caprices of western power and multinationals. The novel also hints at the pernicious manipulations of neo-

colonialists to support oppression and racism which capitalism encourages. A hard look at the human rights question reveals that behind the seeming silence over human rights abuses are some vested political and economic interests. The gory stories of the Khartoum government bombing villages in southern Sudan to clear the way for oil fields in the region can be recalled. Even the whole concept of commonwealth, aid, loans, and credit is brilliantly summed by Nkrumah when he observed that before the decline of colonialism what is known as aid was simply foreign investment. As investments profits are bound to accrue to them. In another instance, Nkrumah is more detailed in delineating the subtle forms of control through loans and aids:

Credits are granted by capitalists to countries of Africa...so that they can be equipped with the infrastructure necessary for their further exploitation by private monopolies. The aim is political as well as economic. It seeks to aid capitalism by winning over the indigenous bourgeoisie...at the same time the economies of the developing world.
(Nkrumah, Neocolonialism, 34)

This finds an echo in the lament of the late Nigerian politician and business mogul, M.K.O. Abiola who said in one of his speeches "...There is nothing we have in Africa that is not controlled by people in Europe and the United States.

Through Udenwe's novel, it is also made aware that aggressive war on any scale, local or world-wide can never be anything but destructive and calamitous, not only to those actively engaged in it, but also to the countless other innocent victims drawn into its violent whirlpool for instance, innocent people like James and his family. As if the psychological torture is not enough, the sudden overthrow of government which brings in Colonel Umar Hassan al-Bashir as the president, Prime Minister and Chief of Staff, forces Leona's family to flee from Khartoum to

Omdurman because her grandfather is declared “a saboteur, a traitor by the SPLA” (41) The narrator records: “That night around seven o’clock, a white Peugeot 404 wagon, driven by a short Arabian, stopped in front of our apartment in Khartoum. That night would open the door to the event that would change our lives forever...Dad pushed me into the car. We were smuggled to Omdurman.” (42)

The next morning as Leona’s family is to be taken to the airport to be flown to Nigeria. Four men with machine guns arrive on the scene, and there is an ensuing battle between Leona’s grandfather and the four men who overpowered and kill him in front of his loved ones.

The above is a graphic representation of the problem of fatal hostilities and conflict in that part of Africa with serious bleeding sores. Sudan’s violence according to Melaba “springs from an admixture of racial, religious and economic factors” (Melaba, 36). Obinna Udenwe’s *Colours of Hatred* stands out for its interest in using the literary field to protest and mainly to denounce social contexts marked using oppression and violence. The problem of civil strife has made many African countries to be embroiled in long drawn-out conflicts that threatens the corporate existence of African countries. At the height of the crisis, Leona’s father, Chief James Egbufor’s return to Nigeria is greeted with much prosperity. His business grows to the extent that he becomes a billionaire in just a few months. On the other hand, Leona’s mother is going through difficulties. Leona records:

I knew Mum changed as soon as we arrived Nigeria. What happened in Sudan changed her - To live in Enugu – and the colour of the city, the dusty brownish colour, clouded her senses and her imagination. She became hungry for privacy and became a little hard-hearted...Nigeria’s colour affected Mum and changed her so deeply, when Grandma was

hard on her, she hit back, hating her as much as Grandma hated her. Mum ignored her and refused to visit Dad's village... (75).

It is not long before businessmen friends now see James as one who will help them in financing the coup in Nigeria. In the words of Chief Kutuga "James, you are unknown to anyone. If we hit the government now, we hit them hard, and no one will know where it is coming from...no one will know how the coup was financed, at all, at all" (92). In trying to justify the coup, Alhaji Usman says:

why can't we do it? General Babangida is the Head of State. He has been since nineteen eighty-five. Nothing is working in this country. No road. No electricity. Students are protesting almost every month and their lecturers call for strike across every quarter. Wallahi, we cannot develop like this as a nation... (91)

The reality of Alhaji Usman's comment provides a fine catalogue on the impact of military misrule which appears to sum up the basic predicament of the ordinary Nigerians as the country moved from one military regime to another while basic infrastructure is neglected and the institutions die by installment. From Alhaji Usman's comment above, and from the posture of the political class as recorded, comes Daniel Udo's assertion that:

...in Nigeria today, as it is true in other African countries of the post-colonial consciousness, it is increasingly hard to make clear-cut distinctions between dictators and non-dictators, who all transform themselves and their political apparel from the military camouflage into civilian garments...Paradoxically, there are hardly any dictators left in the African polities; they have all turned politicians, in charge of all levels of government, from local to national. (68)

The preaching of Doctor Daniel Adele on the need to rescue the nation from dictatorial rule in which the citizens languish in economic hardship in Nigeria that is endowed with enormous natural and human resources which ordinarily, this significant wealth should have made a positive economic impact on the lives of its citizens but, unfortunately, it has only succeeded in fueling greed with the result that Nigeria's population remains among the world's poorest in terms of per capita income. Adele's speech in the novel is worth quoting here:

Let us think about our nation first and not what we stand to gain or be pushed back by fear. Some of us need to sacrifice ourselves for the country. Some of the countries that are making steady progress today like India, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the UAE were all pivoted to greater heights by men like us in their country, who looked beyond the ordinary, beyond their wealth and family and personal safety. They took drastic actions to make sure that their nation moved forward. We cannot continue to meander like fishes between one military regime and another, each one worse than the other...(91)

Although the businessmen and coup plotters explain their intention as a corrective measure intended to rescue a nation that is dangerously adrift. In their clandestine meetings in James' apartment, they sound as if they are revolutionaries working to save the soul of the country from the grip of bad rulers whose leadership is not in the interest of the people, yet, their real intention is to grab power for the sake of power. Their selfishness is inherently revealed as they try to convince James to accept the plot thus:

Let me tell you, James, no matter how wealthy you are without political power in Africa you are nothing. For example, you may be driving a Roll Royce, but if a mere state governor is passing with a Peugeot 504, you must clear by the side of the road for him. If

you want to board a plane, they can displace you for a minister, a governor, a senator, even an ordinary local government council chairman...In Africa, power counts, not money...we may pretend as hard as we can that we don't love power because the opportunity has not presented itself, but our hearts know better than our heads that when the opportunity comes knocking, we will leap and grab power with all tenacity...as soon as you have power, you will understand that not even the gods will blink at you. You can do anything, kill and be killed for, steal and be stolen for. Churches will honour you; mosques will pray for you, communities will crown you, and God will bless your handiwork...Just wait and see (94 -96)

The duplicity of these "big men" is shown through their exotic lifestyle in the face of excruciating hardships of the people. They drink and eat lavishly and hanker after young girls. They conduct themselves in a manner quite typical of contemporary political behaviour in Africa. Leona reveals how they often clandestinely make advances at her and offer to send money in her bank account. The attitude towards politics in the novel is highly contemptible. James' wife, Mary confirms this, she is not comfortable with these men and what they represent, and she did not hide her feelings in her remarks about her husband's political associates. "This is the second time those men have been here. It amazes me that we have only been here for two years and you already have friends with such evil in their hearts..." (97) Nothing can be plainer than this.

It is not long before Chief James Ogbufor is arrested and clamped into detention at a time of the interim government of Ernest Shonekan who became the acting president after the annulment of June 12 elections is truncated, and Sani Abacha announced himself commander-in-chief. James's daughter Leona was convinced about her father's culpability where she says,

“When the news reached us in school, I knew Dad had a hand in it, and I was worried sick.” (137). It is Chief James’ friend, Mister Isaac Uwaifo, who breaks the news to Leona’s Mother “The Head of State...He ordered the arrest of your husband. He was arrested early yesterday around seven’o clock. We have been trying to track where they kept him but –“(156). Leona and her mother are smuggled in an army vehicle to Calabar seaport and ferried to Cameroon. They come back after some months, and Leona’s mother takes over her husband’s business in his absence and managed it very well before her death in controversial circumstances. By the time he comes out of prison James, who is now made a Mister in the government, suspects his business rival, Chief FagunWale of Killing his wife, Leona’s mother. “Look, your mother was killed by the man who wanted to run my business down.” (8) Usurpingly, he convinces Leona to marry Chief FagunWale’s son, Akinola, with the intention of settling scores by killing either her own husband, Akinola or his father Chief FagunWale. This makes the beautiful Leona more confused when she learns it was the Chief who killed her mother, she confronts her father, “And this is the man whose son you want me to marry?”

Through the character of Leona, the evil side as well as the ugly side of the human mind is revealed. Leona, bows to pressure and marries Chief FagunWale’s son. Leona is shown so much love by her husband and his family, yet she goes on to poison her father-in-law before she learns the truth that ChiefWale who loved her mother dearly may have no hand in her mother’s death. Here, we realize that hatred as propelled by James and demonstrated by his daughter Leona seems to be the most destructive of all emotions. Leona shows how self-centered and brutal she can be by actualizing her father’s evil plot before seeking to find out the truth from her father-in-law who, in his state of sickness coupled with the knife wounds she inflicts on him, wrestles emotionally with her, enlightening her, and ultimately, showing her to learn how to

forgive. Leona who could not survive her rash actions falls ill. She seeks out a priest for confession, but the priest after listening to her confession tells her “call them on the phone and tell them what you did. You can do them a letter or email, but I want them to know that you did this thing, only then will I know you have prepared yourself for viaticum. I assure you, you will gain greater forgiveness” (316). But Leona is too ashamed of herself, she prefers to die than confess her evil to her husband’s family.

Formal experimentation in *Colours of Hatred*

Obinna Udenwa’s novel brings out in sharper focus, through form and content, the symbiotic relationship between the literary artist and the historian. It is the kind of novel which to borrow the words of TerhambaShija “can be linked closely with topical political events which are encapsulated in non-literary text” (142). Like all good historical novelists, Udenwa combines the techniques of the historian (documentation) and that of the novelist (imaginative recreation of events) in the fictional evocation of the past.

History, thus, plays a fundamental role in the plot of Obinna’s, *Colours of Hatred*. Leona’s bi-cultural family is in the middle of the Sudanese conflict that escalates into the second Sudanese civil war lasting for twenty-two years. When Sudan won independence in 1956, two features stood out: it was the largest country in Africa, and it was already embroiled in civil war that had erupted several months earlier. Many people see a link between Sudan's vast landscape, the many different groups that make up the country, and the repeated internal conflicts that have plagued the nation for decades. Udenwa cleverly reconstructs the Second Sudanese Civil War which was a conflict from 1983 to 2005 between the central Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army. It was largely a continuation of the First Sudanese Civil War of 1955

to 1972. Although it originated in southern Sudan, the civil war spread to the Nuba mountains and the Blue Nile. It lasted for almost 22 years and is one of the longest civil wars on record. The war resulted in the independence of South Sudan 6 years after the war ended. Roughly two million people died because of war, famine and disease caused by the conflict. The civilian death toll is one of the highest of any war since World War and was marked by numerous human rights violations, including slavery and mass killings and the life-wrecking effects of war take its toll on the family, mostly Mary, Leona's mother.

It is however, observed that Obinna Udenwe had a fine story, and employed characters to help him execute the job. Events spiralled to the present, set in 2005, Abuja, where Leona submerged in her mist-clogged mind, recounting her father's request to do the unfathomable: "to live with...love and cherish this man for a few years, and just when I had made him trust me enough as his wife, I would poison him" (9). Placing Udenwa's *Colours of Hatred* into chronological order, the story traces the life of a young Nigerian girl, Leona Egbufor who spent her childhood years in Sudan with her parents James, an Igbo man from Eastern Nigeria and Mary from the Dinka tribe in Southern Sudan. The plot progresses through the innocence of Leona as a child counting the lights of Khartoum at night to her gradual awareness of the chaos in the land. At the climax of the war, Leona's father, Chief James Egbufor's return to Nigeria and is greeted with much prosperity. His business grows to the extent that he becomes a billionaire in just a few months. Leona's mother eventually dies in unclear circumstance and her father now a Minister marries her off to Chief FagunWale's son in order to get at the Chief, who he believes has a hand in his wife Mary's death, by killing the Chief's son, Leona's own husband. Unexpectedly, Leona kills Chief Fagun Wale. Now tormented by guilt she confesses her sins to a priest. The irony about Leona is that she is presented as someone who cannot hut a

fly, a beautiful, calm and quiet person, then suddenly the demon of violence springs out of her soul and she commits murder that is least expected of her. This is a perfect confirmation of Shakespeare's truism that there is no art to see the mind's construction from the face.

Having obtained the reader's attention through the prologue in which Leona confesses to the priest, Udenwa's next task is to keep the reader's attention through his technique. Perhaps this accounts for the way in which the story is broken into several flashbacks through the chapters that comes to us, each with its own provocative summarizing heading reflecting the time and space of the events which also comes in major sections of the book. It is as though Udenwa realized how necessarily it is to tell a story of displacement through a technique that graphically reflects the physical impact of the displacement on the characters. It may also be that this method also made it easy for the author to marshal his own thoughts as he uses both the setting and time to explore controversial topics.

Interestingly, the plot is also deliberately old-fashioned, but it is connected by the dates at the beginning of each section and the coherence in the story. Life in Sudan, where the story begins, runs through the entire book and this shows how perpetual memories can be. In the novel's world, memory is a burden. Most of the characters are burdened by the memories they carry; weights which drag them down influence their future choices and shackle them to the past.

Udenwe is consistent in his presentation of conscious details and an easy flow of narrative in *Colours of Hatred*. Gestures, actions, characters, and scenes are minutely described, and the choice of words is remarkable. An example where a character is presented with vivid description is where the narrator speaks of Aunty Agii as follows:

She dressed in a long flowery skirt. She looked elegant. I stood up and stretched my hand, but she hugged me instead. I had forgotten how taller than her I was. She was a pretty woman fair, broad, and comely. Her dimples looked magnificent and they always show because she seems to always be in a cheerful mood...As she climbed up, her well-endowed hips swung this way and that, and her stilettos made koi koi on the tiles (88-89)

The above, presents the author's judicious choice of adjectives which stand out in description. His sheer descriptive power is shown in the rendering of Lagos traffic thus "Monday mornings in Lagos are always chaotic. The traffic is often thick and congested, with cars stretched over two, three kilometres, stuck, and their horns blaring incessantly, while danfos tried to sneak their way out of the traffic, hitting road curbs and denting people's cars and causing a commotion." (163)

Udenwa's story would make for an interesting movie, especially the melodrama at the bedroom with Akinola's father who was summarily described as weak and Leona whose physical strength had not been revealed anywhere in the story is made to attempt murder and carry out such act as taking a fat-wheelchair bound potbellied man from ground floor to his room upstairs without waking anyone in the house yet the dogs barked without ceasing.

Symbolism reinforces Udenwa's theme. The employment of symbolism on the title of the book is quite apt and communicative, 'Colours of Hatred'. Colour calls to mind the use of paint or dye on perceptible items for instance, but then the employment of the word colour on non-tangible phenomenon like hatred is to bring into sharper focus the various levels of hatred that runs through the novel such as: the hatred among the various ethnicities in Sudan and in Nigeria; and the inherited hatred of Leona which can also be examined in the thoughts and feelings concerning issues like tribal differences/tribalism, particularly within Nigerian societies.

For many, dislike or hatred that often comes off as preconceived ideas concerning other tribal groups is inherited, even unconsciously, from fathers, mothers, and relatives, who most likely inherited it. Sometimes, personal experiences or encounters become the sole basis for our opinions concerning various tribal groups. There is also the hatred existing between Leona's mother and her Grandmother, the hatred between James Egbufor and Chief FagunWali and so forth. There is a tinge of irony in the title when set against the theme in the book: love. Love drives each character to make decisions that can alter their lives, and now, it pushes Leona to avenge her mother's death.

Again, at the level of narrative techniques, *Colours of Hatred*, adopts the use of the first-person narrative voice which makes it a wonderfully evocative narrative, the complex web of events comes largely through the delicate employment of flashbacks which reflects very important historical events in Africa such as the second Sudanese civil war lasting for twenty-two years, and the life-wrecking effects of war take its toll on the family, mostly Mary, Leona's mother. The Sudanese war like many wars fought before it, left more than four million South Sudanese displaced and two million dead from the war, famine, and diseases and next to that, is the military regime in Nigeria. In all these historical events, Udenwa shows that "Everywhere in the world. Power, fame, and wealth are built on the shoulders of risk..." (79) These flashbacks also vividly recount the trauma that Leona and her family have experienced. As Leona is revealed in the prologue, she is a dying woman who tries to confess to a priest the secret of her life as she nears her death.

Through progression of endless movement, of passage (of time and people) and of transformation and change, the novel tumbles along. Nature is in a constant state of flux. Thus, Leona progresses from being the small girl in Khartoum, sitting on the bonnet of her father's car

and counting light rays at night (10) to an innocent adolescent girl who gradually transforms from an adolescent into a pretty model who is signed on by a big company in Lagos when she finally returns to Lagos to marry the son of one of the richest men in Nigeria. But everything she had been or done in the preceding decade suddenly seemed of no consequence at long last. Udenwe's writing is one that is jarring as it takes in a disconnected manner from future to past, to live through Leona's memories.

Conclusion

Obinna Udenwe have been able to achieve in *Colours of Hatred*, a very realistic picture of the Nigerian socio-political scenario as it is in the contemporary times. The author has taken strides in form and content to capture the social political realities of that which are ever present in the society. Thus, it is realised that in a developing society like Nigeria, the absence of moral imperative in the consciousness of political leaders has continued to slow the course of national development. On the whole, the issues examined in the selected text for this paper are multi-dimensional: Political, social, economic, religious, national and international, communal and individual. The researcher's final message is that if these destructive issues are sincerely addressed, it is only then that the national aspirations will be realised.

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