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Phone No: +2348039511789

E-mail: alameenalfira@gmail.com

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For further enquiries, please contact: Editor-in-Chief

SAJOLLCOS, HOD's Office,

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Gombe State University, Gombe

sajollicos@gsu.edu.ng,

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CONTENT

SECTION A: LANGUAGE

Pragmatic Analysis of Tones and Tonal Patterns in Igala Language Abdul, Mohammed Adem	1
Process Choice Analysis of President Muhammadu Buhari's 2015 Inauguration Speech Mohammed Maikiyari, Ph.D and Ramatu Tijani Oziti	12
Quantifiers in English and Izhia: A Minimalist Investigation Maria-Helen Ekah, Ph.D and Chibueze Egbe Aleke	26
A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Images of Banditry in <i>Daily Trust Newspaper</i> Cartoons Umar Uba Abubakar, Ph.D., Benjamin Iorbee, Ph.D and Queen Nguhemem Jebe-Tume	42
Critical Discourse Analysis of Persuasion in Donald Trump's 2024 Victory Speech Hauwa Giwa-Ali, Ph.D	60
Political Discourse Analysis of Selected Plenary Speeches of Nigeria's Senate President Godswill Akpabio Ahmad Musa Saleh and Abdul'aziz Bako, Ph.D	73
Rethinking Social Order: Racism within and After Covid-19 Pandemic Abaya, Henry Demenongo	84
Irregularities In The Grammar of the English Language: Blindspots for Pedagogical Attention in ESL Classrooms Cecilia Folasade Ojetunde, Ph.D and Osipeju, Babasola Samuel	105
An Analysis of Lexical Cohesive Devices in Governor Ahmadu Fintiri's Inauguration Speech Muazu Hassan and Hauwa Giwa-Ali, Ph.D	121
Non-observance of Grice's Maxims: A Study of Some Selected Dialogues in the Play – Harvest of Corruption Abdulkadir Adamu and Usman Maigari Malala	140
The Morphology of Personal Names in English and Ebira Languages Amina Salisu Aliyu, Ph.D, Ahmadu Mohammed Dauda, Ph.D and James Jarafu Jawur	153
Impact of Gamification on Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention among Private Secondary School English Learners In Lagos State, Nigeria Adedokun, James Adekunle and Olabode, Adeyinka Ayoola, Ph.D	169

The Expansionist Approach to the Teaching of the English Grammatical Categories: Examples with the Naming Category Khabyr Fasasi	187
Digital Media Learning and Postmodernist Classroom Innovations in Nigerian Universities Maggai Tsokwa and Fatima Inuwa	201
The Pronunciation of the New English Native Speakers in Nigeria Ngor, Cornelius Iko-awaji	210
Lexico-Semantic Analysis of ASUU-FGN Impasse In Nigerian Newspapers Awoniyi Olalekan Ogundeji and Happiness Uduk, Ph.D	222
A Critical Stylistic Analysis of a Channels Television Show, 'Politics Today' Waliyah A. Akeju and Muhyideen Kolawole Ayuba	237
An Investigation on Functionality and Usage of Language Laboratories for Teaching Oral English in Colleges of Education in Bauchi State Bakoji Mohammed Fema, PhD, Alhaji Abubakar, PhD and Fatima Mohammed	249
A Pragmatic Investigation of the Speech of Former President Muhammadu Buhari on Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020 Habu Yusuf	262
Rhetoricity In Orality: An Analysis of Muhammadu Dan’Anace’s “Shagon Mafara” Garba Adamu, Ph.D and Ashiru Abdullahi	277
A Semantic Analysis of Selected Mwaghavul Proverbs Danji Sabo and Kyetu Mandyen Danlami	286
Investigating Linguistic Features of North-East Nigerian Suicide Notes Yunana Ahmed, Ph.D and Danladi, Daniel Boyi	300
A Morphological Study of Derivational Patterns In Android Smartphone Terminologies Ahmadu Mohammed Dauda, Ph.D and Abdulkarim Musa Yola	315
Lexical choices and Ideology in Nigeria’s Security and Development Discourse in the Nigeria’s Media Murjanatu Sulaiman-Shika	326
Syntax and Semantics Interface Mohammed Gambo, Ph.D	346
Colonial Legacy in Tunde Kelani's <i>Saworoide</i> : Language, Power, and Resistance Okunnuwa, Sunday J. Ph.D, Ibrahim, Wahab Adegbayi, and Sobande, Olukayode Olukemi	355

SECTION B: LITERATURE

- An Appraisal of Cult Symbols In The Selected Songs of American POP Artists
Tanimu, Abubakar (Prof) and Adekunle, Joseph 365
- Enlightenment for Empowerment: A Feminist Reading of Safiya Yero'S Najah
Manta G. Yadok and Ishaya: Bilyaminu Salman 381
- Arab-Muslim Immigrants and the Limits of Cultural Citizenship in H.M. Naqvi's *Home Boy*
Olamiposi Oyeleye, Ph.D., Oladiran Damilola Peju, Ph.D. and PatrickbCharles Alex, Ph.D. 395
- The Artist and Leadership Failure In Africa: A Study of Ngugi Wa Thiong'O'S Wizard of The Crow
Dr. Manasseh Terwase Iortyer, Prof. Jeff Godwin Doki and Bizuum Godwill Yadok 411
- Narratives of Conflict: A Literary Exploration of Boko Haram's Impact in Politics and Security in Nigeria's Northeast Since 2009
Markus Ishaku 421
- Literary Creativity and the Condition of the Nigerian Writer in the Age of Globalization and Capitalist Economy
Adebayo, Abidemi Olufemi, PhD and Bukola, Olubunmi Iyabo, M.A 431
- Amali's Faces of Shame as Reflection of Leadership at the Altar of Ethics and Decorum
Isah Ibrahim PhD 442
- Of Mothers as Mistresses: Jocasta Complex and Transference in Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's Season of Crimson Blossoms.
David Mikailu Ph.D. 452
- Stylistic Explorations of Love: Conceptual Metaphor In Mariama Bâ'S So Long a Letter and Zaynab Alkali'S The Virtuous Woman
Anwar Danjuma, Maryam Mukhtar Abdullahi, Muntari Babangida and Sulaiman Harisu 462
- The Influence of Nigerian Folktales on National Identity and Values
Jimoh, Olumide Yusuf, Ph.D. and Adedokun, James Adekunle 474
- Discontents and the Quest for National Rebirth in Karen King-Aribisala's Kicking Tongues
Okache C. Odey 487
- An Assessment of Performance of Bauchi State Senior Secondary School Students in Literature-In-English
Professor Asabe Sadiya Mohammed, Dr Alhaji Abubakar and Haruna Shuaibu Hardawa 496

Betwixt And Between Colonial Hegemony and Contemporaneity: Examining The Voyage of Transmutation In African Drama

Andrew Aondofa Nyikyaa 508

Investigating the Educational Advisory Roles of Tera Proverbs

Alheri Bulus 527

SECTION C: COMMUNICATION

The Media Influence on Economic Development Through Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

DANGO, Salamatu Eshi and ABDULLAHI, Hussaina Abaji 535

Social Media Discourse and Peace Negotiations in Contemporary Nigeria

Peter Ochefu Okpeh, Ph.D., Theodore Shey Nsairun and Okpeadua Sony Okpeadua, PhD 546

When Robots take over Journalism: systemic Considerations for Artificial Intelligence and Practical Realities in Nigerian Television Newsroom

Maggai Tsokwa and Tebrimam Useni Andefatso 560

Mitigating Fake News Through Media Literacy Education: The Perception and Experience of Masaka Market Traders in Karu

Ben Ita Odeba, Ayuba Ummah Ibrahim and Desmond Onyemechi Okocha, PhD. 574

An Assessment of Adherence to Journalism Code of Conduct among Journalists in Plateau State

Dorcas Agabison, Prof. Greg H. Ezeah, Maggai Tsokwa and Orya Theophilus Tertsea 597

An Assessment of the Two-Way Communication Model of Public Relations Used During the University of Jos School Fees Increase in 2023

James E. Amad, Evaristus J. Ugboma and Chidimma Precious Okechukwu 616

An Assessment of the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Business Communication in Lafia, Nasarawa state and Makurdi, Benue state, Central Nigeria

EIMOGA Audu 632

SECTION D: CREATIVE WORKS/BOOK REVIEW

Poems for Savannah Journal of Language, Literature and Communication Studies

Ismail Bala 647

The Loss-Land

Fatima Inuwa 652



Dustbins and Dreams Abdulkadir Mubarak	657
The Desperate: Desire of a Feminine Soul Faith Nkeri Aliyu	664
Gumakan Zamani: A Book Review Mohammad Abubakar M.	667



Literary Creativity and the Condition of the Nigerian Writer in the Age of Globalization and Capitalist Economy

Adebayo, Abidemi Olufemi, PhD

Department of English, Redeemer's University, Nigeria
femishakespeare@yahoo.com adebayofemi@run.edu.ng

Bukola, Olubunmi Iyabo, M.A.

Department of English, Redeemer's University, Nigeria
omotosooolu@run.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper examines the impact of social change on the Nigerian literary writer in the contemporary Nigerian society. The social change in the country, as in the rest of Africa, has been occasioned by globalization within a capitalist economy which Nigeria practices. Such change in the Nigerian social consciousness has made the African literary writer redefine his/her social identity and more than ever place emphasis on material acquisition. The new orientation of wealth acquisition, however, conflicts with the age-long stereotype of the African literary writer as an austere scholar whose main essence of living is to serve as a watchdog on the ills of the society. This is a reflection of the tenets of the philosophical theory of Determinism as the theoretical framework for the study. Globalization has exposed the Nigerian populace to glamorous lifestyle of Western celebrity, which the society expects the African literary writer to satisfy, in a stifling capitalist economy. Yet, literature, the means of income for the writer, has lost its dominance as the primary source of enlightenment in Nigeria. This may indicate that literary creativity is negatively affected in Nigeria. Consequently, vocational literary creativity may not be so lucrative to many people as a viable source of income. The writer is, therefore, caught between his/her role as the conscience of the society and the expectation of wealth acquisition that the glamour of globalization and an austere economy has made the society have of him/her.

Key words: Literature, Globalization, African literary writer, Capitalism, Social change

Introduction

The age of globalization and capitalist economy, in the context of the argument of this paper, may not be the best of time for the Nigerian literary writer. This is because the peculiarities of the present time have made the Nigerian literary writer encounter

social impediments in the course of functioning as the conscience of the Nigerian society. The Nigerian society has been replete with many impeding oddities such as wars, xenophobia, ethnic cleansing, corruption, terrorism, poverty, illiteracy, and infrastructural deficit, to mention but a few. The situation, in part, has constituted the



bane of the country's minimal economic development so far. The reason that Nigeria (as an African country) has made insignificant progress is the loss of the missing link (Layiwola, 2010). The missing link in this context manifests in a number of deplorable social conditions in Nigeria. These might be lack of access to energy as about 76 million Nigerians do not have access to electric power, yet energy is a source of power to industries as well as the general people's living environments. And as many people may agree, Nigeria is faced with extreme electricity outage (Sadik, 2015). Also, Nigeria is bedeviled with the disintegrating consequences of Boko Haram terrorist agitation which is the concern of Ahmed Yerima in the play *Pari*. Similarly, the missing link may be the weak Nigerian economy, and this has been attributed to lack of industrialization because in spite of the many strategic economic policies that the Nigerian government has employed in the management of the country's economy, Nigeria is still not industrialized (Adeleke, 2018). As an African country, Nigeria has had to contend with the adverse effect of colonization and religious hypocrisy because African intellectuals have indicated the distinctions between the views of the colonists and the realistic cultural stipulations as well as biblical claims. (Munene, 2006). Munene reveals further that African intellectuals opined that colonial rule was alien and as such illegitimate, and, therefore, it should be jettisoned. However, after failing to dislocate the colonialists, another strategy was desired by the indigenous occupants in venting their grievances. These instances point to and emphasize it

that the Nigerian society (as an African country) has had (and is having) its share of the turbulence that has bedeviled the African continent as a whole especially in the contemporary time, the era of globalization and capitalist economy.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is hinged on the core principle of Determinism as the theoretical framework of the research paper. Determinism is the perspective that all circumstances and happenings are determined absolutely by previous and by this existing factors. The Deterministic theory is relevant to this research because the fate of the Nigerian writer in the contemporary time has been occasioned and determined by the unrelenting impact of globalization alongside the stifling impact of the capitalist economy which Nigeria practices. The nexus between the fate of the Nigeria creative writer and the factors of globalization and capitalist economy constitutes that research debate that the writer is addressing in the paper.

The Research Methodological Approach

To carry out this research, the writer has employed the principles qualitative approach. This is because the qualitative research upholds the empirical principles to affirm the plausibility and acceptability of the positions established in the paper. This approach in all ramifications of consideration tends to negate the data-collection and analytical method. As a result of this, the non-numerical strategy has been adopted in the paper. This approach has been considered



suitable as a result of the circumstance that the research is motivated by rationalist principle. In addition to the non-numeric or rationalist tendencies in the research, the researcher has adopted the core principle of interdisciplinarianism which bridges the gaps that exist between the many divergent fields of human endeavours. In this particular context, it is the inter-fusion discourse between literary creative writing, globalization and capitalist economy in Nigeria. This is with the main objective of enumerating the crucial impact of Western frameworks such as globalization and capitalism on Nigerian art culture and literary creativity.

Review of Relevant Literatures

It is perhaps quite incontrovertible that literature has been uncomfortably and, perhaps, unduly, made to proffer solutions to societal problems, as it has been asserted that literature is:

the embodiment of the mores and values of a society. It also reflects the hopes and aspirations of that society. Literature is a veritable tool for building a fair and cultured society. It is a critical factor in striving for social and physical developments. (Abubakar, 219-220).

In order to find a way out for Nigeria from the despicable social situation it has been in, concerned individuals motivated by the quest for autochthonous rectitude, social order, and overriding angst have taken it upon themselves to write literary works with the core intention of

salvaging the Nigeria society. These individuals are known as Nigerian (African) literary writers. Writers of and on African philosophies and social circumstances in Nigeria have addressed the problems that have inflicted (and plagued) this West African nation. The gamut of their literary writings has covered the critical social topics such as rituals, influence of the divinities, corruption, religious hypocrisy and commercialization, tyranny, cultural renewal, (and in recent time) terrorism, to mention but a few. For example, Amos Tutuola portrays the untainted rawness of the Yoruba folklore in *Palm-wine Drinkard* (1952). It has been seen as transmogrified folk and fairytales (Weaver, 2008) whose essence is the explanation of soul immortality in Christianity (Onoyima, 2009). All of these point to the cultural aspect of the Nigerian socio-cultural life. A similar thematic pursuit is noted in the 1958 Chinua Achebe's magnum opus *Things Fall Apart* whose execution of the cultural agenda and artistic fecundity has made the text attain a height which only "few books anywhere on the planet can boast of" (Osofisan, 36).

In a similar vein, Wole Soyinka has addressed the Nigerian social situation in a number of ramifications in his literary writings, registering "his observations and reflections on the projects of nation-building" (Jeyifo, 218). To accomplish these projects of nation-building, Soyinka examines and consequently condemns tyranny in the African (including Nigerian) political system in *A Play of Giants* (1984). This was a sequel to an earlier creativity in 1960, *The Trials of Brother Jero*, in which he laments religious



commercialization and hypocrisy in Nigeria. The ramification of the Nigerian life, which Zaynab Alkali's ostensible concern in *The Stillborn* exemplifies, is the question of women and civilization in the modern Nigerian socio-cultural sphere. Alkali's strategy in this novel is to look at the endemic malaise in the Nigeria from the inter-link of the macro and micro realms of the Nigerian system. We see Tutuola, Achebe and Soyinka addressing the issues at the super-structure, stepping in the process, on the base realm. That is, they have addressed the issues that concern the government deriving legitimacy for doing so by re-directing the course of their advocacy to the people who constitute the base. However, since Alkali focuses on the gender question, the writer observes that this is her bid to connect individualism to collectivism thereby drawing the general attention of the different class-categories in the society to the *plight* and *fate* of the individual in the same society.

At this juncture, it behooves the writer to interrogate the attainment of this social responsibility which literature has been, as a matter of task, saddled with. In other words, has each of these writers changed the Nigerian society from the perspective of the topic of concern in his/her work? The problematic relativity of the response that each person may give to this may make one be satisfied with the assumption that the success of each work is the mere mention of such issues and the general receipt of such by the readership. If one considers it that the culture that Tutuola and Achebe were preserving then through the productions of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and *Things Fall Apart*,

respectively, is falling to the imposing influence of Westernization, one may conclude that the works have not succeeded. Also, when one considers it that the tyranny that Soyinka bemoans in *A Play of Giants* is currently manifesting in democratic governance in Nigeria (giving rise to such a coinage as *tyrannical democracy*) consequently and there is higher rate of religious merchandise in Nigeria today, one may then conclude that the two plays have not been successful.) This is just as the liberation of women from alleged social/cultural restriction may not be said to have been accomplished. This is because Africa is still regarded as a patriarchal society "where gender specification of role differentials is highly heightened, women are socially constructed and controlled by several impediments which demand them to be docile...." (Usoro, 203). To this end, one would conclude that the writers and their works have succeeded only to the extent that they have initialed the conversations on the socio-cultural (political and economic) topics which their angst has motivated; and kept such conversations on-going. Through their writings, awareness on the issues has been created. Such is seen as a matrix of the accomplishment of their works in the context of this research evaluation.

The Context of Globalization and Capitalist Economy

Globalization and capitalism are two phenomena that have irresistibly infiltrated the African (also Nigerian) social consciousness. In the context of this paper, these two landmark circumstances which have marked the difference between the pre-Globalization and pre-capitalism



era in Nigeria, and the contemporary time in the country are of peculiar significance. Globalization could be seen as the Westernization of the African mores, and Nigeria has had (is having) its shares of the effect of cultural Westernization. That is, the manifestation of globalization is palpable in Africa, today and it is particularly visible in the contemporary time in Nigeria. This is because Western ideals seen in the way of life of the Europeans and Americans, and as aptly signified in scientific advancement and technological innovation have pierced the African cultural realm. The implication of this is that the African milieu and way of life liken to the social life in Europe and America. The attesting testimonies of globalization are the internet (which is a conveyor of the agents of globalization from a region of the world to the rest of the world thereby making societies of the world alike (Mowforth and Munt, 2009). Illustrating the Western cultural transmission to the African continent appropriately are the agents of culture such as electronic banking, Mary Kay power, McDonald or Kentucky Fried Chicken (or the fast-food culture, generally), state-of-the-art automobiles, the rap music, the mobile phones, and the social media (such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram and so on) to mention but a few. All of these indices have introduced Africans (Nigerians) to what happens in another part of the world thereby making the peoples of the world unified as one community (Fyanka, 2014). What is obtainable from the above is that Africans have been exposed to another way of life as dictated by the United States, and this has eroded prevalent

indigenous practices. Such an exposure is known as civilization.

The second phenomenon is capitalism whose core tenet is profit maximization, hence, the exploitation of the consuming populace. The Nigerian economy as currently constituted and run is capitalist. In the first instance, the private sector constitutes the economy; government participation is minimal but policy guides are provided for regulations. The phenomenon of globalization through which people in different parts of the world receive international goods and services (Moynihan and Titley, 2012), has mobilized multinational companies to establish branches in Nigeria. Indigenous enterprises are also players in the private sector that run the Nigerian economy. The keen resolve and disposition of the capitalists to wealth acquisition through profit maximization does endanger strict discipline and ruthlessness in labour relations, rights, code of conduct and work ethics. These, often time, are unfavourable to the employee. The institutionalization of the unfavourable labour relations is the brainchild of the expatriates in Nigeria. Local employers of labour too, however, have emulated the policy-practice in running their companies. This sense of exploitation does not always allow the employed the latitude of self discovery and innovation.

Two developments have arisen from the advent of globalization and capitalist economy in Africa (Nigeria in focus), in terms of the impact they have on the people or the way Nigerians have received these two phenomena. In the first instance, globalization has



brought ostentation in the lifestyle of the people of Nigeria. Two spheres of globalization have brought the quest for conspicuous consumption as the core of the consumption pattern of Nigerians. The access to the internet has made Nigeria exposed to Western aesthetics and glamour which are imported to the country at a great cost. The telephone revolution too has drained the purse of the people as attempts are made by Nigerians consistently to keep tab on latest productions of the telephone as a mark of sophistication and class establishment. In general, globalization has made the standard of living of Nigerians to be on the fast lane. This twist of event is, however, a reverse receipt of globalization because the concept itself is innovative and is desirous by all after all in the spirit of externalization of cultural concepts, Dasyuva (2014) desires and, consequently, seeks the globalization of the Yoruba *omoluabi* concept when he examines, as a form of prognostication, the significance of the Yoruba character-molding concept at the global stage. In any case, the reverse receipt and the inimical implication of globalization are underscored here for the peculiar purpose of the goal of this study. The capitalist economy, however, is a denial of access to wealth for the employee in Nigeria, as the living wage is not paid, pension deductions are unremitted, productive hours or time is taken away from the employee. All these lead the employee into penury. From the perspective of small scale industry or sole proprietorship, the exchange rate of the naira to the dollars keeps rising and cost of production always skyrockets. Service providers like mobile operators and banks deduct hidden charges; and renting

apartments especially for business intent in choice areas costs a great deal. The scenario created is such that the glamour/comfort of modern living is created by globalization while the capitalist economy makes this daunting if attainable at all.

The Dilemma of the Nigerian Literary Writer

The literary writer has devoted himself/herself to the formation and nurturing of the conscience of the human society. From the Classical age to the present time, the literary writer has functioned as the teacher, motivator, advocate, tribune, bastion and above all, the regulator of the values, ideals and focus of the society. In Nigeria, these roles have been efficiently performed by such literary icons as Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Cyprian Ekwensi, Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, Zaynab Alkali, Femi Osofisan, Ahmed Yerima and in the contemporary time Ngozi Chimmanmada Adichie. Each of these writers has addressed an array of Nigerian socio-political and cultural topics with a view to proffering solution to them. These range from mythological mystical theme of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* and Achebe's repulsion of the erosion of indigenous culture by the infiltration of the West in *Things Fall Apart* (representing the pre-independence era) to Soyinka's denouncement of despotism in *A Play of Giant* (representing the post-independence age), extending to the Yerima's portrayal of the marginal destructive consequence of the Boko Haram terrorism in the North East of Nigeria. Through the awareness they have



created, they have served as the conscience of the Nigerian society.

However, can the Nigerian literary writer sustain this responsibility? Can he/she remain the conscience of society? Can he/she continue to serve as the bastion, the vanguard, or the tribune of the society in the contemporary money-centered Nigerian consciousness? Perhaps, the responses to these posers are in the negative. The African literary writer cannot remain the conscience of the society in the contemporary times. It needs be underscored that the contemporary Nigerian sensibility is at variance with what used to be at the time that the first generation of writers broke into the writing enterprise. At the time, it was a thing of the pride of the society that the sons and daughters of the soil were intellectually efficient to be able writers for the world. The intellectual capabilities of these writers were interpreted by the Nigerian people and perhaps the people of the West as the capabilities of the Nigerian people. It was a collective accomplishment. Today, however, communalism has caved in, justifiably though, for individualism, whereas collectivism, as indigenous goodwill, made Soyinka, Achebe and Alkali intellectual celebrities of unquantifiable fame. Nowadays, literary writers are renowned among intellectuals only. They are read and celebrated only within the intelligentsia. During the time of the penetration of the first generation Nigerian writers into the writing/literary enclave in Africa, literature was taken as a source of public entertainment and enlightenment. Two significant reasons were responsible for this. The first is

that Nigeria was just breaking into the limelight of Western education, from aboriginal civilization, and these were the first indigenous scholars trained by the West. Again, there were no other competing platforms of entertainment. Today, there is a proliferation of writers and other means of entertainment and enlightenment, such as cable television and social media. Therefore, there is no as much prestige for the African literary writer in relation to how it was during the time of Soyinka and his contemporaries.

The loss of significant prestige that the African literary writer has suffered is worsened by the loss of values and ethical standards among Nigerians, disregarding the priceless value of integrity (Lysias, 2010). The society expects every individual to be proud of attaining certain level of material acquisition, which, itself, is an oddity of globalization in Nigeria. The glamour that globalization engenders in Africa (Nigeria) has raised the standard for doing well economically in the contemporary time. There has been a fall in the African cultural values. Money or material acquisition is valued more than the taunted virtuous lifestyle of the aboriginal Africans. The days are obviously gone when the trademark of the success of the African/Nigerian literary writer or when the hallmark of scholarship was overgrown beard, unkempt, and a rickety car with something slightly falling short of a cave as his abode. The African/Nigerian literary writer too is compelled by the new cultural attitude and demand to amass and control wealth before he or she can earn a personality and prestige. The writer, therefore, aspires to live in modern mansions of his/her own, ride his/her



own executive cars, and purchase the Apple computer and the Galaxy Note Tablet: This portrays modern lifestyle which society expects everyone to acquire. But the exposure to the Western items of life comfort is hindered by an unbecoming economic manifestation—the effects of the capitalist economy. In Africa (Nigeria) today, capitalism has clashed with African communalism (Obafemi 2014). To this end, income is marginally lower than demand or expenses. It is even worse in the current Nigerian economy where inflation rises exponentially “moving from 12 percent in March 2016 to 18.72 percent in January 2017 in a country whose economy has just exited recession (Ebi, 2017) In this case, the purchasing value of a person’s income devalues. One may wonder what the income of a professional literary writer in the modern time is! It could be arguably asserted that the literary writer who does so professionally nowadays may not be making substantial income from literary writing, such that a descent living can be made from professional literary writing, solely. This situation arises from the fact that literature has seized to be a dominant means of social and general entertainment. Such loss or seizure is borne out of the stiff competition that other means (especially, electronic) of entertainment poses. Native nationalism and communal goodwill which the earliest (first generation) writers enjoyed has seized. Books are very costly too. Literature has been restricted to the academic circles, within the university and other academic institutions. Authorial renown, too, is minimal, and hardly have other upcoming writers been able to penetrate the psyche of the people

apart from the first generation writers in the strict real sense of it. All of these have eventuated in low, very low, sales of literary texts. How could an individual choose literary writing, professionally? One may then think about part-time writing as a way out of the imbroglio. Even in this situation, writing, which is supposed to be hallowed, will suffer in the sense that writing would not be made a priority since it cannot provide huge instant income. The society then suffers for it as a society where writing, the conscience and guide of the nation, is relegated is bound to derail, one may prognosticate.

The angst and social commitment of a potential literary writer in Nigeria is further wounded by the corrupt flamboyance and ineptitude of the country’s political leadership. The status quo is such that the writer, being an intellectual, who is expected to reason for the society, is typically assumed to be a devoted ascetic. However, the situation in the political leadership in Nigeria is not fascinating to the expectedly ascetic writer. There is enormous corruption in the Nigerian political class and there are “constant accusations of corruption” by the people and there is “the ineffectiveness of the anti-corruption commission to act on any single case” (at a point in time) (Osuntokun, 14). The constancy of the accusations of corruption against the political class in Nigeria exudes the hugeness of corruption in the Nigerian government circle. The most germane to this paper, however is the flamboyant ostentation that illicit funds afford the political class. Nigerian newspapers are replete with reports of the property Nigerian politicians



acquired in Dubai, the United States, as well as the expensive get-togethers they do organize in choice cities across the world. When the *drivers* of the economy, the political leadership, is flaunting affluence indiscriminately, does it align that a writer would subject him/herself to an austere, ascetic or hermitic life—a life of penury and squalor? Could that be justified? It would be recalled that the Nigerian society is on the fast lane in search of wealth and the political leaders, who are supposed to be exemplary in discipline, are aligning with the reckless sensibility. This does not make the views of the writer and scholar count (Adeleke 4).

The Factor of the Publishers

The publisher is contributory to the non-lucrative twist to writing in Nigeria in this era of globalization and capitalist economy. Profit motivation, justifiably though, defines which author a publishing house would publish. The established authors, renowned names, such as Wole Soyinka or Adiche are published preferably. It is these names that are sold in actual sense. This is obvious in a situation whereby the name of the author comes first before the title of the text itself. In fact, the name of the author (renowned) is printed in bigger characters such that the title of the text is subsumed under the name of the authors. In certain instances, the picture of the author dominates the cover page. In any case, there is a justification for the strict economic/materialistic consideration that the publishing houses attach to a manuscript before the eventual publication. This is that these publishing houses are not for charity,

they have employees on their payrolls. They have equipment and machinery to maintain. And above all these, the owners of the publishing establishments are subjects to the influence of economic implication of globalization and capitalist orientation which has pervaded the nooks and crannies of the Nigerian life. The society expects them to have tangible achievement attached to their labour and investment in the publishing industry. This is just as the society expects their employees to make remarkable achievements as evidence of their service (or servitude). This often causes the payrolls to increase constantly; and the inflation in the country's economy makes the cost of maintenance rise. The only way out of the economic convulsion the publishing outlets have been subjected to in Nigeria is the strategic namedropping on and the *sale* of the established literary names and personalities.

The dominance of the first generation literary luminaries has extended to the globalization and capitalist economy. The clout and reverence people created for them as a result of aboriginal goodwill endures till the present time. Such clout, it is safe to say, is inimical to the growth of young literary artists or creative writers. This situation suggests that literary creativity has ended with the old brigades who were trained at the University of Ibadan, and who formerly made Ibadan the capital of Africa's literary creativity. But Ibadan has ceased to be the hub of literary creativity (Osofisan, 2005), and this means that there are talents elsewhere in Nigeria across ages and generations.



In conclusion

The Nigerian literary writer is in dilemma. He or She is divided between the fervency of his or her social commitment and the unfavourable social change which makes absolute devotion to social cause unworthy. The change in the Nigerian social consciousness is attributed to the influence of globalization which has infiltrated the psyche of the people of Nigeria in the contemporary time. The adverse receipt of globalization, that is the extreme interpretation of what globalization stands for, glamorous material acquisition, for instance, is worsened by the exploitative capitalist economic situation in the country. The Nigerian literary writer is burdened by the high expectation of materialism which is dependent on enabling economy. However, the capitalist Nigerian economy stymies financial access, particularly that the product of the writer, that is, literary productions enjoy poor acceptance by the contemporary Nigerian populace. This is because literature has lost its prestige as the sole means of general enlightenment, knowledge, and entertainment. Therefore, since the modern-day Nigerian literary writer battles to make ends meet in a harsh economy, and that the intellectual cannot and is no longer a hermit or an ascetic, literary creativity is consequently non-lucrative and at the ebb in Nigeria.

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Author's Biodata: Adebayo, Abidemi Olufemi teaches African Literature and Culture in the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Redeemer's University, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria. He has published extensively both locally and internationally. His areas of specialization include African literature and culture in Social Media. emails femishakespeare@yahoo.com
adebayofemi@run.edu.ng

Bukola, Olubunmi Iyabo teaches African Literature in the Department of English, Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria email address : omotosoolu@run.edu.ng