Media, Democracy and Development: A Literary Perspective

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Abstract

This paper investigates the efficacies and implications of media on Nigeria's democracy and development through the lens of fiction. The paper is conceived on the assumption that both fiction and media are tools for the dissemination of information for democracy and development in Nigeria. It is discovered that Literature, like the media, conveys information and enlightens the public on democracy and development. That literature critiques media bias and collaboration with government in propaganda and manipulation of public information which is inimical to Nigeria's democratic process, practice and development. It is also found that fiction exposes the intimidation of the media by the political power elites who are opposed to the principles of the rule of law, true democracy and sustainable national development. Hence, creating mass poverty, disease, ignorance, national economic stagnation and political retrogression. The paper deploys intertextuality theory as its guiding principle to provide "Humanistic Perspectives in a Technological World" (Richard et. all. 2014, p. 97), and the qualitative text-based method as its tool of analysis. The paper concludes by recommending the recognition of literary discourses as crucial communication/information tools in the articulation and formulation of public policy on mobilisation and enlightenment in the promotion of sustainable democracy and national development.

Keywords: Media, Democracy, Development, Fiction and Intertextuality.

Introduction

The relationship between fictional world and the real world has since time immemorial received scholarly attention in the fields of theory and practice of fiction. The discussions on the novel is primarily on its true replication of the real, or a "made up" reflection; the responsibilities of the novelist to make events in his texts to properly compare with what might have happened in the real world is an essential obligation to constitute essential theoretical input in the writing of the novel (Hoffman & Murphy, 2005, p. 9). Derrida (1993) holds that:

> …every text given over to the public space, relatively legible or intelligible, but of which the content, the meaning, the reference, the signatory and the addressee are not fully determinable realities … can become a literary thing (p. 7).

Media and literature play crucial roles in democracy by providing citizens with information, facilitating public discourse, shaping public opinion, sensitisation for development and holding those in power liable for the entire acts and processes of governance.

In communication, media are the communication outlets or tools used to store and deliver information (Rouse, 2017). The term media is generally referred to as components of the mass media industry: print media, publishing, the news media, photography, cinema, broadcasting (radio and television), digital media and advertising (Martin et. al. 2009). This, by analogy, suggests literature and its genres: Novel, drama and poetry in their function of storing and delivery of contents. The term media in its modern application relating to communication channels was first used by a Canadian communications theorist, McLuhan in *Counterblast* (1954) where he held that "The media are not toys; they should not be in the hands of Mother Goose and Peter Pan executives. They can be entrusted only to new artists because they are art forms" (p. 14), thus, aligning media to "art forms" which suggests literature etc. Accordingly, literature is defined, like media, as "one of the means or channels of general communication, information, or entertainment in society through cultural means…" (Hoffman & Murphy, 2005, p. 97) which nurtures the development of critical thinking and rationality in man's reaction to socio-political and economic transformation of the society.

To this end, democracy is a system of government in which sovereignty is devolved in the people or the entire citizens of a country (Britannica, 2023). Accordingly, democracy can either be parliamentary or presidential (Tangian, 2020). Consequentially, it can also be direct - in which the people have the direct authority to deliberate and decide legislation; or representative - in which the people select governing bureaucrats through elections from among "the people" to exercise delegated authority or power by obtaining majority votes (Lock, 2013, p. 213). However, the crucial issues of majority and minority interests are counterbalanced via the efficacies of the constitution and the supreme court. This is usually through securing the rights of all to freedoms (Oxford English Dictionary; Walkins, 1970).

Therefore, both literature and media are communication tools by means of which communal interactions: dialogues and discourses take place. This implies the storage and interchange of messages, ideas, information or events from one person to another, or from one place to another: done with the sole aim of informing, awakening, sensitising, stimulating, motivating, inspiring etc. and

stimulate in the populace, a productive and positive attitudinal change in the perception of individual life and collective existence. In other words, both media and literature have the common objective of smoothening man's cognitive perception of the struggles for liberty, freedom and the attainment of sustainable development as both (literature and media) watch, document and report the extent of compliance to the "rule of the people" as against the absurdities of the "rule of an elite" (Wilson, 2006, p. 511).

This paper therefore, seeks to provide "Humanistic Perspectives in a Technological World" (Richard et. all. 2014, p. 97) through the juxtaposition of humanities, social science, science/technology to create a more durable perception of human dignity and existence in the context of interactive dialogues for development.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts intertextuality theory in its attempt to explicate the common objectives of humanities, social sciences and technology to provide "Humanistic Perspectives in a Technological World" (Richard et. all., 2014, p. 97) via the lens of literature. Intertextuality is a literary theory which aims to understand literature (text) by relating it to other texts through direct compositional strategies, such as quotations, allusions, analogies etc. Northrop Frye, in *Anatomy of Criticism* sees literature as an entity containing life and reality in a system of verbal relationships. He also maintains that intertextuality "subsumes the work of 'major' authors with that of 'minor' figures in a multiple positional typology based on relation and difference" (as cited in Clayton & Rothstein, 1991, p. 17).

Literature and Corruption

Lindfors (2004) holds that "Achebe's novel should be recognised as a devastating satire in which Achebe heaped scorn on independent Africa by picturing one part of it just as it was" (p. 278). *A Man of the People* (1966) is a story about an ambitious young teacher, Odille Samalu. Odille hates M.A. Nanga, his previous teacher because of his fraudulent trait and corruption. This corrupt trait led to the termination of the political system and process by a military coup. *A Man of the People* (1966) represents the political and social situations in postcolonial Nigeria. Achebe possibly aims to draw attention to Nigeria's unpreparedness to independence, which produced unprepared and ill-equipped political players as political leaders, whose regime, Heywood (1975) described as a "cesspool of corruption and misrule" (p. 82). However, Dwivedi (2008) adds that "Nigeria is a place where leaders who had fought for independence became traitors after

attaining power, and sacrificed their country in exchange for middle-class comfort" (p. 3).

This is therefore, implicit that egocentric leaders at independence, to a greater extent, laid the foundational legacy of series of leadership drawbacks: nepotism, corruption, materialism, misinformation etc. which combined to suffocate the people, the democratic process, the media - the supposed watchdog of the suffering populace and, national economic development. "They want to share out the wealth of the country between them. That is why you must reject both" (AMP, p. 139). The media cannot portray this as vivid, lucid and clear as fiction. Instead, the media collaborates with government and so compromises its civic responsibilities by embarking on biased reportage and suppression of alternative voices. The scene was set when, all of a sudden:

> …came the slump in the international coffee market. Overnight (or so it seemed to us) the Government had a dangerous financial crisis on its hands. Coffee was the prop of our economy just as coffee farmers were the bulwark of the P.O.P. (AMP, p. 3).

As characteristic of Nigerian Politicking: prioritising personal political interests to the detriment of collective national development, the P.O.P. government decides to rape the national currency, like the current rape of the Nigerian currency via the politics of subsidy removal and devaluation which, inflates the cost of living and frustrate realistic economic progress for the short term electoral victory of the ruling P. O. P and the long term interest of foreign financiers – IMF and World bank. As the media always struggles to contend with and avoid sanctions, intimidation and direct brutality by government through thugs and or the police, it compromises its constitutional duties in reportage to favour government. By extension, the media compromised public rights to knowledge, prudence and information about political situation. Literature reports thus:

> The Minister of Finance at that time was a first-rate economist with a Ph.D. in public finance. He presented to the cabinet a complete plan for dealing with the situation. The Prime Minister said "No" to the plan. He was not going to risk losing the election by cutting down the price paid to coffee planters at that critical moment; the National Bank should be instructed to print fifteen million pounds. Two-third of the cabinet supported the Minister. The next morning the Prime Minister sacked them and in the evening he broadcast to the nation. He said the dismissed ministers

> were conspirators and traitors who had teamed up with foreign saboteurs to destroy the new nation (AMP, pp. 3-4).

This portrays the parrot-like report by the media that further complicates the fraudulent political truncation of Nigeria's national security, constitutional democracy and national development. In this situation, Okoko (2006) holds that "materialism, corruption, injustice and exploitation become the vague rather than the bane" (p. 10). Thus, fiction envisioned the ugly political corruption and the docility of the media in Nigerian society in a more practicable way. The character of Nanga is a symbolic illustration of this personality dilemma throughout *A Man of the People (*1966*)*. Nanga is seen striving to maintain his grip on power, regardless of his being ineptitude. This is further clarified by Odille's speech when he says: "…the trouble in our nation is that none of us had been indoors … the shelter would subvert and bring down the whole house" (AMP: p. 42). Odille's speech exposes how power and wealth can seduce ordinary people; make them vulnerable and greedy, including the media. By way of a definition, "…greed is the unscrupulous, uncontrollable desire to accumulate more and more wealth…" (Etim, 2004, p. 293) as seen in Nanga's in reference to Nigerian politicians. This suggests that, the elitist's desire to amass affluence severed the people from humanity and flanged them into perpetual poverty, unsurmountable exploitation and subjection by the power elites and their surrogate cohorts. This naive and inept psychological attitude "which inspired … you chop, me self-chop, palaver finish" (AMP, p. 167), allows "(t)he leaders abuse their posts to enrich themselves at the nation's expense" (Macheka, 2012, p. 14). It is apparent that politicians in Nigeria, as symbolic to Africa, personalise national or common resources of nation rather than use it for the benefit of all Nigerian citizens, who, in one way or the other, have joined in the fight for independence. This is how fiction complements media by embarking on the ugly and harsh task of public information for public responsibility and prudent socio-political development and security of Nigeria and Africa.

Literature and the Media

Achebe symbolises the entire deceptive qualities of both the Nigerian politicians, as in the character of Honourable Chief M. A. Nanga and the political process, as in the naïve public attitudes. Nanga's pretences are betrayed during his visit to and speech at Anata Grammar School. In reality, Nanga is not only corrupt but cynical and devoid of political morality and vision which combined to make him "dumb, ignorant and unintelligent" (Zapata, 1993, p. 215). In other words, Nigerian leaders who assumed political control following independence are

unskilled, inept and semi-illiterates who took delight in amassing power and authority through wealth. Accordingly, this situation allowed those politicians, who "…are surrogates of western values, and these values promote the pragmatic individual, at the detriment of African cultural values of collectivism" to take charge of African economies thereby misappropriating Africa (Duerden & Pieterse, 1972, p. 97). The media cannot report this without incurring the wrath of government but fiction, through its various poetic licences and cultural perimeters could complement this deficiency by providing imaginative and holistic portrayal of the situation with minimal or zero risks.

Literature and Democracy

True democracy is a good thing, both intrinsically and instrumentally. Intrinsically, it is a necessary component of the ability of individual to live freely and autonomously. Instrumentally, it is an institutional guarantee that the policies and laws created by a government will have a reasonable fit with the fundamental interests of the people. Thus, true democracy is intended to be a central determinant of the quality of life, and a fundamental element in the ability of men and women to live freely and autonomously as human beings. Alas, this is not so in developing countries like Nigeria and in a continent like Africa.

But before we can have great confidence in the above utterances, we need to look more closely at the meaning of democracy and democratic citizenship in relation to several important empirical questions: Do the Nigerian democratic institutions facilitate economic development of the right kind? And Do Nigerian democratic institutions guarantee that government policies and laws will reflect the fundamental interests of the people? Therefore, development of the right kind can be sorted out through informed and enlightened discourses which the media, on behalf of the people, must lead in its functions as the watchdog of the people and the fourth estate of the realm. Alas! The contrary is the case, "I remember this broadcast very well. of course no one knew the truth at that time. The newspapers and the radio carried the Prime Minister's version of the story. We were very indignant" (AMP, p. 4) which shows artistic indictment of the media. Instead of informing the general public about the truth, the Nigerian media only conspires with the elites against Nigeria, the security of people and national development. Odili clearly told us that "It was at this point that I first noticed a new dangerous and sinister note in the universal outcry" (AMP, p. 4) as "The Daily Chronicle, … had pointed out in an editorial that the miscreant Gang, as the dismissed ministers were now called, were all university people and highly educated professional men. (I have preserved a cutting of that editorial)":

> Let us now and for all time extract from our body-politic as a dentist extract a stinking tooth all those decadent stooges versed in text-book economics and aping the white man's mannerism and way of speaking. We are proud to be Africans. Our true leaders are not those intoxicated with their Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard degrees but those who speak the language of the people. Away with the damnable and expensive university education which only alienate an African from his rich and ancient culture and puts him above his people (AMP, p. 4).

This indicates Achebe's fictional lamentation and critique of the emerging subservient democratic system, dominated by ignorant participants whose only mission is no more than self-enrichment through collaboration with or manipulation of security, financial and democratic organs of governance: the national Assembly, the Central Bank, the media, police and the judiciary. This also exposes most of African or Nigerian politicians' false political and legal claims with wider implication that unduly commit and obligate the citizens without legitimate public consent. The use of such pronouns as "we", "us", "our" is an artistic signification of the violation of the citizens' fundamental rights of self-determination, self-expression and freedom of choice. It also betrayed the arbitrary nature of Nigerian legislative and judicial processes which the media failed to interrogate. Odili illustrates this media laxity thus:

> I remember the figure of Dr Makinde the ex-Minister of Finance as he got up to speak – tall, calm, sorrowful and superior. I strained my ears to catch his words. The entire house, including the Prime Minister tried to shout him down. It was a most edifying spectacle. The Speaker broke his mallet ostensibly trying to maintain order, but you could see he was enjoying the commotion. The public gallery yelled down its abuses. 'Traitor', 'Coward', 'Doctor of fork your Mother'. This last was contributed from the gallery by the *Daily Chronicle*, who sat close to me. Encourage, no doubt, by the volume of laughter this piece of witticism had earned him in the gallery he proceeded the next morning to print it in his paper. The spelling is his (AMP, p. 7).

It is through this poetic testimony that one can deduce the extent of this collaboration between government and the media. It is equally through this singular means can one assess the extent of public commitment to national security, democratisation and development on the part of the media. The media is

shown to have abdicated its constitutional and legitimate function of interrogating the direction of our democracy, instead, it delved into biased reportage and political propaganda that support embezzlement of public funds, suppressed social developments and obliterated national security information in Nigeria. Therefore, the media is, literary adjudged to be an accomplice to under-developing Nigeria and the contraction of civilisation of the citizens. This unethical attitude of the media, apart from under-developing the intellectual capacities of the people, allows executive arrogance, greed and unconstitutional violations that tramp upon the constitutional rights of citizens and gain in setting the nation into unjustified ethnic conflicts. It also creates arbitrary and selfish manipulation of the law, violation of minority interests and denial of self-expression or suppression of other voices. In his confusion, the narrator laments:

> I suppose I thought the whole performance rather peculiar. You must remember that at that point no one has any reason to think there might be another side to the story. The Prime Minister was still talking. Then he made the now famous (or infamous) solemn declaration: 'From today we must watch and guard our hard-won freedom jealously. Never again must we entrust our destiny and the destiny of Africa to hybrid class of Western-educated and snobbish intellectuals who will not hesitate to sell their mothers for a mess of pottage …' (AMP, p. 6).

This absurd socio-political situation, like the arrogant pronouncement of subsidy removal by the sitting President of Nigeria: devoid of due processes, consultations with organs of government, was responsible for the collapse of most of the so called democratic governments in Africa. It suffices at this point to emphasise that democracy cannot survive without the principles of the rule of law. *A Man of the People* (1966) demonstrates a country – Nigeria and or continent – Africa where people are governed under the principles of *the rule by law* as opposed to *the rule of law*. In the former, the rulers employ the law to justify their nefarious acts which is sanctioned by guided legislations and suppressed judicial declarations. In the latter, all citizens are equal before the law without any prejudices to social status. Supreme decision rests with the court of law whose operation is also guided by law. This is the only way out of the ugly situation "which inspired …' you chop, me self-chop, palaver finish' (AMP, p. 167) syndrome which signifies cynical submission to the dominant evil and acceptance of communal defeat. The docility of the media and its collaboration with government has fuelled the people's cynicism thus: "Let them eat … after all when the white men used to do all the eating did we commit suicide?' of course not. And where is the all-

powerful white man today? He came, he ate and he went" (AMP, pp. 162-163) thus accepting the false historical experience as fact. Hence, illustrating the adversity and its cynical acceptance as fate.

Development and the Media in Literature

In *The Famished Road* (1991), Ade foresaw the ultimate chaos and change that might overturn the table and, in a way, bring change as a means of sustaining hope in Nigeria:

> There will be changes. Coups. Soldiers everywhere. Ugliness. Blindness. And when people least expect it a great transformation is going to take place in the world. Suffering people will know justice and beauty. A wonderful change is coming from far away and people will realize the great meaning of struggle and hope. There will be peace. Then people will forget. Then it will all start again, getting worse, getting better. Don't fear. You will always have something to struggle for, even if it is beauty or joy (TFR, 478).

In this text, Ben Okri clearly portrays the political despair caused by manipulation of the entire political organs/processes: the law, state security organs, the media etc. This must significantly impact on security, democracy and development. Yet, within the commotion ease will emerge. As Azaro's spirit-companions queried: "So why has it taken so long to build so little?" (TFR, 329). Ironically, Dad answered thus, "Our people are very powerful in spirit. They have all kinds of powers. We are forgetting these powers. Now, all the power that people have is selfishness, money, and politics" (TFR, 70). This sad psychological transformation provides another theory that explains the aptitude which differentiates between fiction and media; the quest for affluence, power and mediocratic relevance than national integration and development. This is the effect of secular materialism infused in the adopted alien system. It is apparent that *The Famished Road* (1991) seeks the rejuvenation of the media through the character of Joshua, the photographer. It creates a diligently factual, free, popular, pro-active and people-oriented media that emanates from the people without any prejudices or egoistic interests. This signifies a literary rejection of the conventional media due to the public perception of the inherent exclusion of other voices and manipulation of information. To demonstrate his poetic perception of the media, especially when the ruling party, the party of the rich is feeding the populace with "the rotten milk of politics" Dad is made to cry out "They had poisoned us with the milk", and:

> The photographer hobbled about, from housefront to housefront, holding his stomach, his face wretched and pale. Bravely, he took pictures of the milk-heaps and vomit outside the houses, and got the women and children to pose round them. He took shots of sick children, men in contorted forms of agony, women in attitudes of hungry outrage (TFR 132).

This situation represents the literary notion of the media and so literature exposes and critiques this silence and collaboration of the media which stagnate the people and national development. This action by Joshua, the photographer symbolises a poetic disapproval of conventional media practice which violates the norms in scientific media function – dissemination of information, public enlightenment, mobilisation for cooperative entrepreneurship for national development, security and global relevance. The media does just the opposite by sending false data to the outside world hence, harboring the truth about the condition of human life in Nigeria and, or Africa. Therefore, Joshua's photographs provide alternative instrument of public information, foreign relations or disseminationof information about human condition for the attention of the World communities.

It is therefore, clear that literature, due to its cultural affinity, is capable of representing corruption and insecurity and how these have permeated into the entire fabric of Nigeria's social life, including the information system which is bastardised through induced dissemination of false and devious data that imperils national unity, security, democracy and development. In this difficult context, fiction is the only alternative resort for reliable information, history and cultural identity; a crucial prerequisite for the socioeconomic and political development of a secured and safe environment – Nigeria.

Conclusion

The discussion above shows that both literature and media have similar social responsibility and utility: dissemination of information to the public to facilitate democracy and social development in a secured country or environment. Media and literature only differ in their method and style of functionality. Literature represents the entire society and critiques the excesses and short-falls of every social institution, including the media via poetic representations of functional relationships of organs of state: security, democracy, development and information dissemination in Nigeria. This marked function differentiates literature from media. Fiction is a poetic reflection of the society as it is in a particular historical period. This allows it to also depict the political intimidation

of media by the disgruntled political power elites who perpetrated the evils that retard Nigeria's security networks, democratic institutions and national development. Media biases in its collaboration with government to distort and falsify information through misleading account of public events is represented and critiqued and, the consequences and solutions to these are also highlighted.

Essentially, interactive fictional involvement of the audience through imaginative rendition of the story, narrative or information enables the public to not only internalise the problem but develop a cognitive intuition into the possible solutions to the problem. Therefore, literature as a form of literary discourse should be recognised as crucial communication/information tool in the articulation and formulation of public policy on information, mobilisation and enlightenment in the promotion of sustainable national security, democracy and development in Africa.

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