THE USE OF CREATIVE WRITING IN REVIVING NIGERIA'S DEPRESSED ECONOMY

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Abstract

Creative writing in Nigeria and in Africa generally has, for a long time, served as a socio-political weapon. Social critics, human right activists, freedom fighters and justice lovers have through the medium of writing, fought colonialism, military dictatorship and all forms of misrule. In contemporary Africa, with particular reference to Nigeria, the economic situation, which is not too favourable, could also be redeemed through literature. It is not an exaggeration to say that Nigerian economic status is far below expectation. This is not unconnected with the unwholesome attitudes of most leaders and the citizens in general. Through creative writings economic unfriendly attitudes could be exposed, criticized and corrected. Creative writings could also educate many on personal economic issues. It is for this reason that this article makes a call on contemporary writers to show more concern for economic redemption in their themes.

Introduction

Like any advanced nation of the world, Nigeria has been naturally endowed with resources that could fetch her great wealth It is hard to believe that an average Nigerian is still no economically comfortable. This is not unconnected with the selfish attitude of leaders and individuals. This paper is looking critically at the extent to which the bad character of members of a society could adversely affect their economy. It continues by reflecting the roles creative writing could play to make people improve their characters and consequently their economy.

Economic depression in Nigeria

What is economy?

According to Anyanwuocha (2001:1) "Economy is man's behaviour in relation to production, exchange, distribution and consumption of goods and services." Ihoya et al (1998:2) describes economy as:

> *The process by which individuals, households organizations and nations attempt to satisfy their unlimited wants in a world of limited resources.*

Economy measures power. The strength of any individual or nation is measured by the status of her economy. It is the source of wealth, the act of managing resources and the extent of financial reward for services. It determines sufficiency, self-dependency, and the ability to meet man's needs today and tomorrow.

Any nation that is able to conveniently cater for most of the needs of her citizens is said to be economically reliable. The primary needs of man are shelter, food and health. The economic power of a community or a person is weighed by the extent to which these needs are consistently met. Economy could be national programme, a community affair, a family issue or an individual matter. It is a topic any living being could not avoid.

Nigeria's current economy:

Emmanuel Egbogah, special adviser to late President Umaru Yar'Adua on petroleum matters said at a conference "Nigeria's gas reserves estimated at 187 trillion cubic feet are the 7th largest in the world," In The Nation of April, 28, 2009, p.11, Chima Ibeneche, the Managing Director of Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Limited In The Nation of April 28, 2009, p. 21, noted that "Nigeria is ranked 6th among the oil exporters of the world." He explained that:

> *Nigeria produces 2.5 million barrels of crude oil per day with 187 trillion cubic feet of gas but consumes only 297,000 barrels per day and 325 billion cubic feet of gas per day and earns $25billion per annum with a population of N140 million people.*

He however continued:

> *If we look at oil alone, if 90% of the value of produced oil accrues to Nigeria at $50 billion, Nigeria would earn $135million per day. Assuming that there are 140 million Nigerians, this translates to less than a dollar per day per person.*

He reflected this in his conclusion:

> *Oil does not make Nigeria rich. What Nigeria does with her oil could indeed make her rich. So far, she hasn't done anything with the oil that would make her rich, so she remains a poor country.*

Again in The Nation of April, 28, 2009, p. 11, Oby Ezekwesili, the Vice President, African Region in the World Bank, said "To help Africa weather the global economic crisis, the World Bank has jacked up finding for infrastructure development on the continent from $600 million to $3.6 billion." According to her:

> *The credit crunch in the world's financial system meant that only the best environment could attract investment but regrettably, only negligible number of countries in Africa could currently boast of standard infrastructure Development in countries such as Nigeria has been bogged down by poor infrastructure which has made products of such countries uncompetitive.*

From the words of these renowned economists, it is clear that though Nigeria is highly endowed with natural resources which could rank her among advanced nations, she is still crawling economically even 50 years after independence. Geographically, Nigeria is positioned in the forestic climatic zone consequently, she is endowed with diverse valuable agricultural products such as cocoa, timber, cola nuts, cashew, palm products, various foods, fruit items and cotton among others. Apart from these, other valuable natural resources such as bitumen, salt, minerals, coal, iron and so on are deposited in various parts of Nigeria.

Nigeria is blessed with a land area of 923,219 sq Km which could encourage agriculture at the maximum level. The Atlantic Ocean which extends to Lagos has linked Nigeria to the rest of the world for business purposes. Rivers Niger, Benue, Ogun, Osun and Owena among others are

natural endowments. In spite of these vast natural blessings, Nigeria remains economically backward. Ibeneche in The Nation of April 28, 2009, p. 21 says:

> *If we need further evidence of Nigeria's poverty, we should look at her membership of the club of least developed countries. Nigeria occupies a lowly position of 193 out of 208 in world bank's league table of nation.*

Ibeneche concluded his view of Nigeria's economy thus:

> *most generous description of Nigeria would be a potentially rich country inhabited by poor people who are hardly able to meet their needs of food, power, water, good roads and adequate health care.*

Without mincing words, economic depression is a stark reality in contemporary Nigeria.

Man's character as it affects economy

Going by Anyanwuocha's definition of economy as man's behavior in relation to other aspects of development, the success of in economy depends, to a great extent, on the behaviour, character or attitude of the people handling it. Ibeneche in The Nation of April 28, 2009, p. 21, identified six major kinds of capital a country needed to be vibrant. Top on the list is 'Human capital.' According to him "Wealth is human capital and for Nigeria to become a truly wealthy nation, she must invest in human capital development" Leaders, professionals, executors of industry, technicians and crafts people, all need to be developed. To invest in the human capital, the basic needs of man which are food, shelter and health must be given priority. Basic and character transforming education, skill, sense of belonging and security are other vital factors.

The failure of African leaders in the past, with particular reference to Nigeria to adequately fulfil the individuals, have contributed greatly to the various negative behaviours of men and women, young and old, These negative behaviour include corruption, misappropriation of public funds, moral decadence, worship of money, negative attitude to government work and properties, robbery, killings, inordinate ambition, political thuggery, examination and electoral malpractices among others. These have all contributed to today's adverse economy.

A popular English adage says 'a hungry man is an angry man', Africans and Nigerians in particular, have been waiting for too long for better days to come. Africa has moved from the era of absolute monarchy when the traditional rulers ruled wickedly to the era of slavery. With the abolition of slave trade, Africa moved from slavery in foreign lands to slavery in their fatherland under from slavery inistration of their colonial masters volhen the fires of the cruelisad burnt beyond tolerance, Africans revolted and gained independence and Nigeria got her independence on 1" October, 1960. The people looked to the future with hope. They heaved a big sigh of relief from the task masters. They felt they would be secured in the hands of their brother leaders.

The African elites became leaders after independence and shortly, problems began throughout Africa. There were power tussle, tribalism and political crisis which led to killings and arsons. This situation brought the military officers to power. Aguiyi Ironsi made this statement in 1966 after seizing power from the civilians in Ojiako (1972: 21).

> *Fellow citizens, tonight, I wish to outline the policies of my government for the republic. All Nigerians want an end to regionalism. The national military government will preserved Nigeria as one strong nation.*

This promise was never met as soldiers soon turned to total dictators. When the storms of military dictatorship became unbearable in Nigeria and in Africa generally, the masses revolted and gradually military rule gave way to the present shaking democracy.

Fifty years after independence, the rate of unemployment, armed robbery, incessant industrial actions, insecurity, political crisis, inadequate health care, accidents, poor wages, and injustice is still very much alarming. Having waited for too long without getting justice, reward nor satisfaction, Nigerians like other Africans lost all hope in their leaders and neighbours and so decided to do the fighting personally by running after self satisfaction at the detriment of national development.

The syndrome of survival of the fittest drove people to stealing, even public funds. Public properties are not safe neither are human beings. People worship money instead of integrity. Security agents prefer bribery to enforcing laws. The judiciary prefers the reward of money to justice. The leaders prefer affluence and fat foreign accounts to achievement while the common

man in the streets no longer ponder on good name but on how to get the daily bread at all cost. Chinua Achebe's imagination of things falling apart eventually came to reality in Africa. Ibeneche continued his observation:

> *All economist accepted that wealth is the product of people's effort and the interaction of the people in exchange and trade. It is not the endowments of minerals, land, geography or even population. Without investment in human capital, no nation has ever moved from agrarian to industrial stage" (The Nation, April 28, 2009, p. 21)*

Creative Writing, A Branch of Literature

We can start by looking into what literature is:

According to Amaechi (2005: 1),

> *The word literature is an offshoot of the word literate which means able to read and write. Literature can be described as all printed materials which give instruction and information.*

Literature is as old as man. It started in oral forms such as songs, stories, proverbs, riddles and jokes. The documentation of literature started with the development of writing. It is a work of art born out of imagination which deals with what is expressed and how it is expressed. It is one of the many subjects being taught in schools and just like man and his society, literature is dynamic. It moves, grows, and changes as the events change in the society. Literature has three genres which are poetry, drama and prose. They are all works of creativity, imagination, observation and interest.

What is Creative Writing?

Creative writing is simply literature in its fictional, but written form. Creative writing could come in form of any of the three genres of literature earlier stated. As the name implies, it is a work of art born out of creativity. Creative writing is the product of an interested writer who considers a given situation in the society. He shows concern for the situation and he has a goodwill message for the society on the subject. He therefore imagines a befitting theme and he

creates characters, settings, times and events. Though fictional, creative writing is always very realistic and objective since it fulfils all the functions of literature.

Functions of literature

Literature serves many functions for both the society and individuals. It is educative and didactic, it is entertaining, it preserves history and culture, it diffuses information. For activists, it is a political weapon and a corrective measure; for artists, it is an economic means and for teachers, it is an aid. Amaechi (2005:36) observed:

> *The chief function of fiction is to entertain, to instruct, to edify, to persuade, to arouse or even to incite. It is one of the major devices by which human beings communicate their visions of reality in concrete terms.*

According to Wauthier (1978:144), "African poets and novelists have usually regarded their work as miraculous weapons to defeat their conquerors." Also, Mario de Andrade in Wautheir (1978:145) said, "The central theme is arranged around the fight to dispel the dark night of colonial oppression." African writers have so far mirrored the realities in the continent through their themes which have so much demonstrated l'esprit de realism in great measure

The pre-independence era novels featured such themes as denunciation of colonial rule, criticism of social humiliation, of oppression, economic exploitation and miliation, Ferdinand Oyono's Une vie de Boy (1956) is a sorry story of a Black slave boy who died due to the injuries he got for an offence henever committed. Sembene Ousmane in Le Docker Noir (1956) depicts the pitiful physical and economic exploitation of African labourers in France.

Also, the novels after independence did not fail to display the political failure of African leaders. William Sassine in Le jeune Homme de Sable (1979) depicted the economic oppression meted on the masses by the black leaders. Tunde Ajiboye's Le Temoin (1997) is a correct picture of the level of corruption in Nigerian police. Briefly, African novels have been a weapon of political emancipation. In this era of global economic depression, creative writing could also inform individuals, organizations and nations on economic issues. It could be powerfully used in the fight against poverty, and economic inadequacies.

Creative Writing and Economic Building

African leaders' selfishness as it affects economy:

Babu (1981:49) submitted:

> *New colonialism is worse than formal colonialism in that, in the latter case we were confronted with only one vulture. Now the vultures are many, foreign and local, old and new.*

These vultures are nothing but African leaders. African elites in collaboration with the colonial masters continued to oppress Africans physically, emotionally and economically even after independence. Ojiako (1979:1), agreed with Babu in his words:

> *The politicians were very powerful, foreign investors and capital lenders exercised their influence on the country through them*

Shehu (2003:12) also was of this view:

> *We need political leaders with an economic think tank, world view and foresight that will not only sell our assets and common patrimony.*

In a nutshell, African leaders have, in various ways such as investing huge amounts of money in foreign banks and personal accounts, ruined the economy. Nigerian and African economy has been fought and beaten by its managers through corruption, misuse of public funds, illegal sales of government properties, low funding of government organizations, lack of maintenance culture, undue ambition, love of affluence and other unwholesome attitudes.

To overcome the problem of man's negative behaviour in Africa generally, Kwame Nkrumah in Alex-Hammah (1972:30) said "Africa needs a complete new man." Babu (1981:9) confirmed the notion in this statement

> *The only redeeming prospect is the emergence of a working class and of patriotic petty bourgeois intellectuals who are beginning to see the real cause of their misery.*

To achieve Nkrumah and Babu's wish in Nigeria, the entire citizenry needs complete transformation; there is the need for mental revolution and a complete new orientation towards patriotism. Creative writing could do this wonder. Chiegeonu (1991:1) cited Plato thus "Literature is capable of inducing the appropriate emotion or feeling in the rulers." The reason is that people are influenced by what they read. Today's inspirational writers should choose themes that will, in full force, chase unpatriotism out of Nigerian system just like colonialism and military misrule were defeated by the several writings of social activists.

Poems, dramas and novels could serve as weapons of correcting economic unfriendliness. The bad image of Nigerian economy should be projected in writings. Niyi Osundare is his poem "Ours to plough not to plunder" showed a great concern for the persistent degradation of the earth and its vast natural resources in Nigeria. Two lines in the last stanza says "Ours to work, not to waste," "Ours to man, not to maim" They are both a note of caution, the poet warns that the earth's resources should be productively exploited and judiciously utilized, Umukoro et al (2002:212-214).

Sembene Ousmane in Le Mandat (1956) projected the low economy of Senegal by showing the level of unemployment, poverty, begging, robber, and a difficult bureaucracy. Any Senegalese leader who reads and digests Le Mandat should feel so ashamed and wish for a change. Tunde Ajiboye in Le Temoin (1997) depicted the corruption and greed of members of the Nigerian police. He painted a policeman in such a terrible, selfish and unpatriotic image that any Nigerian senior police officer who reads the piece should feel so concerned and should wish for a change. Ahmadou kourouma in Allah n'est pas oblige (2000) painted Liberia in a terrible economic mess, child abuse, abject poverty, undue political ambition and greed which led to avoidable waste of many lives and valuables. Any civilized Liberian leader who reads that novel should feel so challenged to bring an end to the peoples' plight.

According to Tell of Dec. 15, 2008, p. 21,

> *Council elections in Jos, Plateau State, turn the city of peace and tranquility into an avoidable theatre of blood letting and destruction of lives and properties worth billions of naira.*

This is an election that was supposed to be concluded in the year 2007 but which tarried due to electoral fraudulence in Nigeria. The article said over 300 lives were lost as a result of political thuggery while people's homes and businesses were razed. Any Nigerian leader who has conscience should feel guilty and ashamed and so wish for a change on reading the article.

Ignorance as it affects individual's economy:

Creative writing could also direct attention to individuals, families and organizations. Illiteracy, ignorance, fear, inferiority complex, over populated homes could all destroy an economy. A nation is made up of various communities while communities are made up of families and individuals. Once the individuals' economic strength fails them, it affects their communities. When several communities are in economic mess, it affects the nation.

Many Nigerians are ignorant of the ample opportunities which could turn their economy around. Many ignorantly take steps that could set them back economically. We can have problems of over populated families, divorce, polygamy and wrong priority as a result of ignorance. Many, on the other hand, having identified their opportunities have no idea of how to seize them. Education is the surest remedy for ignorance and one of the functions of literature is to educate people. Nwazuoke et al (2007:iv) opined that:

> *Education should now be more than education for education sake; it must be value-ladden and not one that goes by paper qualification... The business of education is to empower learners to be better informed so as to be useful to themselves and the society.*

Creative writers should focus on themes with particular concern for economic issues. This is because reading economic literature could promote many from poverty to wealth.

Some, out of ignorance, never knew they could achieve much with a little capital. They fold their arms and suffer in silence as they wait for bigger capitals which may never come. Some are so fearful that they shy away from business risks while some others are just ashamed of engaging in petty and clean businesses. There are some who are just too lazy who would neither pursue education to a profitable height nor be willing to engage in hard labour. A popular Yoruba adage

says "Ise ni oogun ise" That is, "Hard work is the only remedy for poverty." Through literature, the emotions and orientation of these people could be redirected.

Poor pay, lack of reward and recognition of productivity, poor working environment and inadequate infrastructure have discouraged a lot of people from working hard. Directors and managers of industries should be taught to treat workers respectfully and pay them gainfully. Thus, they will avoid incessant strike actions and workers' poor attitude to work which have badly affected Nigeria's economy. Approximately, Nigeria has a population of 140 million. If all Nigerians have to depend on the government for survival, then the economy will remain ever below. Creative writings could encourage private establishments and self employment.

Bearing in mind that literature travels farther, speaks louder and lives longer than the authors, creative writers should not relent in identifying Nigerians' behavioural patterns which have spoilt the economy. Such behaviours should be exposed and corrected. Themes should be well-spelt and voices of reason should be loud. The consequences of either obeying or disobeying the voices should be made manifest. For instance, Tunde Ajiboye's corrupt police officer in Le Temoin (1997) eventually ran mad; this is the power of creative writing. The picture of the mad officer could create fear and a spirit of change in others.

The authors' language must not be pedantic, rather, it must be simple enough to facilitate reading and understanding. These economic pieces must not necessarily be voluminous to avoid boredom. The plots and the settings should be clearly layed out to create interest. Stakeholders should endeavour to make such literature affordable and the quality of the materials should be minded to ensure durability.

CONCLUSION

The fact that literature can help rebuild a depressed economy can no longer be over emphasized. There is urgent need for economic recovery in Nigeria now. The recent global economic meltdown has worsened Nigeria's chances of economic development. Writers should therefore rise up to the challenges of repositioning the nation's economy.

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