

Literary Representations Of Political Conflict And Democratic Consolidation In Africa**By****Ibrahim Muhammad Abdullahi****Department of English****College of Humanities****Al-Qalam University Katsina****E-Mail: Ibramabdul@Gmail.Com****Gsm: +2348065087009****Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to explore the literary representations of political conflict and democratic consolidation in selected works of literature as cultural feedback to societal transformations in developmental transition. The term “democratic consolidation” is suggestive of an infinite patience and pliability. It is a notion that covers few semantic constraints in the vast field of consolidation studies. Conflict is a necessary existential aspect of humanity with varying causes: racial, caste, political, class, religious etc. The discourse uses the Linz and Stephen (1996) theory of democratic consolidation via institutionalisation processes. It adopts the qualitative text-based method as its tool of analysis. The paper argues that lack of the rule of law, corruption, nepotism among others have combined to create political conflicts and thwart democratic consolidation in Africa. It recommends the resuscitation of the principles of the rule of law: equity, respect for human rights, security of life and property and superior economic development to supplement the establishment of democratic culture: stable political processes, durable democratic practices and experience, sustainable national development, and civilised power transfer and transition.

Keywords: Democratic consolidation, Political conflict, Literary representations, Development and Rule of Law.

Introduction

The term postcolonialism is used to denote the effects of colonisation on cultures and societies that experienced colonisation, cultural repression and economic exploitation. These periods began from the 16th century through the period of neo-colonialism to the present day of global imperialism (Rai 5). The phenomenal impacts of this policy of human degradation can still be observed in the psyche, culture and identity of the once colonised peoples.

Postcolonialism is the legacy of colonial past, a legacy of the impact of suppression and destruction of people on racial grounds and egocentric economic quests.

Therefore, postcolonial literature consists of "... different forms of representations, reading practices and values" (Rai 1). After the world war II, the people of Africa fought to end European imperialism, to achieve political independence and reclaim Africa. The newly born African states were destabilised by scuffles for control that gave vent to intermittent internal conflicts, civil wars and genocides. African literary sensibility has captured these struggles and the sociopolitical unfolding: corruption, militarism, poverty, famine, violence in various ways and manner that polluted the African polity and create internal commotion, suspicion, disaffection and ultimately conflict.

This study identifies texts from two historical extremes – the first-generation writers on the one hand, and the contemporary writers on the other. Each generation is represented by a figure of prominence, namely Chinua Achebe and Ben Okri. While Achebe was a realist writer, Okri is recognised as an African magical realist writer. The reason being to synthesise the historical recurrences of political concerns and poetic efforts to domesticate democracy through conscious and purposeful political consolidation and cultural resolution of conflicts in Africa's developmental transformation and journey to selfhood. Both writers have employed myths and the local belief systems of their people as the basis of their poetic conception of the real world. Both authors have indicted colonisation and imperialism as responsible for this deplorable transformational constriction in Africa.

It is normal for scholars of African studies in different disciplines to use literary texts to study the numerous features of the continent. Some use European-authored fictions about Africa and Africans to explore the Western imagination, especially in works that are based on Europeans' expeditions to Africa between the 15th and the 19th centuries. Many famous Eurocentric writers - Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad etc. have represented Africa and

Africans in their works, which produced a rich collection of commentaries by Africanists in different disciplines. The 20th century has witnessed the rise of indigenous studies of Africa in different languages spoken in the continent. However, the diverse volume of African literature has made its comprehensive discussion impossible as a single category. This is perhaps because of the different categorisation of literature in Africa. It's regional categories – Western, Eastern, etc. or, its struggles with choice of medium or Language and colonial affinity - Francophonic or Anglophonic; Genre - African poetry, prose; Style/Technique – Realism, Magical realism; or Movements - Negritudes or Black consciousness art (ABC, 6753).

The term “democratic consolidation” is clearly suggestive of immeasurable patience and pliancy. These few semantic difficulties in the broader field of consolidation studies make the term vulnerable to some intelligible and whimsical manipulations in the communication of its meaning. However, the subjective use of the term may lead us into conceptual chaos that might gradually ruin sub-disciplinary communication, theory-building, and accrual of knowledge. Geoffrey Pridham believed that democratic consolidation is a “nebulous concept” (8) as “no clear consensus has emerged” (Gunther et al. 5) as to its meaning. This allows for the emergence of conflicting conceptual fog that covers the term.

However, authors have variously reacted to the prevalent conceptual confusion in the definition of democratic consolidation. One such group just lists competing views of the term without any form of ordering or adjudication between them (Beyme 95). Another group tries to control the debate by decree. They delineate the meaning of the concept by authoritative definitions (Higley and Richard, 1992; Linz, 1990; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Mainwaring et al., 1992; Schmitter, 1988). There are some who prefer to explain their conceptual preferences without any hegemonic pretensions to it and reconstruct their argument in dichotomist polar

terms: Such as positive vs negative, maximalist vs minimalist notions of democratic consolidation (Di Palma, 1990(a); Palm, 1990(b); Pridham, 1990a & 1990b). However, other scholars prevaricated conceptual problems by using democratic consolidation implicitly by assuming its meaning to be unproblematic and equally shared among writers and readers (Agh & kurtán, 1995; McClintock, 1989; Sandbrook, 1996). Some scholars largely use the term only for decorative usages (Baloyra, 1987; Ethier, 1990; Tulchin & Romero, 1995). Other writers use the concept in the title of a book or article without making any further reference to it in the main text (Gunther et al., 1996; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Schmitter, 1988 & 1993). A host of other scholars try to give the term more precision by refocusing it from national political systems to political subsystems and disaggregate it into several dimensions (Gunther et al., 1996; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Schmitter, 1988 & 1993). Some simply avoid the term in order to introduce novel terms into the study of new democracies, for instance, democratic governance or institutionalisation (Dominguez & Lowenthal 1996). Some insist on the need for more conceptual analysis (Diamandouros et al., 1996, xii; Munck, 1995 & 1996). The last group interrogates the utility of the concept and even advocates for its abandonment (O'donnell, 1996a & 1996b; Przeworski et al., 1996; Schneider, 1995). It suffices at this point to say that democratic consolidation is that process through which a new democracy is nurtured to its maturity, in a way that it becomes almost impossible to relapse to authoritarianism without incurring internal and external shocks, and is generally accepted as the only viable system of government within a country. A country can therefore, be defined as democratically consolidated when its democratic system is “the only game in town” (Linz and Stepan 17) and all political actors accept and respect the fact that all conflicts must be resolved through the established political and constitutional rules (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Scott & Burcu, 2016).

In every social relationship there are inexorably continuous disagreements over different essential issues of life and relationship. In some cases, there can be acceptable conciliations and amendments to sustain the brotherhood. But there are other circumstances in which there can be no conciliation - such as group identity and collective recognition which cannot be quantified as can material resources (Burton, 1990).

Conflicts are consequential to the existence of nation states and this is a fact in every society. This theory argues that the state did not emerge from any conscious resolution but as a result of violent conflicts. Various interest groups struggled against each other for control over the land and its resources and, the winner ultimately imposed its dominance on the loser. Conflict can be violent or non-violent and its causes are genuinely rooted in people's lives. The cause of a conflict may be political, social, economic or environmental factors. Its social causes mostly occur because people in conflict are often interdependent and in constant interaction with each other. This interdependence becomes severely strained and incompatible due to either lack of communication, or misinformation when certain needs, interests are perceived to be jeopardised and or misinterpreted by either side in the relationship which usually leads to protracted and intractable disagreement or conflict.

However, human needs theorists argue that conflicts and violence are caused by neglect of fundamental human needs. Violence occurs when certain individuals or groups do not see any other way to meet their needs or, when they need understanding, respect and consideration for their needs (Rosenburg, 2003). Human needs are a powerful source of explanation of human behaviour and social interaction. All individuals have needs that they strive to satisfy, either by using the system, acting on the peripheries or as a reformist or revolutionary. For this reason, social systems must be responsive to both the individual and

collective needs to avert instabilities and forced change, possibly through violence or conflict (Coate, & Rosati, 1988).

This paper is, therefore, an attempt at exploring the heuristic literary representations of the development of the entire gamut of African democratic processes and the use of African literature in the appraisal of conflict resolution and democratic consolidation as a social value that is necessary for sustainable social growth in Africa.

Literary Representations of Political Conflict and Democratic Consolidation in Africa

The 20th century Africa has experienced diverse political phenomena: colonialism and independence. Each of these has greatly impacted on numerous facets of social life. This is more particularly so with the corresponding developments in literature. Chinua Achebe's literary works, for instance, have profoundly represented these transitory kaleidoscopic political themes: colonialism, independence, post-independence and political corruption (Okoko, 2006).

However, a critical examination of *A Man of the People* will reveal these kaleidoscopic transitory thematic representations vividly. This is evident as the beginning of the narrative introduces readers to the period of colonial control by foreign colonisers. Midway, the story delves into the portrayal of collective struggle by all characters to gain national independence. The third part of the novel relates the period of independence or the emergence of political corruption, the abuse of authority and the rule by law where the law becomes instrument of repression. As a true reflection of Nigerian society, "the novel provided a new way of reorganising African cultures, particularly in the crucial juncture of transition from colonialism to national independence" (Gikandi 31). This novel portrays the characteristic abuse of political authority by politicians who pursue their personal interests at the detriment of the more fundamental concern of democratic consolidation via the

application of the rule by law. This development precipitated the quality of African life, polity and leadership as symbolised in the depiction of Nigeria. Therefore, African peoples' dream of self-government, and nationhood after independence from the coloniser has been foiled by greedy and unfocused politicians. As a social responsibility, this sad situation has attracted the poetic concern and interest of writers in most African countries (Achebe, 1975).

Therefore, Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966) attempts to reflect the generic African political scenarios, procedures and leadership problems, with Nigeria as symbolic to Africa. It also portrays how political greed, and excesses result in diabolical political conflicts that in the long run, capsized the ship of political consolidation and mar both national and continental integration, development and economic competence. This is evident in the portrayal of the postcolonial era, where humanity is marginalised completely by those in authority, through the system of colonisation. Obvious phenomenon like corruption, abuse of the law and intimidation of patriotic citizens produced leadership failures and social stagnation instead of improved living conditions. It suffices to say, therefore, that "Achebe's novel (*A Man of the People*) should be recognised as a devastating satire in which Achebe heaped scorn on independent Africa by picturing one part of it just as it was" (Lindfors 278). Notwithstanding the fact that the text relates of the story of a young and ambitious elementary teacher - Odile Samalu, the protagonist, who dislikes M.A. Nanga and his evil ways, was himself engulfed by the political system that led to their destruction by a military intervention due to alleged "cesspool of corruption and misrule" (Heywood 82). This same corrupt practice has also engulfed the judiciary, the police and the press. Consequently, "Nigeria, and by analogy, Africa, is a place where leaders who had fought for independence became traitors after attaining power, and sacrificed their country (or continent) in exchange for middle-class comfort" (Dwivedi 3). Political consolidation is deliberately frustrated, "materialism, corruption, injustice and exploitation become the vague rather than the bane"

(Okoko 10). Odille further illustrates the extent of this devastation when he says that “the trouble in our nation is that none of us had been indoors ... the shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house” (Achebe 42). Achebe represents the influencing role of power and wealth in the seduction of the ordinary citizens through temptation, thus making them more vulnerable to all forms of sociopolitical and economic corruption. This is apparent as “the leaders abuse their posts to enrich themselves at the nation’s expense” (Macheka 14) while the masses, who are the direct victims stand aside and watch and, in some instances, celebrate the loot (Macheka 15; Lindfors 24). This suggests a situation of intense corruption that culminates in public cynicism as corruption invades:

The people themselves, as we have seen, had become even more cynical than their leaders and were apathetic into the bargain. ‘Let them eat,’ was the people’s opinion, ‘after all when white men used to do all the eating did we commit suicide?’ ... And where is the all powerful white man today? He came, he ate and he went (Achebe 161-162).

Essentially, Africans were desirous of a decent and upright life, equality, security, and justice on the attainment of independence. However, this desire is frustrated because of the new political elites’ dressing in the borrowed colonial garment, on assumption to power, became more hostile, even more obnoxious and degrading than the colonisers. This situation has gradually vaporised these desires or African dreams. Consequently, creating conflicts in the socioeconomic and cultural life of the people as:

... the people in charge of African economies have been influenced by western values, which promote the individual over the collective, and therefore are neglecting historic African cultural values (Pieterse and Duerden 97).

Eurocentrism is expressed when Nanga offers Odili an opportunity for a better job, he brags to Odili thus: “...by the way Odili, I think you are wasting your talent here ... people must press for their own share of the national cake” (Achebe 13). Corruption, the obvious enemy of political consolidation, is now a common phenomenon in Nigerian/African society because “the society realizes the hypocrisy of its leadership but it is silent about it” (Macheka

15) and the “people were willing to excuse the extravagances of their leaders” (Lindfors 24). Perhaps, these excuses, due to some uncomplimentary primordial affinity, allow the politicians to embezzle public funds for their personal benefits (Etim 294). This attitude subverts political consolidation and national development. If we look at the populace, it is apparent that:

They were not only ignorant but cynical. Tell them that this man has used his position to enrich himself and they would ask you – as my father did – if you thought that a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth." This quote highlights the cynicism and acceptance of corruption in the society, where people view it as normal for those in power to exploit their positions for personal benefit (Achebe 2).

Thus highlighting the corruption that makes the landlord "now an ice-cream-eating Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Labour and Production and had not only become one of the wealthiest and most corrupt landlords in Bori..." (Achebe 111). This illustrates how those in power can exploit their positions for personal gain, becoming wealthy and corrupt.

The famished road (1991) draws from the myth of a spirit child Azaro, an abiku, who, in the Yoruba mythology is born in the destined circle of birth and death. Surprisingly, this abiku is so obstinate and determined to break this circle of destiny and live in the mortal world against all the consequences of defying his spirit-companions and the covenant between them. All efforts by his sibling spirits to persuade or intimidate him to return proved abortive. They desperately wanted him to rejoin their spirit realm, but Azaro resisted every temptation and inducement to return to his spirit world. He gradually succumbed to the desires of his heart – the curiosities and fancies of the mundane world and the love for his impoverished mortal parents. Azaro’s anti abiku stances marked the point of departure in narrative vision as a signpost for hope in the possibility and readiness of Nigeria/Africa to withstand the test of time and survive its “dying from a lack of vision, too much greed and corruption, not enough love and too many divisions” (Okri 8). Here, Okri as a writer displays

his novelistic optimism against all predicaments and reiterates his faith in the brightness of African future, regardless of the prevailing politico-ethnic and cultural conflicts and divisive oppositions.

Okri portrays a nation/continent and its citizens in their trying moment. The political situation is tense, desperate and dreadful. The nation/continent is polarised into two hostile political camps: the party of the rich and the party of the poor. The former uses the thugs to intimidate and rob the country/continent of the ability to consolidate internal democracy - credible elections, prudence, peace, and the rule of law. The later languishes in open denial, suppression, political brutality and police terrorism. The ghetto is engulfed in the burning fire of bad and unconsolidated politics. The conflict is between the power elites and the mass of the impoverished populace. The abiku child's resolve to persistently resist his spirit companions in order to bring happiness to his mundane family, symbolises hope and the possibilities of consolidating the tattered democratic system and fabric, and to ultimately end suffering in Nigeria/Africa. Moh holds that the incessant birth and death of Azaro is parallel to the political history of Nigeria (75). Azaro is "on his fifth round to the earth; a parallel to the five eras of government in Nigeria" (Okri 29).

Independence raises the African dream of an egalitarian continent. But this African dream is short lived following the inauguration of the incompetent, despotic and puppet governments in Africa. Consequently, sociopolitical and economic cynicism in the continent have combined with abject poverty to extinguish all the fires of hope that the birth of a great continent has lit up. The poor continue to be victimised by the rich through their vulnerable attitude, poverty, and ignorance. Okri literary indicts the African political elites of complacency and connivance with both the foreign and black detractors, saboteurs and exploiters of the continent. This ideological conflict, which gives rise to conflicting social

interests, continue to polarise the continent thus inflicting devastating damage on collective continental ability to consolidate its democracy, a necessity for growth and security.

Songs of enchantment (1993) continues the story of Azaro's adventures in the ghetto, an African village crippled by corruption, political intimidation, arson and poverty from where, ironically, dad declares:

Africa is the home of the world, and look at how we live in this world.....poverty everywhere, wickedness, greed, injustice all over the place, goats wanting to lead the country, cows running for elections, rats scheming to become governors. This could be the great garden of the earth, but it is now a backyard (Okri 126).

This continues the description of the political turmoil between the party of the rich and the party of the poor, two political categories at great enmity. This also reflects the lack of political tolerance and respect for individual as a factor of democratic consolidation in the African political process. The process only benefits the rich, the powerful and their cohorts at the detriments of the majority who suffer from discriminatory dispensation, insecurity, disease, fear, abject poverty and dominance.

Madame koto, a staunch adherent of the party of the rich and "the great whore of the apocalypse" (Okri 377) alternately displays ominous metaphysical erotic force. Her spells over Azaro's mother is an instance of note. Dad is the only character who openly renounces the society's hypocrites and despises the imposition of artificial social limitations on the populace by bad and unconsolidated government. He functions as the community's conscience, intelligentsia and the voice of the oppressed. His blindness provides him with the inner vision and power to consolidate the situation of the poor as he announces: "I am converted. I am blinded. I am beginning to see" (SoE, 499). This sustains the concept of seeing through the "third eye". Blindness is recreated to instrument the reawakening of the spiritual intuition that is necessary in the struggle for self-redemption and self-actualisation for a better and collective Africa. The recuperation of Dad's sight signifies the transformation that enables the

crystallization of Dad's hitherto deformed political vision for Africa's ultimate and final liberation. This balances the conflict between hope and despair.

Infinite Riches (1998), the last novel in the abiku trilogy, opens at the verge of independence in Nigeria. So, all hands are on deck in preparations to usher in a democratically elected government. Incidentally, Dad is framed and arrested for the murder he knew nothing about. It involved a local carpenter who was found dead and Dad was faultlessly suspected and arrested by the police. This marked the continuation of the conflict between good and evil that runs through the trilogy. The arrest of Dad infuriated Mum, his wife, who ignited a search for her husband with the help of seven elite women. They looked for him from one police station to another until they found him devastated and savagely beaten and locked up in one of the police custodies. They demanded for his release and after several infinite arguments, Dad was finally released. This experience transformed him. He is now mentally altered and scarred. Sadly, the second group of the educated women who also joined the first set of eight women who initiated and embarked on the search for and secured the release of Black Tyger, as Dad is nicknamed, usurp and arrogate the credit of securing Dad's freedom to themselves. They connived with their associates in the media who ascribed the credit to the wrong people in their newspapers. This is characteristic of African press. In other words, Okri is here replicating similar act of disavowal in which the press undermined the patriotic efforts of the finance minister to rescue his nation from its economic predicament in Achebe (1966)'s *A Man of the People*. Both the press and the police, important organs of democratic governance and consolidation, have fallen prey to the obnoxious system and policy of political blunder and sociopolitical retrogression. This is a reference to the initial emergence and collaboration of the new retrogress class system on the attainment of independence in most African countries. This class of elites were the same set who assumed power without merit. Since then, Africa has to pass through imposed era of

chaos, to emerge at the other end with some semblance of hope. Okri depicts that Africa is completely governed by corruption, totalitarianism and despotic politicians who arrogantly pre-empt electoral victory thus: "... victory is ours already, we have won ... those who vote for us will enjoy, those who don't will eat dustbins" (IR, 261-62). The situation is not only vicious but unpredictable as "no one was sure who was really the enemy" (IR, 71). Hence, the politicians are no different from the coloniser. Okri shows that the current political gimmicks, monkeyshines, thuggery and corruption began at the second birth of colonial period (independence) in the new continent. Yet, Okri is optimistic about Africa's ability to consolidate democracy and achieve developments, regardless of the existing unconsolidated ideological conflicts. The African journey from the traditional through the colonial to its current state of imperialism is a continental record of turmoil on a famished road to total freedom. Today, Africa is experiencing its transitional crisis: a stage of electoral democracy and the continent will complete the journey by attaining to the final stage of consolidated democracy, where the rule of law prevails over and above retrogressive policy of arbitrary governance by the rule by law. Okri expresses this hope in the metaphoric statement: "Our country is an abiku country. Like the spirit child it keeps coming and going. One day it will decide to remain. It will become strong" (IR, 547) when our detractors must have learnt that "the only way to get out of Africa is to get Africa out of you" (IR, 553).

This is the way to salvation, the way to consolidated democracy in Nigeria and, indeed, in Africa. A democracy in which every person's interest counts and is lawfully equal and protected. It is an exodus to a newborn Africa, where differences in political ideologies is only a matter of individual understanding of the common social goal and good of society. However, this common goal will persistently remain intact and the focus of politics and governance in Africa.

Conclusion

It is apparent that literature is an instrument that objectively reflects the society of its origin by highlighting different paradigm of human endeavours and relationships. To this end, both texts studied have differently critiqued their societies and represented the political situation of Africa and the glaringly persisting lack of democratic consolidation, total absence of the rule of law and popular or cultural method of resolving conflicts. Each writer portrays the absence of democratic consolidation in the democratic processes: lack of respect for the rule of law, equity, fairness, and justice amongst the populace.

Instead, both writers have represented a society predominated by the rule by law, in which case, the law only provides legal instrument and justification for the nefarious activities of the crazy ruling elites. A point of poetic departure is realised in the fiction of the contemporary novelist, Ben Okri, who envisions a brighter and consolidated political future for Africa, in spite of the predominance of demoralising political vendetta. According to Okri, this deplorable situation can be redeemed and salvaged through the proactively collective and reawakened resolve in the populace to ameliorate the situation. This implies a popular resolve to attain and institute the process of consolidating our democracy through popular process of democracy that is founded on the basis of the rule of law, equity and social justice.

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