

The Nigerian Fiction Tradition in the 21st Century and its Postmodernist Imperative

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Abstract

Still insisting on the essentialist and peculiar nature of African Literature, most older critics are reluctant to admit that postmodernism had taken its toll in the production and interpretation of contemporary art of Africa. In their evaluation of the Nigerian fiction since the advent of the 21st Century, these critics depict it as lacking in substance as well as inept in the treatment of “big issues” that were once the defining features in the Nigerian literary tradition.

This paper, however, argues that the real issue of dispute in recent Nigerian fiction is more with the critic than the writer. It cites salient contemporary developments in academics, technology and the mass media to justify the shift in focus in determining the big issues of our time as well as locates the teleological metamorphosis of Nigerian fiction in the globalised and postmodernist literary discourse. Suggestions are also made on how the various fragmented occupations of new writers can indeed constitute and sustain the big issues that always pervaded Nigerian literature.

If there is any singular scholar that has given direction to the study of Nigerian literature in the new millennium, he is Charles E. Nnolim. Although a humanist critic with proven disdain for modern literary theory, Nnolim had dismissed the African literary tradition since Achebe’s era as merely lachrymal or lamentative in nature. He says African writers began by weeping for the loss of their culture, dignity, religion and general heritage through slavery and colonialism and have continued to blame the Europeans for everything wrong that happened to their society. This stigmatized view of subservience and self-abasement is noticed too in the literature written after most African nations won their political independence. The focus of the agitations only changed from the colonial masters to African political leaders, who aside from corruption, nepotism or ineptitude, neglected to provide basic amenities like shelter, health services, water and electricity to the suffering masses. The military power mongers who incessantly interrupted civil governments in Africa were not also spared by the writers, who now wore the toga of postcolonial writers.

So for the greater part of the second half of the twentieth century, African writers had merely waged a war against colonial and political leaders ranging from the era of colonialism, through national independence struggle to what is now regarded as the post-independence era stretching to the end of the 20th century where Nnolim admits that African literature had reached a “point of exhaustion”, and dwindled to a narrow artistic canvass. It was therefore quite refreshing that he sought a break from the boring stereotypes of defensive grandstanding by declaring that:

...a new image of the African personality needs to be fashioned to reposition Africa for the take off of the 21st century. We need a new spiritual reorientation, a new creative hope to give artistic impetus to a new world order. Our writers in this new epoch of globalism dominated by a technologically oriented new world order must create a new Africa, a new spirit of optimism, an Africa full of promises, able to feed its teeming populations, with a healthy and vibrant people not dependent on Europe and America for sustenance(3).

There is no doubt that dozens of Africans, particularly Nigerians have responded to this clarion call to write for the new age. In their introductory study of the novel genre in Nigeria in the 21st century, Allwell Abolugbo Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu [2009] have outlined the prolific turn-over of novels within the first ten years of the new century and were particularly impressed with their artistic sophistication as well. What has however, bothered Nnolim more is the alleged lack of depth of seriousness in the handling of themes in contrast with their predecessors like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Elechi Amadi, Festus Iyayi, Ben Okri and so on who were firmly committed to big issues like colonialism, nationalism and corruption and well advocating social change.

Among the 21st Century Nigerian novelists are Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Helon Habila, Jude Dibia, Maik Nwosu, Kaine Agary, Chris Abani, Sefi Atta, Tanure Ojaide, Promise Okeke and Isidore Emeka Uzuatu. Others are Abimbola Adunni Adelakun, Bisi Ojedinran, Cameliuk Ukah, Majovo Amarie, Odilli Ujubuonu, Bina Nengi-Ilagha, Omo Uwaifo, Gbenga Ajileye, Wale Okediran, Toni Kan Onwordi, Chim Newton, Gloria Ernest Samuel and so on. Added to this growing list are authors who had already established themselves as writers before the advent of the new century. In this category are names like Isidore Okpewho who published *Call me By My Rightful Name* in 2007; Buchi Emecheta with *The New Tribe* in 2009; Ben Okri with *Arcadia* [2002] and *Star book* [2007]; Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo with *House of Symbols* [2001], *Children of the Eagle* [2005] *Trafficked* [2008]; Biyi Bamidele with *Burma Boy* in 2007; Zaynab Alkali with *The Initiates* [2007] and

Abubakar Gimba and many others.

Nnolim [2010] insists that these writers present themselves with a certain attitude of detachment from political issues, in contrast to their predecessors who were overtly political. The implication is that the novel tradition has been considerably adulterated. The new generation writers have abandoned the “big issues” of crusading against colonialism, neo-colonialism, and corruption, but have indulged in writing on frivolous themes like prostitution, deviant sexuality, drug use and addiction in cities and promoting epicurean livelihood and fleshy matters.

Although Onukaogu and Onyerionwu commend the supremacy of the craft of the 21st century Nigerian novelists, it is indeed the message in these works that appears to be of great concern to most scholars who feel that literature does not exist for the sake of its beauty. Nnolim’s description of this new fiction depicts it as both licentious in nature and even distracting to the Nigerian national consciousness.

But in recent Nigerian fiction, with the exceptions we noted among female writers, there is a corruption of the Nigerian dream, there is absence of a national ethos, there is a sense of estrangement, of cultural disinheritance and we have disinherited people who have abandoned “home” and converged in Lagos (a no man’s land) searching for quintessential pleasure, through sluice-gates of debauchery, drinking, motoring as doubtful palliatives and suspect compensations in bars and brothels.

In spite of the proliferation of churches, God is dead in recent Nigerian fiction, completely edged out by materialism and epicurean tendencies. Hedonism is the new non-Sunday religion (217)

While these charges of abandonment of serious issues of culture and politics and the degeneration into themes of debauchery, sexuality and irreligiosity may be rather over-stated, it cannot be denied that the Nigerian society itself has been caught up with modernity, and these practices are just a corollary. Nnolim himself admits that the 21st century Nigerian society “is adrift and the people are lost in the imbecilities of future optimisms” (2000:219). This is a veritable situation of the postmodern, the prevailing condition in the 21st century in which human history and the homogeneous Enlightenment Programme of modernity is being distrusted and challenged. Major changes have indeed occurred in all spheres of human endeavour with the view to dismantling rational modes of social organisation and thoughts so much so that there are now no universal, eternal and immutable essences in the perception of reality. Literature which was described in Arnoldian terms as the “best that has been thought and said” has also succumbed to this sudden eclipse of collective values and essences. Alvin Kernan’s book, *The Death of Literature* provides an insight into this state of affairs when he writes that:

Rather than being near-sacred myths of human experience of the world and the self, the most prized possession of culture, universal statements about an unchanging and essential human nature, literature is increasingly treated as authoritarian and destructive of human freedom, the ideology of patriarchy devised to instrument male, white hegemony over the female and the “lesser breeds” (2)

Since literature is by nature a mirror on society, it is quite important to look at those dynamics that have caused its decline. To understand the ideological formulations that gave rise to the 21st century Nigerian fiction, this paper intends to examine the salient developments in the academic, technology and the mass media which have given rise to a change in perception of the status of contemporary issues. The allegation of whether or not the new novelists are writing on “big issues” would then be naturally put in its right perspective.

Firstly, from the academics in the late 20th century, have arisen a host of thinkers like Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixious, Jean Baudrillard, Jean François Lyotard, Edward Said and so on who challenged the Enlightenment Programme formulated since the advent of modernity which established a tradition of rational thinking and organisation of society into grand norms and ideologies. These norms, also regarded as narratives, were widely accepted and enforced by society so as to ensure values of morality, justice, discipline, order, hygiene and so on. But the new thinkers unleashed a tsunami of ideas on this collective or totalitarian manner of thinking, believing that grand norms were merely avenues of establishing power control or privilege over opinions and identities, since all opinions were said to be relative or arbitrarily created by human society.

Jean Francois Lyotard (Readings, 37) explains that the grand narratives that structure the discourse of modern religion, politics, philosophy and science only work to suppress and control the subject of the individual “by imposing a false sense of totality or universality on a set of disparate things, actions and events” (11). Postmodernism is therefore the critic of these grand narratives because they are believed to mask the contradictions and instabilities that were inherent in social organisations and practice. Mary Kleggs [2006] explains further the repercussions of dismantling time-honoured orthodox views about society:

Postmodernism in rejecting grand narratives, favours mini narratives, stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large scale universal or global concepts.

Postmodern mini narratives are always situational, provisional, contingent and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason and stability. (169)

This paradox of a globalised world abolishing universal standards of humanism, justice, morality and religion and cultivating provisional or mini-narratives for the interpretation of social reality or the creation of literary works is disturbing enough. It is even perhaps why scholars like Nnolim and Izevbaye, knowing fully the inevitable shift in world order, are not prepared to accept the propriety of legitimizing fragmented views of human subjectivity in a world that canvasses for homogeneity. It is at this point too that Bran Nicol in his book *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodern Fiction* insists that the reader of a postmodern text must actively participate in the interpretation of the work in its contextual eclecticism to appreciate it better. He says:

Postmodern writing challenges us because it requires its readers to be an active creator of meaning rather than a passive consumer. More than this, it challenges its readers to interrogate the commonsense and commonplace assumptions about literature which prevail in our culture... To read the postmodern fiction is to be invited to ask: What is fiction? What does reading involve? Why do they create innovative experimental forms rather than just stick to traditional ones. (XIV)

Accordingly, the argument by Nnolim that the Nigerian Novel in the 21st century does not engage in “big issues” becomes problematic. His description of Maik Nwosu’s *Alpha Song* as a “dissertation of night life which has attraction for drifters who are debauched, irreligious men and women thinking about their crotch” [2010, 208] may hardly be the single most important interpretation in the text. The act of debauchery itself may have been an allegorical representation of the “so-called” bigger issues of society which is the collapse of morality, social, cultural and political values. In essence, no text has a stable meaning and the reader is not obliged to regard the writer’s seeming opinion as sacrosanct in its ultimate interpretation.

Modernity might have intended to decipher from among the confusion of the world, events and experiences that were necessary and articulate them as universal narrative or big issues that transcend society. But the postmodern society moves exactly in the opposite direction, by seeking for the contingent, the fleeting or the arbitrary thereby exposing new possibilities of thinking and interpreting social reality. In other words, for writing on themes we take for granted like prostitution, deviant sexuality drug-addiction and loose living in the postmodern times and assuming that these were necessities of life, the new writers motivate us to think in a different way about power relations, change and identities. This is certainly a big intellectual enterprise with a universal proportion which cannot be undermined.

The second factor which is the rupture of technology in the postmodern era is indeed what makes the dramatic difference between the modern and postmodern eras. The world has moved forward with incredible speed through inventions and breakthroughs in virtually all fields of human endeavours. Technology has made life easier, more efficient and faster in terms of communication, medical sciences, space technology automations and computers. However, the entire project of modernity with all its machineries for comfort has always been associated with self-destruction in spite of its efforts to develop objective science and universal norms for morality, law and so on. Technology which is a catalyst for comfortable living, faster digital communication, speed and mobility is also a facilitator of debauchery, prostitution armed robbery, armed conflicts of different dimensions and fierce antagonisms characteristic of cosmopolitan living. Kernan’s explicit explanation of this paradox is very useful and it is here quoted:

In our time, as the pace of technological change has increased, the bomb, the pill, the automobile, the computer and television have radically affected everything from international relations and sexual morality to where people live and the way they conceive of their own mental processes. (126)

It goes without saying that the idea of literature as a time-less transcendent discourse written by extremely gifted individuals to impart normative values had also changed its paradigms, since the so-called lesser issues of life are now the legitimate concerns of millions of citizens.

Scholarship in the postmodern era is therefore a clear departure from the old order of strict orthodoxy. Trends in social life become veritable subjects of research and study instead of rebuke. Practices of prostitution, deviant sexuality, drug-addition and debauchery flourish under this climate to the point that they become another set of narratives operating side by side with those of religion and morality.

Alvan Kernan [1990] expressed outrage at the collapse of moral rectitude in the United States occasioned by post modernity in the following words:

Not only the arts but all our traditional institutions, the family and the law, religion and the State, have in recent years been coming apart in startling ways. The family is probably the most desperate battlefield in this massive social change: the pill, soaring divorce rate, custody battle, poor single-parents, families headed by women, right to life, and pro-choice struggles, two-career families, surrogacy, women’s rights, battered wives and murdered families, the disappearance of traditional patterns of sexual differentiation, in

vitro fertilization, casual attitudes towards sex, the appearance of new venereal diseases.

There is the good and bad in this catalogue. (8)

From Kernan's point of view, it could be deduced that the so-called debauchery, sexism and religious scepticism noticed in the 21st century Nigerian novel is neither strange nor do they diminish the worth of this literature at the global level. It only proves that contemporary Nigerian authors were indeed more globalised than their predecessors who were post-colonialists and essentialist in orientation. In any case, a Nigerian novelist who wrote his novel depicting characters who were morally debased cannot be accused of writing on small issues as it were, when in fact, prostitution is often interpreted as a consequence of the big issues like failure of government, unemployment, neo-colonial exploitation, natural disasters and so on. In Terry Eagleton's interpretation of scholarship in the postmodernist age in his book, *After Theory*, he explains that there were really no differences between the so-called big issues and the small ones as just any subject could be a worthy topic of academic research or creativity:

On the wilder shores of academia, an interest in French philosophy has given way to a fascination with French kissing. In some cultural circles, the politics of masturbation exert far more fascination than the politics of the Middle East. Socialism has lost out to sado-masochism. Among students of culture, the body is an immensely fashionable topic, but it is usually the erotic body, not the famished one. There is a keen interest in coupling bodies, but not in labouring ones... In the old days, rock music was a distraction from your studies; now it may well be what you are studying. Intellectual matters are no longer an ivory tower affair, but belonging to the world of the media and shopping malls, bedrooms and brothels. (2-3)

Thirdly, the sudden upsurge of the electronic culture over and above the print has had considerable implication on the production and consumption of fiction in the 21st century. The novel tradition is a product of the print medium and has been in operation for several centuries while the electronic culture came into being in the second part of the 20th century in Nigeria. The radio, television, audiovisual, and the film have proven to be more effective and faster in transmitting knowledge and entertainment than the print, hence the threat to diminish the role of literature in contemporary society.

Nigeria is served by hundreds of radio and television stations that broadcast programmes both in English and the various local languages around the clock. With a huge technological breakthrough in communication, the Internet and the Cable television coverage have become ubiquitous as the BBC, CNN, VOA and Aljezeera competing against each other to dominate the airwaves. The novel genre is virtually overtaken by programmes like Reality shows, music, sports, drama and movies originating from both home and foreign producers. Most remarkably, the Nigerian viewing public has for over two decades now been subjected to a menu of home movies of the DSTV cable networks depicting themes of traditional royalty, with-craft, broken marriages, prostitution, drug-addition, brain-drain, corruption, political mischief, armed-robbery, poverty destitution, unemployment and witchcraft. These appear to be what attract Nigerian viewers to the Nollywood industry, for which the Nigerian government also invests billions of Nigerian to promote. Kernan had noticed a similar phenomenon in the United States in the 1980s and had made this important remark:

The problem for literature in all this is not just that interest in reading great books is diminishing as television watching increases, or even that reading of all kinds is becoming a lost skill in a time when more and more information is available on the electronic screen. At the deepest level the worldview of television is fundamentally at odds with the worldview of a literature based on the printed book. As television watching increases, therefore, and more and more people quite unconsciously, their sense of reality and the existential situation in it from the television, the assumptions about the world that have been identified with literature will become less and less plausible, and in time will become downright incredible (147-8)

The implication of the above observation is that literature as a cultural form in the 21st century is so sufficiently subservient to the electronic tradition that it appears the television or the movie is restructuring the consciousness of the novelist. If Nnolim has to be believed then his charge of lack of "big issues" may probably have emanated from the inspiration given by movie producers in Nigeria. The Nigerian novelist is engaged in a battle of survival against the movie and therefore may have engaged in the trick of mellowing down his message as dictated by the home movie producer. But if we may ask: Is writing on the themes of local village chieftaincy struggle or waywardness of the youths or failure of marriage really as inconsequential as to be branded small issues? Does literature not exist in metaphors, allegories parables, anecdotes and innuendoes that explain bigger issues again?

In any case, even in the ordinary understanding of the function of literary studies being canvassed by Nnolim, Emenyonu and Izevbye, the 21st century Nigerian novelists have not in any way demonstrated any deficiency in the handling of the so-called big issues of their time. The charge against them for lack of fierce

commitment to social and political advocacy as compared to their predecessors is equally unsustainable. It will be pertinent at this point to illustrate my argument with an examination of the various trends that have developed in Nigerian fiction since the beginning of the century.

Firstly, female writings and feminism generally have flourished in the 21st Nigerian fiction more than in any era in the Nigerian literary history. Sophia Ogwude [2013] recalls that until 1970, Nigerian writers were predominantly men and wrote to privilege patriarchy, while the 1980s witnessed the rise of a crop of female writers who had effectively begun to challenge the grounds of patriarchy. Both periods featuring prominent male writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Munonye and Amadi as well as female writers like Nwapa, Emecheta, Alkali, Okoye and others, operated under the humanist paradigm of recreating the role of the woman in the patriarchal Nigerian society with utmost realism. As such, even fierce feminists critics like Ogwude were constrained to read this lukewarm challenge against patriarchy as the enactment of the real situation on ground. Ogwude remarks that:

Our major writers, such as Ngugi, Sembeme Armah, Soyinka and even the often mercilessly maligned Achebe have consistently cast their female characters in very dominant roles so much so that it becomes quite difficult to close one's eyes to the truths of these texts.

In his examination of three new female writers of the 21st century, S.S. Egya (Ogwude 211) observes that the rising profile of the woman in the new fiction is as a result of the shift of focus from the rural woman to the urban professional heroin. The postmodern female writer draws his characters from the educated, urbanised and professional class whose pedigree parallels those of the male characters so as to enable them argue for equality in the Nigerian society. This way, Egya believes that Alkali's Seytu in the *Descendants* [2005], Adimora-Ezeigbo's Neme in *Children of the Eagle* [2002] and Atta's Enitan in *Everything Good Will Come* [2005] use their very cosmopolitan backgrounds to pursue nationalist, as well as womanist, objectives (8).

But long before the general shift from the rural woman to her urban counterpart, Cyprian Ekwensi's fiction had led the way to depict the not-so-educated urban woman who expressed freedom in female sexuality and the erotica especially in his two novels: *Jagua Nana* and *Jagua Nana's Daughter*. As Iniobong Uko (Ogwude, 100) rightly observes, Ekwensi's fiction was received with harsh criticism not only because he allowed excessive room for women to express themselves sexually, but because his generation believed that such themes were too frivolous to be regarded as serious literature.

However, one of the 21st century female novelists that has demonstrated vividly what the new age stands for in Fatima Ba'Arum Alkali, the first daughter of Zaynab Alkali. In her novel, *Personal Angle* which title eminently epitomises the relativisation of social reality, she depicts female characters Bashaika and Zaria, who boldly revolt against the Northern Nigerian Moslem patriarchy with considerable success. Her strict Moslem background notwithstanding; her heroines are counselled by Justice Qadr in the following word which sound like a manifesto statement for the Nigerian woman in the post-modern time:

You may not achieve happiness by coveting the lifestyles of others, assuming that what they have will make you happy. To be happy, you should adopt a *personal angle* from which you will view yourself. You have to condition your mind continuously to be happy with circumstances. Circumstances that are unfavourable to you, avoid them if possible. Circumstances that increase your chances of happiness, you maximize (259)

These words are suggestive of a new frame of mind of the 21st century woman, a desire to be individualist, free and self-reliant; a yearning for pleasure and the willingness to work assiduously to achieve these goals. The personal or the arbitrary is preferred; not necessarily the established general rule.

Secondly, the 21st Nigerian novel has developed tremendously in the direction of transnational and diasporic discourse. More Nigerian novels have transcended the narrow ethnic and nationalist viewpoints that described corruption and other sundry issues of statehood. Two approaches could be discerned in this transnational impulse. First, some Nigerian authors who are domiciled in either the United States of America or Europe write in their stories the experience and characters of their home country who are resident in the diaspora in this era that is believed to be border-less. Chimanda Adichie's *Americanah* and Tanure Ojaide's *The Activists* and Kaine Agary's *Yellow Yellow* were written with obvious Nigerian consciousness about characters who oscillate between their home country and the United States. These characters suffer from a certain ambivalence from both ends as they face a combination of factors like racial or ethnic segregation, unemployment, homelessness, public corruption, gender prejudice and poverty all which make Ojaide describe this era in a befitting volume of poetry as *When it no longer matters where you live* [1998].

Nnolim's suggestion that Nigerian authors be globalised was intended to inspire them to recolonise the West by imaginatively invading other continents and even the skies as new settings. He says just as European writers like Rider Haggard in *King Solomon's Mines*, E.M. Forster in *A Passage To India* and Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* widened the artistic canvas of European writers, African writers should:

...no longer be contented to be fixated on our cultural moorings. Europe invaded Africa

and the world with their civilization, religion and technology and all of us have since then been transfixed. What prevents the African writer in the 21st century from re-inventing Europe and from there developing an international theme in our literatures.

The second strand of transnational impulse is that which Nigerian novels are set principally set at home in Nigeria by treat themes that have multi-national applications. In this category we have Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* and *Unbridled*, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked*, Chris Abani's *Becoming Abigail*, Bisi Ojedinran's *A Daughter for Sale* and Buchi Emecheta's *The New Tribe*. All these novels treat the rising wave of prostitution and sexual slavery among Nigerian ladies who find their way to Western Europe. The conditions for this phenomenon are not too different from reasons given above for the commodification of every aspect of life in late capitalism. The quest for materialism had turned the sanctity of sacred objects and ideas like religion, the human body, education and the arts into money making ventures. Faith in God has been effectively weakened giving rise to the lowering of family values, morality and ethics. However, most of these novels dealing with sex slavery of Nigerian girls in Europe are crafted as moral adventures which enable the characters explore the European advanced societies and return home with unfulfilled wishes. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu summarize a few of them as follows:

In *Trafficked*, Nneoma embraces a new life from Europe alongside other girls who have been victims of sex slavery; Erika, a Nigerian girl driven into the hands of an inconsequential Briton as wife retraces her step back to her fatherland after all manner of abuse in *Unbridled*. In *A Daughter For Sale*, Abel an investigative journalist, snatches Alice, a Nigerian teenager, from the wicked jaws of an international syndicate that specializes in smuggling girls into Europe and America from the third world for prostitution. (133)

Another manifestation of transnational impulse in the new Nigerian novel is constituted by those novels that evoke the general African landscapers, hybrid identities and spaces that transgress national boundaries especially as dictated by language, religion and the current insurgency or terrorism in Africa. One of such novels is Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* which is a story of a set of twins who grew up going there opposite directions in quest for success. One of the twins having sickle-cell anaemia worked at home in Keti, Nigeria as a school teacher and historian, while the other twin joins the guerrilla rag tag mercenary army which terrorise people and governments across North and West Africa. While we follow Mamo's activities at home as he documents the contemporary history of Nigeria, his twin brother Lamamo documents similar activities in countries like Libya, Niger, Chad, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Liberia to demonstrate how contiguous Africa south of the Sahara has been in terms of livelihood and survival. In Lamamo's third letter to Mamo, he comes to terms with the fact that the instability in Africa is instigated by the politicians, military adventurers and businessmen of the United States and Europe who actively exploit the Wars of Africa to make money' (129). Thus, Habila makes a very important point about Africa's unity which must be negotiated either through good governance in the nation States or shattered through adversities promoted by merchantilists ideas of the West. Emeka Uzoato's *Vision Impossible* [2006] is also set largely in a West African country where Nigerian soldiers with other African nationalities are engaged in peacekeeping.

Thirdly, another dimension in the development of the 21st century Nigerian novel is its historical approach. Like what their predecessors did in recreating the era of colonialism by fashioning stories about the drastic changes experienced in the advent colonialism, the new writers reconstruct the physical and psychological accounts of wars in both the colonial and postcolonial eras of Nigeria. From Biyi Bamidele's recreations of the Second World War in *Burma Boy* [2007] to Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of Yellow Sun* and Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's *Children of the Eagle*, both which are fictional reconstruction of the Nigerian civil war, it appears war literature has flourished more in the 21st century than even when these wars were being fought. Similarly, other lesser wars are being captured in the contemporary Nigerian fiction. Mngumber Vicky Sylvester's *Long Shadows* [2004] along with Terhemba Shija's *The Siege The Saga* [2015] have fictionally reconstructed the Tiv Revolts of 1959 to 1964. Although, *Long Shadows* for instance is written to depict the white colonial domination and later the Hausa-Fulani hegemony over the Tiv people, the author elevates his art to a sublime level by interrogating even the very suggestion of local heroism or ethnic nationalism and embraces an integrationist solution to Nigeria's challenges of nationhood.

In the same vein, almost every crisis flash point in Nigeria attracts the writing of fiction and Nigeria has had more than its fair share of conflicts, anarchy and mini-battles among communities over religion, petroleum resources, grazing and farming lands as well as political expediency. Cases of kidnappings, robbery, suicide bomb attacks, abduction of teenage girls, gang wars and violent bank robberies abound through the length and breadth of the country. Armed militias are formed along ethnic, lineage, political and religious lines to defend causes of identities. Nigeria is also a country that had been devastated by the scourge of malaria and HIV/AIDS and was mercifully saved from the Ebola virus that was introduced in 2014. The country is also jittery about the prospects of the introduction of deviant sexuality like lesbianism, homosexuality, sado-masochism pedophilia

and so on.

From this turmoil, outstanding fictional works have arisen which are worthy of academic discourse especially as these works appear to celebrate instead of lamenting the existential tragedy of the Nigerian man. Tanure Ojaide's *The Activist* [2006], Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* [2006] and Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* [2008] tell us stories about the desecration of the environment and the economic exploitation of the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, a situation which has given rise to militancy in the area. These novels describe incidences of lynching, kidnappings, mob actions and oil bunkering. The authors also create heroes and heroines in their novels to grapple with the intellectual and political dynamics of the area; thereby increasing the ecocritical consciousness in literary discourse. A few other novelists are preoccupied with other social vices in Nigeria, Wale Okediran in *Dreams Die At Twilight* and Jude Dibia's *Walking with Shadows* deal with absurd sexual tendencies while Maik Nwosu's *Alpha Song* treats the younger generation's lifestyle of nightclubbing, alcoholism, sex, music and hip-hop dancing. All these are real issues in Nigerian contemporary society with a global implication which have not been neglected by the 21st century Nigerian novelist.

In conclusion, it is pertinent to note that although the Nigerian fiction in the 21st century has developed in various dimensions and has appreciated in craft as aptly demonstrated by Onukaogu and Onyerionwu, it still has not lost sight of the big issues that affect their readers. The loss of its monolithic outlook cannot be taken as the loss of focus. The Nigerian novel in the 21st Century has no doubt taken another live owing to shifts in academics, technology and communication modes which are in infact, the prerogative of the critic to discern, especially if the following advice from Francis Fukuyama is taken into consideration:

There is something like a law of the conservation of institutions. Human beings are rule-following animals by nature; they are born to conform to the social norms they see around them, and they entrenched those rules with often transcendent meaning and value. When the surrounding environment changes and new challenges arise, there is often a disjunction between existing institutions and present needs. The institutions are supported by legions of entrenched stakeholders who oppose any fundamental change (7).

The argument here is that Nnolim and his soulmates do really need to change their perception of African literature. The interpretation of literary art in the 21st Century is more of a critics endeavour than the writers, who is even regarded as symbolically dead. The reader of the contemporary novel is expected to be adventurous and actively versatile to keep track with the innovations and diversity of postmodernist preoccupations. And as Fiona Tolan [2010] warns: "one can never rest, every time we presume to know the field, its parameters have shifted once again" (4). The Nigerian novel genre in the 21st Century is consciously janus-faces, intensely globalised and preoccupied with imagined possibilities of the present and the future. Its evaluation should therefore be done with caution and sensitivity.

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