

## CANONISATION AS A FACTOR IN A FUNCTIONAL NIGERIAN LITERARY CULTURE

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### ABSTRACT

The sociological role of the African literary enterprise of which Modern Nigerian creative writings are a part, is today accentuated by the urgent need to intervene in the social, political and economic condition of modern African societies. The Nigerian condition lends itself to any discourse, properly constructed, in tandem with this sociological function; owing to the massive presence of the largely politically disconnected of the Nigerian populace, and the growing irresponsibility of the Nigerian political class with its attendant socio-economic and political crises. This is more significant at a time when the efforts of the United Nations in envisioning a global transformation platform through sustainable development goals are gaining momentum. The canonising processes are often indirectly or subtly implicated in the discourse of the colonial and postcolonial condition of Nigeria, thus are suspect in the case of the lingering Nigeria's cultural disorientation, mis-socialisation, economic stagnation and political impasse. There is need to activate the discursive framework of the contemporary Nigerian canonising processes vis-à-vis the nation's literary productions, with a view to correctly placing the relevance and capacity of the literature in meaningfully participating in the nation's social processes and her aspiration towards sustainable development initiatives. Understanding canon processes with regard to the Nigerian literary enterprise could enhance knowledge of the place of the country's creative writings in her affairs, and, by extension, that of the modern African literary practice in the affairs of contemporary Africa.

**Keywords:** Literary sociology, Literary enterprise, Literary Canonisation, Critical, Creative, literary tradition, Canon.

## INTRODUCTION

[...] art reveals and records the innumerable variations of individuality which contribute to the laws and standards of behavior established by science and philosophy. If science declares the laws which govern the world of material things, art shows human behavior in its relation to these laws<sup>1</sup>

Most generally, canons are seen as the means to regulate cultural practices, beliefs and other markers of identity<sup>2</sup>

The social impact of literature does not just exist. It is a reality that manifests in a myriad of ways across time and place. Literary canonisation or the way literary works emerge as “privileged” or having “special status” within a culture<sup>3</sup> belongs in this literary sociology. Even in the Western cultures where the claim is often made that literature is but for its sake alone, it is hard to deny literature its ultimate impact on the soul of an individual that literature has engaged (creative paradigm) or that has engaged literature (critical paradigm – either casual or formal). With regard to Africa where social formations have been redefined, shaped and continually influenced by the West, the sociological role of literature is a matter of primacy both on account of the pressure of the colonial experiences and in terms of the original condition of the art of the people. To speak of the “natural condition” of art is to evoke the literary history of a people which is often best traced from the milieu of the society’s dependence on the oral medium for its organisation, sustenance and intergenerational transfer of heritages and achievements. Many, if not all African cultures, still retain that ancient condition, if only in part. Notable are those constituting the country called Nigeria.

To speak of Nigeria as a multi-culture is to reiterate the salient point which has been repeated over time in different fora that the name “Nigeria” just as its referent are phenomena of colonial political administration of peoples of diverse histories and cultures but who, using the parameter of the historico-cultural-cum-political parameters, in spite of major differences, still share values that could make co-habitation possible. And indeed, the various cultural units constituting the country have cohabited comparably well in spite of major crises that have threatened their existence as a “nation”<sup>4</sup> and challenges that the country continues to face, particularly at its economic and political frontiers. Suffice to say that a long period of cohabitation has

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<sup>1</sup>This is John K. Ewers’ as quoted by Peter A. Foulkes. Peter A. Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda*. London: Methuen and Co. Limited, 1983, 1.

<sup>2</sup>See “The Literary Canon as Process: Early Novels by Heinrich and Thomas Mann in their Contemporary Reception.” <http://www.law.duke.edu/edtech/staff/wmiller/diss/introd.htm>. Accessed 3/25/2004. (Henceforth, “Literary Canon as Process”).

<sup>3</sup>This definition as applied by Tanure Ojaide is apt for the present discourse. Tanure Ojaide, “Examining Canonisation in Modern African Literature.” *Asiatic*. Vol. 3. No. 1. (2009): 2.

<sup>4</sup>Ade Adefuye traces this from pre-colonial to colonial. See Ade Adefuye, *Culture, Diplomacy and the Making of a New Nigeria*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 2011.

imposed on the constituent cultural units the dire need to make the condition of existence a harmonious one. Hence, several political projects and governmental policies have focused on national integration with a view to blurring all forms of differences that are capable of promoting divisionist tendencies.

In the whole of this, the literary discipline has been involved both directly and indirectly. Within the purview of the understanding as well as the engagements of the literature of the continent or/and even of the black human, Nigeria, as an identifiable social unit, has been profoundly implicated. Chinua Achebe, the foremost Nigerian creative writer and critic of note did not just advance the course of African literature but significantly contributed to the formulation of the orientation of the African literary tradition.<sup>5</sup> The impact of this literary giant of Nigerian extraction on the literature of the continent is better summed up as definitive in the sense in which his personal literary outputs have simultaneously marked out and registered the African presence in the global space of literary practices, thereby inspiring the promotion of the African literary agenda. If Achebe's seminal contribution to the establishment of the African literary tradition speaks noteworthy of the Nigerian impact on the literature of the continent, Wole Soyinka's emergence on the literary space obviously accentuated the impact and can be said to have emboldened the Nigerian image as the African literary tradition finally got established against all odds. Achebe and Soyinka are, though major Nigerian literary icons, yet they are representative examples of a good number that the country can boast of.<sup>6</sup>

The discourse of Achebe and Soyinka as well as others in the category or sub-category along the continental paradigm belongs in what is often termed "postcolonial" discourse of African literature; that is, the discourse form that privileges views of "once colonised peoples and their descendants".<sup>7</sup> And so, much effort and time have been dissipated on the discourse that, though it is yet to exhaust its major concerns and address its major contentions let alone the minor ones, the realities of contemporary African countries have rather informed the literature from the paradigm of the cultural units than that of the continental whole. Hence, modern Nigerian literature like other literatures on the continent with similar identity is today a recognised domain of literary practice both in the creative and critical senses. How, then, does the "existence" of this literary sub-tradition<sup>8</sup> implicate the country and intervene in its pivotal social concerns? Or should it be first ascertained whether the structure of the literary practice is capable of discharging the needed responsibility of mediating in all forms of social actions that relate to the country as well as categories of interactions in which the country is engaged? To attempt to respond to this is to seek to examine the structure of the national literary practice with a view to determining its potentials which the country could annex for her growth and for the enhancement of sustainable development. More important is this now that the global attention has turned towards the pursuit of sustainable development initiatives and most African nations have found the vision laudable. This calls into question the nature of the Nigerian literary enterprise, on the one hand, in terms of its political orientation, commercial

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<sup>5</sup>Craig Mcluckie explains this in substantial detail. Craig Mcluckie, "Conversation with Achebe by Bernth Lindfors; Chinua Achebe; Understanding *Things Fall Apart*: Selected Essays by Solomon O. Iyasere; Understanding *Things Fall Apart*: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents by Kalu Ogbaa." *Research in African Literature*. Vol. 31.No. 1. (2000):181-184.

<sup>6</sup>It is noteworthy that both are continental literary icons whose latter-day influence at the national level, directly and indirectly, is outstanding.

<sup>7</sup>Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. "Introduction". London: Routledge, 2005, xi.

<sup>8</sup>The idea of sub-tradition is meant to indicate that Nigerian literature is a subset of African literature.

underpinning, and objectives as an act of the society and, on the other hand, the role of the Nigerian literary canonical tradition as the driving force of an actively sociologically relevant literary tradition.

## **POSTURE OF THE LITERARY TRADITION**

Perhaps there cannot be any serious basis of differentiation between the notions of literary tradition and literary enterprise. A bit of that is however necessary in the present study for the purpose of illuminating the postcolonial circumstances of the literary culture of a previously colonised social enclave. Hence, literary enterprise is basically that which is directly connected to the literary tradition of a place. Though the literary tradition of a people would mark them out as a distinctive social entity in fundamental ways, the tradition does not determine the business form that emerges; not necessarily from it but on its account. This is the reason the contemporary African literary enterprise was, at inception, colonially activated and controlled, even though the emergent literary tradition on which it fed tapped into the oral traditional roots of African societies. In spite of the colonial background which did not favour the imperative of the “postcolonial” African social condition, the African literary tradition was sustained on the two frontiers of the functionality of any literary tradition: the creative and the critical.

Indeed, the pioneering creative works on Africa were at the instance of non-African writers. Arguments have been intensely deployed on whether they were meant to serve the colonial interest at the expense of the grave social needs of the African people or that they are the best that could have come out of innocent foreign literary enthusiasts who did not have the privilege of accurate information about the geographical and social territory, Africa, on which their intellectual searchlight was focused. Joseph Conrad’s *The Nigger of the Narcissus* and *Earth of Darkness*, Graham Greene’s *The Heart of the Matter*, and Joyce Cary’s *Mister Johnson*<sup>9</sup> are classical examples of such literary works that depicts Africa with derogatory implications. Creative works in this category of racial bias (jingoism?) incidentally were at the earth of the inspiration behind the literary critical tradition that attended the misplaced beginning of the contemporary African literary tradition. It is noteworthy that the misplacement in terms of authorial origination inspired a peculiar mode of literary critical practice that allowed for subsequent creative works on Africa to correctively respond to the earlier ones with a view to meeting the need for accurate representation of Africa and her peoples. It is in this sense of counter-discursivity that Achebe’s early literary works, particularly *Arrow of God* and *Things Fall Apart* have been rated as monumental additions to African literature in terms of Africa’s ability to generate comparable literary mode as a counter to the literary denigration that came about those early days at the instance of some European writers. Clearly defined act of literary criticism only became part of the African literary history much later, and its growth and development owe largely to the interest of the West shown in the emerging African literature of the time.

Both aspects of the literary enterprise – the creative and the critical – are now fully established in all parts of Africa. The various “national” literatures that stemmed from the continental modern African literature therefore had a firm pedigree of literary practice imbued as appropriate for self-sustenance by global standards. One of such is the Nigerian brand of African literature popular known and taught today as Nigerian literature. Given the country’s multi-dimensional challenges, the discourse of

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<sup>9</sup>These are similarly cited in Tanure Ojaide, “Examining Canonisation in Modern African Literature.” *Asiatic*. Vol. 3.No. 1. (2009): 15-16.

efforts made to confront the challenges of the nation must implicate the literary practice, since by the full autonomy of any national literature, it ought to affect the society it primarily engages and that engages it. No where should this be more expected than in an African country with multiplicity of sociological challenges and major postcolonial hurdles. In a study of this nature, the interface of the creative and the critical would be the best for gauging the sociological worth of the literature that is being focused.

## **INTERFACE OF THE CREATIVE AND THE CRITICAL**

For any literary tradition to be properly conceived of, it must be seen to be functional both at the creative and the critical ends.<sup>10</sup> This is to say that both domains of activities have to interact constantly or at least, the critical activities must be seen to be in response to the creative. The creative domain of Nigerian literature is well occupied by competent literary artists that have succeeded in representing the reality of the Nigerian society in its multi-dimensionality. Such literary writers as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Helen Oyeyemi, Sefi Ata, Lola Soneyin, Kaine Agary, Helon Habila, Buchi Emecheta, Ifeoma Okoye, Akachi Ezeigbo among others have appreciably extended the creative frontier of the literary enterprise. Literary works of these scholars continue to engage the attention of critics, reviewers and historiographers<sup>11</sup> who are mostly found in the higher institutions of learning in the country. Although it may be argued that some writers on the Nigerian social condition who are based in overseas countries do not qualify to be regarded as Nigerian writers since their distant locations may not be good a basis for such categorising, their addition to or subtraction from the list of literary practitioners would have little to do with the established presence of the literature. It is evident from the foregoing that Nigerian literature is fully formed and on course.

The imperative of social transformation with regard to the country could then be tested on the literature of the country. The interface of the creative and the critical wings of the Nigerian literary practice is appropriate for this. Of course there may be other aspects of the Nigerian literary culture that can serve the purpose of the test. It is obvious that the manner and rate of interaction between creativity and criticism are crucial to the social relevance and, of course, the life of the literature. The interface is most appropriate for measuring the capacity of the literature to intervene in vital social matters and affect crucial social condition. The interface should reflect the literary practice as crucial in the realisation of social conditions which are supportive of sustainable development initiatives. It is also of consequence that the interface links up with the more socially involved consequences of canonical activities surrounding the literature itself. Canon activities are of essence in gauging literary strength to mediate vital social condition.

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<sup>10</sup>Both approximate as “writerly and readerly activities” following up on Lucy Munro. See Lucy Munro, “Critical Debates and Reviews: Shakespeare and the Uses of the Past: Critical Approaches and Current Debates.” *Shakespeare*. Vol. 7. No. 1. (2011): 107. (Henceforth, Munro, “Critical Debates”). It should be noted also that the traditional culture of bygone days with its heavy reliance on orality had its critical mechanism, usually “critical audience” drawn from the community of performance.

<sup>11</sup>The critical roles of the literary practitioners so categorised often overlap, and most times, we find them performed by literary critics.

## THE NATION'S LITERARY CANONICAL CONDITION

Canonical activities in Nigeria correspond to those of countries with well-established literary traditions elsewhere. Countries like Ghana, South Africa, Senegal, Kenya, and Tanzania among others belong in this category; they are geopolitical entities in Africa that constitute spaces of literary enterprises with somewhat similar but different canonical tendencies. Literary canonical activities or canonical activities in relation to literature as a cultural practice in Nigeria today are quite different from those in the days of colonialism. Nigerian-owned and Nigeria-based publishing companies are now in a good number unlike in the past when publishing was exclusively under the control of the Westerners who had the knowledge of publishing and its uses. Also in abundance are Nigerian newspapers that serve as outlets for reviews on literary texts. In addition, higher educational institutions in the country are today manned by natives, unlike the colonial era when the educational system up to the university level was tailored by the colonial agencies and in the interest of the colonial mission. The concomitant high level of educational and social awareness in independent Nigeria has really helped in the development of a national intellectual culture that can boast its own publishing houses, critics (both in the general sense and in the academic sense of it), essayists, teachers and literary historians. On the whole, Nigeria can be said to own a full blown network of engines for an effective literary enterprise. However, the way and manner this vital resource is operated is antithetical to the sense of independence that is supposed to be conveyed.

This owes wholly to the postcolonial condition of the country. However, let the cart not be put before the horse. Why this is so must first be highlighted. Just as the country is a colonial legacy so is her practice of literature in contemporary times. The country's educational system leans so heavily against the mentality acquired from the former colonisers. The country's curriculum planning and the content of her educational curriculum still reflect influences of the colonial legacy. For example, many courses being mounted in Nigerian universities simply do not have any direct bearing with the intellectual needs of the country. Shakespeare with its old English is still being offered as a course when its universal thematic appeal could be found in many Nigerian creative works. Besides, literary traditions of Europe across different ages are still being taught in many Nigerian universities.<sup>12</sup> What this approximates is a critical condition of Nigerian literary canonical identification. In other words, the country's curriculum planning has obviously made Western literary productions to remain in the country's repertoire of "exemplars".<sup>13</sup> The implication of this is that the country is currently an extended domain of influence of English "static" literary canons like William Shakespeare, William Wordsworth, Emily Bronte, John Keats, among several others. Owomoyela captures this succinctly when he submits thus"

It would be futile and misleading to pretend that the practice of literature and criticism in Africa is unconnected with Western practice and the legacy of our colonial experience. Despite ineffectual chafing at the fact of derivativeness,

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<sup>12</sup>Oyekan Owomoyela's build up to Paulin Hountondji's claims in respect of African colonial legacy significantly applies here: "The colonial economy (in the broad sense of the world) persists today [...]." Oyekan Owomoyela, "Socialist Realism or African Realism? A Choice of Ancestors." *Research in African Literature*. Vol. 22. No. 2, (1991): 21. (Henceforth, Owomoyela, "Socialist Realism or African Realism")

<sup>13</sup>Sela-Sheffy considers canons as exemplars. See Rakefet Sela-Sheffy, "Canon Formation Revisited: Canon and Cultural Production." *Neohelicon*. xxix. 2 (2002): 150. (Henceforth, Sela-Sheffy, "Canon Formation...")

and despite bombastic declarations about the autonomy or decolonization of our literature and criticism, our main referential figures and monuments remain those of the donor canon.<sup>14</sup>

Incidentally this is not at variance with the country's lamentable susceptibility to Western influences at her major frontiers – social, political, economic, cultural and religious. While this is true, it must not be forgotten that numerous literary texts by Nigerian writers which focus on the Nigerian subject exist, and are very much favoured in the country's curriculum planning.

That “inferior” canonical presence<sup>15</sup> of homegrown literary productions, however, does not foreclose unfavourable canonical condition. The canonical presence of “colonial texts” within the very active space of the literary engagement in the country (the Nigerian Ivory Tower) put the lie to the country's claim of serious determination to achieve a kind of culture of autonomous mode of intellectualising that is related to the outside world in a non-dependent mode. This is because the Western canonical texts within the country's circle of “exemplars” are of trans-cultural canonical influence. Therefore, their presence within the country's circle of literary canons cannot allow for easy delineation of the country's literary canonical status, except we do not seek for a national literary canonical status in the exclusive sense in which it applies in countries like Germany, Italy and China among others. Besides, in such a mixed state of the national literary canons, relations of canons within the canon circle, aided by the activities within the literary critical institution, cannot but be interdependent. And given what must now be regarded as the postcolonial empowerment of the “imposture canons”, such interdependent relation is likely to be dominated by the “extra-territorial” literary canons with their “rigid status” enhanced both internally (in the West) and externally (within former colonies and trade-posts of the West spread across Africa and beyond).<sup>16</sup>

Hence, major “readerly activities”<sup>17</sup> with regard to literary texts, at the peak of which literary critiquing found in the Ivory Tower is, cannot but be centered on literary works authorised in the country's educational curricular. Whereas literary canons often enjoy being engaged intertextually by literary critics, since by virtue of the circle of “exemplars” they are bound to enjoy critical valuation at the internal level (where their status is (re)validated) and at the external level (where the canonical is made to interact with the uncanonical in a process of possible qualification of the uncanonical for inclusion as a canon). At the intertextual phase of critical assessment of the mixed literary canons (national literary canons and the extra-territorial), deliberate efforts can only be made to ensure that the dominant foreign canons answer the imperative(s) of the host native literary tradition. Suppose there is a Nigerian literary tradition that stems from a national ideological project – a clearly designed cultural project of intellectual (re)orientation for the country – the place of teaching of literature, literary critiquing, and literary historiography has to be top priority. This is the condition under which the extra-territorial literary canons can be made to serve in the interest of the host literary tradition.

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<sup>14</sup>Owomoyela, “Socialist Realism or African Realism”, 35.

<sup>15</sup>The idea of “inferior” is to suggest that the very extra-territorial presence of the foreign canons presupposes an unequal canonical condition of the Nigerian repertoire of literary “exemplars”.

<sup>16</sup>The idea of rigidity of the canon is posited by Rakefet Sela-Sheffy. See Sela-Sheffy, “Canon Formation”, 145.

<sup>17</sup>The coinage is borrowed from Lucy Munro. See Munro, “Critical Debates”, 107.

The significance of the foregoing postulations will be expanded if the way readerly activities vis-à-vis creative texts that are of any serious canonical consequence in the country is positioned is understood. We must see readerly activities in the country in the two popular senses: casual and specialised. The casual relates to the reading public that is by far more indeterminate than the specialised, while the specialised concerns literary critics, reviewers, literary scholars, literary historians, and teachers of literature. Whereas the general literary readership that is being referred to as casual exist as complex fragments in the public, the specialised are mostly found in the numerous educational institutions in the country. Given the country's poor reading culture, it is obvious that the more active of the readerly activities exists in the educational institutions. Combined with the modeling role of the educational institutions, especially the Ivory Tower, the lead maintained by the educational institutions in the sphere of readerly activities in the country is a major determinant of the market condition that is of essence to the publishing interests. Therefore, the publishing interests would make educational institutions their target. The consequence is that what gets published is informed by the demand imposed by readerly activities in the educational institutions that represent the primary market where profit is most guaranteed for publishing.<sup>18</sup> Hence, old and new editions of already canonised texts may constitute a ready market for publishing, thereby further enhancing their canonical status, an actual enlargement of the circle of literary canons through inclusion of new creative texts would rests on available literary texts which, of course, is informed by the publishing interest, that, in itself, is a primary function of the demand of the educational institution in the country.

## **REDIRECTING CANONISING PROCESSES**

The need to redirect the nation's literary canonical agency would be related to the need to have the country embrace a new and well-informed culture of intellectual (re)orientation; that would mean ensuring a socio-political condition under which the nation's literature is to be made functionally responsive to the sociological challenges of the moment. The country's overall need for intellectual re-orientation has been expressed over time and in different fora, particularly within the academia. This sense of need is ultimately the motivating factor behind studies of such scholars as Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah, Ade Adefuye, E.J. Alagoa, J.O. Ihonvbere, and J.F. Ade Ajayi among others.<sup>19</sup> Uchendu's vehemence in this regard could serve to inform more:

Post-colonial states are forced to carry the cultural load of their departing imperial masters, just as they must, initially, work with the institutional infrastructure created by colonial rule. An African-centered cultural policy in a post-colonial state requires a radical definition of imperial doctrines: the

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<sup>18</sup>This can be inferred from the poor reading culture in the country.

<sup>19</sup>Rev. Matthew Hassan Kukah, *Religion, Culture and the Politics of Development*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 2007; Ade Adefuye, *Culture, Diplomacy and the Making of a New Nigeria*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 2011; E.J. Alagoa, *Festac Remembered: Cultural Intolerance in the Nigerian Nation*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 2007; J.O. Ihonvbere, *Reinventing Africa for the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 2011; J.F. Ade Ajayi, "Resilience of African Traditional Institutions and Cultures." In *African Unity: The Cultural Foundations*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1988.

doctrine of power; the doctrine of profit and the doctrine of civilization of cultures.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, to be proactive in the sense of adjusting literary canon processes in the interest of the country is, perhaps, to be downright political by adopting some principle of “affirmative action”, which has become an attraction of issues of marginalisation across the world today. This may require deliberately refashioning the nation’s curricular to make the content of literary scholarship and literary pedagogy totally homegrown. However, the need for such national attitude must first be gravely felt on the path of those at the helms of political affairs and the idea properly sold to the intellectuals who are concentrated in the higher institutions. Next would be to study the market condition behind the country’s literary culture, since, in literary sociology” literature itself is a “commodity in a public market both directly accessible and of direct interest to its consumers.”<sup>21</sup>This may have to be followed by questions of what constitutional approaches should be deployed before the issue of implementation of appropriate policies, ranging from those of educational administration, curriculum planning to those of pedagogy with regard to reconstituting a national literary culture. The implication of this is that, going by the influential structure of the nation’s readerly activities within which educational institutions is highly placed, the casual segment of the readership of the nation’s literature will be invariably pulled along as the centrepiece of the readerly activities (educational institutions) is purposely influenced.

Whether a political action in the form being contemplated is right or not is a different issue altogether. A nation reserves the right to conduct its internal affairs in whatever way it considers most suitable according to law. Yet, such a political step would have to be backed up with a strong political will and sufficient financial support given the free market condition under which publishing as a sector in the national economy is structured. After all, as George Orwell contends, to conceive of art in terms of “pure aestheticism” is to be deluded; for “propaganda lurks in every book, that every work of art has a meaning and a purpose – a political, social, and religious purpose – that our aesthetic judgements are always coloured by our prejudices and beliefs”<sup>22</sup>

If a sharp political approach may not be desirable, there can be a subtle political approach which seems to be within immediate reach. Since the nation’s educational institutions play a pivotal role in literary canonisation, understanding the process and purposefully influencing it could yield the way out. Curriculum planning may need to be matched with appropriate mode of literary criticism. The literary critical enterprise may be particularly activated to serve the purpose. This is because a text does not even exist in the first place except it is read.<sup>23</sup>And ultimately, readerly activities within the literary critical enterprise of the nation composed of literary critics, literary reviewers, and literary historiographers are of vital consequence in the formation of canons. Hence, the mode of literary criticism must be such that assures a Nigerian literature that is properly imbued with the needed values for national reorientation in terms of canonical consideration. This calls for a deliberate synergy between the

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<sup>20</sup>V.C. Uchendu, “Towards a Strategic Concept of Culture: Implications for Continental Unity.” In *African Unity: The Cultural Foundations*. Edited by Zaccheus Sunday Ali *et al.* Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization, 1988, 24.

<sup>21</sup>See “Literary Canon as Process”.

<sup>22</sup>Peter A. Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda*. London: Methuen and Co. Limited, 1983, 2&6. (Henceforth, Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda*)

<sup>23</sup>This is a position of Stanley Fish espoused by Chris Lang. See Chris Lang, “The Reader-Response Theory of Stanley Fish.” [Xenos.org/essays/litthy4.htm](http://Xenos.org/essays/litthy4.htm). Accessed 3/24/2004.

country's political machinery and her cream of intellectuals concentrated in the higher educational institutions; and the informing awareness must rest on such an idea as the fact that "[t]hroughout its history, literature has served to move, persuade, offend, challenge and change us. Though we are apt to think of literature as an art to be enjoyed for its sake, [...] it has often been made to perform a variety of social functions, including the promulgation of partisan beliefs."<sup>24</sup>This, however, would be a case of "self-conscious ideological agenda" aimed at influencing the canon machinery in the face of absence of needed ideological sentiments facilitated by a cultural process in which canons of literature are an active force.<sup>25</sup>

The other important issue is understanding the difference between values adopted or cherished by a nation and sold across to the citizens through its literary activities, and the cultural power of the literature itself as a function of the power of its canons usually constituted by a selected number of the entire creative repertoire. The former (Nation's values promoted through literature) is text-based and its processing oscillates between the creative and the critical wings of the national literary enterprise, while the latter (literary canons) is at once text-based, author-based, and ultimately market-driven. Therefore, discourses of literary canonisation must recognise the difference between literary features embodying or signifying a nation's values which are purely text-based and the "exemplars" that actually project the literary tradition and participate with serious cultural consequences in the economic life of the nation. In a country like Nigeria where national values as embodied in her very dynamic literature may be difficult to determine, it would appear more appropriate to focus on the activities surrounding the literary canons and agencies concerned in the canonisation with a view to actively mediating cultural realities of the so-called "Giant of Africa." The whole of the foregoing is intended to posit that a "wrong-headed"<sup>26</sup>literary canonical process is ultimately unproductive for serious national cohesion and would stand in the way of progress of an "emerging nation" like Nigeria in many ways. It definitely would not impact positively on the new framework that the country is projecting, especially with regard to the support and actionable intelligence being provided for the sustainable development goals by the United Nations. This cannot but be a relevant submission in respect of other national literary cultures on the continent, for all passed through similar colonial routes in evolving as geopolitical entities, and presently constitute a postcolonial phenomenon.

## CONCLUSION

Literary forms are more often than not deployed in influencing opinions or passing across information tentatively. The Nigerian literary enterprise has evolved over decades to become an important sphere of the country's national culture. There is no doubt that her literary canonising processes could boost the values of the literary enterprise to make the enterprise a strong factor in enhancing sustainability of her developmental initiatives. Sustainable Development Goals, as Rosenbaum observes, are "ready to take on the challenge of ensuring global development".<sup>27</sup> The introduction of the sustainable development goals by the United Nations should be a welcome initiative in the country since the Millennium Development Goals were only a mirage. Sustainable Development Goals have become means of (re)assessing the growth pattern of developing societies and

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<sup>24</sup><http://english.dal.ca/classes/2005-06%20Upper%20Levels/2050.php>

<sup>25</sup>Rakefet Sela-Sheffy, "Canon Formation Revisited: Canon and Cultural Production." *Neohelicon*. Xxix. 2. (2002): 143.

<sup>26</sup>It cannot be wrong to attribute rightness or wrongness to literary canons since traditionally works of art and writers are often discussed as either "bad" or "good", great or otherwise. See Peter A. Foulkes, *Literature and Propaganda*, P. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Basia Rosenbaum, "Making the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Sustainable: The Transition from MDGs to the SDGs" *Harvard International Review*. Vol. 37, No. 1, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.questia.com/library/journal>, May 13<sup>th</sup> 2016.

proffering ways of attaining socio-economic upliftment. While poverty remains the single most challenging issue of our times, several countries are working hard to overcome it by supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in the areas of economic and social transformation. One of the goals of the sustainable development projects is the provision of standard education for the intellectual development of the people. As Nigeria keys into this,<sup>28</sup> her literary enterprise might need to be attuned for the mission to realise the intellectual development initiative. In this, the canonising processes of the literary enterprise could be a bulwark for the prosecution and realisation of the sustainable development goals.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Akintoye Victor Adejumo and Opeyemin Oluwabunmi Adejumo makes the observation that Nigerian government should concentrate on "key areas that can help boost and sustain its developmental objectives". Retrieved from <http://www.questia.com>, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

<sup>29</sup> The idea of this paper was first articulated and presented at an International Conference of the Left held in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria in 2014.

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