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**Artistic Mediation, Africa's Socio-political Trends and Globalisation**

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**Abstract**

The world is a global village so the saying goes. But in actual sense the aura of globalisation is pervading and insidious in some respects. Africa is an integral part of the globe and so her opportunities and challenges. Here comes the role of the art as a superstructure in its critical and universal mode. Literature remains the tool of illumination on the baleful or benevolent social trends in Africa's onward march in the global sphere. This paper takes a look at the status and place of Africa in global spheres- politics, economy, religion and health. Using literary sociological tenets as the tool of appraisal, the paper x-rays the impact of literature in exploring Africa's global opportunities and challenges. It submits that with the right attitude, Africa is in global competition for development inspite of her colonial memories.

**Keywords:** Artistic Mediation, Africa's, Socio-political, Trends, Globalisation

**Introduction**

Africa is part and parcel of the global village as a continent and a race. Her global exposure and challenges began with the global experience as the now developed nations of Britain, Germany, France, Portugal and America scrambled for and partitioned her territories. The Europeans and Americans had discovered the fast continent in their economic and spiritual race to occupy and convert the vast continent of Africa. Unfortunately, it was a moment of interruption, subjugation and displacement for a continent that was described as a jungle by the Euro-centric writers. Perhaps Africa would have risen and leaped into global reckoning through her developmental pace and maneuvers. The Europeans had added the political dimension in the name of colonisation and so Africa's fate was sealed. The slavery and slaves trade was an epochal devastation on the human and material capacity building for a continent just discovering itself. The agony of slave trade perfected through America's and European's strange and more merchandising slave institution was captured by Olaudah Equiano in his pioneering masterpiece, *Equiano's Travel*. Equiano was one of the early Africans sold into slavery, an Igbo by tribe from the modern day eastern part of Nigeria, a sub-west African State. He was captured along

with his sister and sold into slavery. Such was the trend of slave trade where millions of able-bodied Africans had been captured and forcefully sold into slavery. Equiano had traveled many climes before he could finally purchase his freedom at the rate of forty pounds. A more challenging moment was that of colonisation which was pervasive and institutionalised. If slave trade was for economic purpose, colonisation was all in all as it was tailored to undermine and plunder Africa's resources in all ramifications. The colonial lords had seized the reins of power through which they perfected Africa's political subjugation and oppression. In some places wars were fought especially where Africans had resisted. In some areas, divide and rule tactics were introduced. The French policy of Assimilation and the British indirect rule system were colonial cobweb with which Africans were submerged and pushed to the fringe of underdevelopment. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* published in 1958 provides many answers to many calamities brought by colonialism. Africa had a system of governance, complete in itself and self regulatory. Africa's traditional system rewards and punishes heroes and villains whenever they uphold or transgress the custom of the land. Even Okonkwo is not spared having risen to glory and communal reckoning as early as age eighteen yet he is banished and fined whenever he violates traditions. But confusion sets in with the incursion of the colonial whites into Umofia and Igbo land. Since then, things have started to fall apart. Olarotimi's *Ovoranwen Nogbaisi* chronicles the British expedition to Benin Kingdom during which they clash with the natives. It is a violation of people's customs and traditions for which they had defended the sanctity of the traditions. The rest of the story is the capture and extradition of the powerful and influential Benin monarch, Ovoranwen Nogbaisi. His exile is a metaphor for the denigration of the sanctity of Benin Stool, a symbol of traditional authority, communalism and freedom. The apartheid system in South Africa was another baleful foreign rule and domination experienced by the continent. Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* provides a scenic review of the dehumanising and agonizing effects of apartheid on the black majority on their own soil.

But aside the colonial experience of Africa which from literary and historical point of view has been baleful and dismal, literature has not been silent on the post-colonial Africa. Irele (1990:16) in providing a response interprets the artistic assignment as new and realistic which he labels "New Realism". The African writer has begun to modify his stance and to adjust to angle of perception to take account of those political and social realities that began in the wake of African independence to impress themselves more closely upon the general attention through the entire continent. A question now is what has

been the experience of Africa since it gained freedom or independence from colonial masters. How does Africa explore or fritter away global opportunities or cope and surmount global challenges in engendering political and economic development or growth?

### **Literature, Globalisation and the Third World Nations**

The term literature is from the latin word 'litera' meaning a letter of the Alphabet (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1973). Literature is an imaginative writing which imitates and reconstructs everyday or societal experience for the purpose of instructing, informing, teaching and educating. Its purpose is didactic using aphorism, metaphor and symbols as specialized words. Literature as a field of study and an educational discipline is "second to none in its capacity to train and develop the qualities of observation, insight, imagination and creativity of which rapidly developing societies are in need" (Moody 1972:xiii) The suitable framework for the understanding of the impact of literature on global affairs is its sociology. In other words literature is sociological in terms of impact and medium. Its language which is censorious is universal while its enunciation is axiomatic. Obafemi (2001:6) comments on the global theme of Literature. Literature reflects, represents and refracts the reality of the world across age and time. It is not just a work of imagination aimed surely to give pleasure- pleasure and entertainment are crucial to human existence but literature contributes more concretely and more materially to the creation and appreciation of the human condition. Even though what qualifies Literature as literature (be it drama, poetry, prose, biographies and travelogues) is its fictionality, its imaginative derivation. By leading us into the inner recesses of man through symbols, images, concepts, intricate rhythms, emotions and mysteries, literature informs us of the potential energies of the human mind and his resourceful potentials for love, ambition, fulfillment, complex ranges of existent patterns-all of which supply the corporate cultures of man in his various communities and spheres of existence. By literary sociology we mean an interrelationship between literature and society. How and in what way does literature affect society and vice versa. Literary sociology stipulates an interdisciplinary relationship of literature and sociology as disciplines. The term sociology has to do with the relationship between literature and sociology which explores the relationship between society and literature. Sociology is the study of social relationships and institutions. It is about a profound study of social behavior regarding its origin, development, organization and institutions.

Wikipedia defines sociology as

*...a social science and various methods of empirical investigations and critical analysis to develop a body of*

*knowledge about social order, social disorder and social change. A goal for many sociologists is to conduct research which may be applied directly to social policy and welfare, while focusing primarily on refining the theoretical understanding of social processes. Subject matter ranges from micro level of individual agency and interaction to the macro level of systems and the social structure.*

Sociology covers such aspects of human life as social stratification, social class, social mobility, religion, secularization, law, sexuality, health, education, security, scientific knowledge and activities. On the other hand, Literature reflects societal patterns and evolution of mankind using imagination and creativity. Sociological research informs politicians, government and policy makers, law makers, administrators, planners, educators, managers etc. about social issues. Literature transforms, transmits and preserves social values. Art is a social product and a social act (Lentricchia: 1983:19) and (Wolf 1904:108). Literature perceives society for didacticism and reconstruction. Even as Amuta (1987:46) observes, "the writer is not only influenced by society; he influences it." Literary critical tenets are deployed through investigation of the complex social practices of society. The strength of literature as Bodunde (1995:19) has rightly observed is not described in its reflective mode alone but the critical stance of literature on matters of political and social values which have become a body of dominant policy in a given epoch. The thrust of sociology of literature lies in two schools of thought which are the liberal humanist and radical sociological criticism. Irele (1981:34-38) reflecting the liberal school defines literary sociology as a reflection of societal experience in terms of culture, politics, and history through the artist's mind and aesthetic portrayal. On the other hand, the radical school sees literature as capable of analysis and offer of social change of the prevailing polity. While the liberal school emphasizes aesthetic ornament with which literature imitates crucial experience, the radical school explores Marxist tenets underlining the role of art as active and transforming consciousness. Society is a group of people involved in persistent interpersonal relationships, or a large social grouping sharing the same geographical or social territory. Human society is defined by culture and institution being shared by the sum total of its constituent members where stratification and dominance take centre stage. If literature is a superstructure impacting on society, what then is globalisation? The term globalisation can be seen from different perspectives but suffice to say it involves the interrelationship or interdependence among nations of the world. The term stems from the idea of the global village, the polarity or uniformity of

the entire human race that shares certain attributes in common and operates on certain conditions which are universally imperative and necessary. Awonusi (2006:53-69) defines globalisation as the spread of issues, ideas, artifacts, movements lifestyle, market, technology, information, human rights, cultures, democracy etc. across globe. His is of cogent observation that globalisation may be positive when it is limited to values, peoples and cultures. It may be negative when it involves power relations. Another acceptable term for globalisation is universalisation which is related to values. Aina (1997) captures globalisation as defining the transformation of relations between states, constitutions, groups and individuals. He maintains that it entails the global restructuring involving capitalist relations and the associated problems. While Robertson (1997) views globalisation as a concept of compression of the world and intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole. Awonusi lists issues and globalizing issues and areas to include: global culture, civilization, global economy, capitalism, global political order and global technology and information. Wikipedia's definition sums it all on globalisation as the process of international integration arising from the interchange of world views.

Africa forms the largest group of the third world nations. A question or a poser is where is the place of Africa or the third world nation in global scheming or the advanced global village? In providing an answer to this question, I turn to literary critical values as providing basis for understanding not just the rudiments of globalisation but for locating the place of Africa in the global village. Literature remains an instrument of global consciousness often deployed as revolutionary weapon and the language of education by impacting on society. Obafemi provides a panoramic view of what Literature is capable of doing and what it has been used for over the ages. Literature has been found and used as an important revolutionary weapon in national liberation movements all over the world such as Southern Africa, Latin America etc. The Chicago Movement and the Sandinista Government of Nicaraguan made cultural politics an important aspect of their programme. In a similar vein, the Nicaraguan Minister of culture and poet, Ernesto Cardenal (1972) examining the symbiosis between art and politics concludes in affirmation that literature in fulfilling a purpose should be at the service of mankind and poetry should also be political.

The above texts locate the very kernel of the global impact of Literature on the socio - political experience of Africa and her third world nations. Writers from the continent have taken up the colonial and post-colonial Africa for constructive and combative mission. This role is what literary scholars have termed social realism. Gikandi (2001:1) interprets the role as being critical of

'compromised postcoloniality' and disenchantment as "... writers and intellectuals still believe that their works and words have an innate and functional capacity to intervene in everyday life and to transform the tenor and vehicle of political discourse." Africa's political trends, economy and leadership have come under the literary artillery over the years in epochs. We have discussed some aspects of colonial past of Africa vis a vis the role artists played in sowing the seed of consciousness in pushing for liberty, freedom and independence. If Africa had been confronted with the challenge of colonialism, apartheid and monarchy, her experience since gaining independence has been worse and unpalatable. The focal point of globalisation for a continent of Africa is politics. Politics has equally proved her greatest global challenge especially the continent's democratic march. With wrong polity or bad politics come disorientation of the citizenry, epidemic spread of HIV/AIDS, Ebola, environmental hazards, corruption, poverty, unemployment, rape, teenage pregnancy, low standard of education, etc.

There is the political instability occasioned by military misadventure in democratic exercise as well as hapless civilian missions. There is virtually no Africa country which has not experienced military unrest necessitating political instability. Chinua Achebe, Ayi Kwei Armah paint a not dissimilar political scenario through their artistic works in two different sub-west Africa independent nations. In Nigeria, Achebe's *A Man of the People* (1966) and *No Longer at Ease* both political novel critically presents the profligacy of the first republic politicians and early elite clique whose misadventure, corruption, nepotism, favoritism and insensitivity were the decoy and inevitability of the military coup of 1966 which had sacked the train of the first set of political leaders and terminating the life of a democratic government in Nigeria. The height of this political misadventure was the violent eruptions at every campaign arena brought about by the clash between the old breed and the new breed politicians represented by Odili Samaru and the people's minister. Ayi kwei Armah, a Ghanaian polemic writer, in his satiric novel, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* responds to the prevailing social malaise in the independent Ghana. It is a fictional painting of the tenure of late Kwameh Nkrumah of Ghana as the first civilian indigenous regime after Ghana's independence. The limiting forces for the major characters in the novel like the man and the teacher (a metaphorical reference to any diligent and upright African) are the politicians and their wanton or executive corrupt tendency symbolized by Koomson, the minister. The environment of filth and decay on one hand and the atmosphere of a bleak future or disillusionment brought to the front burner of the political and cultural billboard of a young independent nation on the other. This is typical

of Africa's independent nations' political experience. Soyinka's *The Interpreters*, formless and segmental in structure attests to the bewilderment, disillusionment and despondency pervading the socio-political landscape of a young and upcoming nation like Nigeria. The classical novel chronicles the cultural, political, social and economic displacement of the young African technocrats, intellectuals, professionals among others. Obafemi(2001:) captures the disillusionment pervading Africa and its agents that "next in the nature of the cultural nationalist theory is the growth of neo-colonialism of imperialism operating through the agency of the new comprador bourgeoisie, the nation ruling elite". other works of art providing relevance include Ngugi's *A Grain of Wheat*, Ouloguem's *Bound to Violence*, Bode Sowande's *Farewell to Babylon*, Ola Rotimi's *Our husband Has Gone Mad Again*, etc. Even in poetry, African writers have highlighted challenges of development. Tanure Ojaide's *Delta Blues and Homesongs*, *the Fate of Vultures* and *The Endless songs* or *I want to Dance* paint the wasted resources of oil with the devastation and avalanche of environmental challenges left in the trail of multinational oil prospecting companies. Niyi Osundare's *The Eye of the Earth* x-rays the capitalist incursion into Africa in the name of colonial and neo-colonial lords of harvest. African global challenges remain her political profligacy and incongruity. Her democratic march has remained a futile experiment for several decades. A politically disoriented polity which has been her lot, African's opportunities lie in her preparedness to avail itself the benefits of the organized political system occasioned by the right political culture and best practices. Politics is at the bedrock of global advancement either to annex the opportunities or repel its pervasive aura. No meaningful development could be achieved in an atmosphere of political violence or insensitive and corrupt leadership.

### Conclusion

Africa's challenges have been traced to her political ineptitude and undemocratic trends since gaining independence. The intervention of Literature in national and international politics and global interrelationships has been treated as an apparatus of instilling national consciousness which is a sine qua non for democratic culture and good governance. Literature remains the conscience of the nation; the nexus between man and his environment. It is when Africans are conscious of their political responsibilities and they are prepared to face the task that the Continent could avail itself of many opportunities to advance in all spheres of global development.

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