

THE ROLE OF LITERATURE IN ENHANCING SOCIETAL AWARENESS IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: AN APPRAISAL OF CHUKWUEMEKA IKE'S NOVEL "THE NAKED GODS"

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Abstract

The purpose of this Article is to show how literature plays pivotal role in enhancing societal awareness regarding the happenings within the University system in Nigeria. The research aims at exploring some of the episodes in Chukwuemeka Ike's Novel "The Naked Gods", examining how Ike has used the episodes to create awareness about issues popping up in Nigerian Universities.

Keywords: Episodes, Literary, Awareness, Society, Happenings, Education, Information

INTRODUCTION

Literature most generally is anybody of written works. More restrictively, Literature is writing considered to be an art form, or any single writing deemed to have artistic or intellectual value. Literature encapsulates Novels, Plays and of Course Poetry.

Literature also mirrors life and society. Literature tries to make members of any society know the happenings within their immediate environment.

Chukwuemeka Ike, a Nigerian writer, conscious of the awareness creation function of literature put in place "The Naked Gods", hence, the reason he wrote "The Naked Gods" in creating awareness about the various happenings within the Nigerian Universities.

In doing this, he has used different episodes in the novel to champion the cause of writing the novel. It is clear that what happens in the society is reflected in Literary works in one form or the other. A society is a group of people related to each other through their continuous and uninterrupted relations.

The society is situated in Literature and other arts. "The general resemblance to reality is what makes art recognizable to the rest of us. But what makes art artful is the fact that the artist imposes his own matter upon these forms in a way that gives them another responsiveness to another inevitability, a new necessity and probability", (Murray Krieger, 1976).

Literature has turned out to be "a medium of discussing and explaining contemporary or conventional realities through exposition of the

socio-cultural and political experiences of a given society; since it (Literature) is a product of a particular human society. It is far from being ambiguous that Literature buys into the expressive function of a given language. And, the understanding of culture and the society, which are potential ingredients on which Literature is premised, paves the way for an effective development" (Ogundokun, Sikiru A., 2013).

Literature is expected to perform the function of healing which we describe as therapeutic function. Readers are expected to be healed or cured of emotional, Psychological, economic, pathological and/or socially related health challenges through reading a text, watching a drama, or listening to the recitation of a poem.

SOME OF THE CORE EPISODES CHUKWUEMEKA USED IN DEPICTING HAPPENINGS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

- The Visitation of Traditional Rulers to High Ranking University Officials.
The episode below shows how traditional rulers often pay, visits to high ranking university officials to forge harmonious relationship.

*His Royal Highness, Ezeonuku III
Of Onuku arrived at the
prefabricated temporary residence
of the Vice-chancellor of the
University of Songhai in a manner
intended to leave the vice-
chancellor in no doubt that he was*

*the first class chief for Onuku
Province pg 1.*

The episode above depicts the way traditional rulers visit university officials for one reason or the other. To His Royal Highness; Ezeonuku III hobnobbing with the Vice chancellor of Songhai University is the right step in the right direction.

- Traditional rulers in need of recognition from University Officials. Chukwuemeka Ike depicts in "The Naked Gods" the idea that traditional rulers often believe that they must be accorded the needed recognition by top ranking university officials, and where they are not accorded the needed recognition, they tend to feel bad about this.

*I shall therefore not trouble you
with any requests now,
except to beg you to watch that
registrar of yours.
He has refused to accord me the
respect due to me.
Each time I come to see him he tells
his clerk he is too
busy a thing nobody has ever told
me before, not even
the governor-general Pg6.*

The episode above shows how offended Ezeonuku was when the Registrar of Songhai University denied him access to see him.

To Ezeonuku, it is an act of insubordination for any one, not even in the category of a University Official like the registrar to despise him, based on his position as the Ezeonuku of Onuku. The feeling of Ezeonuku here exemplifies the feelings of traditional rulers in Nigeria generally when someone feels big before them.

- The Rotational Nature of the Seat of the Vice – Chancellor: In the University of the Novel Chukwuemeka Ike in his attempt at reflecting the Nigerian University system shows how the office of the Vice – chancellor is not a permanent one, but indeed rotational.

The episode below shows the modus operandi of the seat of the Vice-chancellor of Songhai University. In the episode, the Vice – chancellor himself

announces vacancy to the seat of the Vice-chancellor to the lecturers of the university.

*The council has asked me to
identify a local person to
take over from me as Vice-
chancellor at the end of my
three – year contract.*

Pg.9

The episode above shows how the Vice-chancellorship seat in Songhai University is not permanent. The non permanence of the seat of the Vice-chancellorship position in Songhai University is an exemplification of the non permanent nature of the position of Vice-chancellor in Nigerian universities. In Nigeria the position of the Vice-chancellor is rotational and not permanent, and this Chukwuemeka has reflected in the modus operandi of the seat of Vice-chancellor in Songhai University of "The Naked Gods".

- *Topsy-turvy attending the vacant seat of the Vice-chancellor:* Chukwuemeka no doubt use this novel to reflect the fact that the seat of the Vice-chancellor often brings a lot of rancor among those who are vying for the seat of the Vice-chancellor. In the episode below, one of the senior lecturers in Songhai University Dr. Okoro, had gone to see his parent regarding the issue of the vacant seat of the vice-chancellor. He posits:

*I have come home to see both of
you so that we'll decide
how to follow that man. I know I've
always refused to do
certain things in the past but our
people say that if a child
crawls on its knees to burn my skin
with glowing firewoods,
I'll also go on my knees to
retaliate.*

Pg 53.

The episode above shows the volatility of the fight for the position of the Vice-chancellor. The fight for this post is always, with people wanting to outsmart the other just to get the Vice-chancellorship position.

The penciling down of someone as the greatest opponent in the fight for a position within the university system.

In the episode below, Dr. Okoro Singled out an Okanu man –Professor Ikin in the context of the novel to be his greatest opponent or better still his arch enemy in the struggle for the Vice-chancellorship post. He postulates:

*There is one Okanu man there who
is much older
Than I and is senior to me now.
There are others who
are my juniors, although I'm not
sure that I am older
than they are. My problem is
with the Okanu man.
Pg 52.*

The episode above clearly shows how someone was penciled down as the greatest opponent by another, in the fight for the seat of the Vice-chancellor in Songhai University of the "Naked Gods", which exemplifies the way someone will pin another down as the greatest opponent or arch enemy in Nigerian Universities for a similar seat. Sometimes the fight often go to the level of using charms to get rid of whoever is seen to have upper hand in the fight for the top position. It is always a fierce battle in Nigerian Universities when the position of the Vice-chancellor is vacant.

- The seeking of the backing of some stronger forces to achieve success: In Nigeria, whenever people are fighting for a particular position, some are being backed by those seen to be high and mighty in the society, this is reflected in this novel showing how a particular candidate for the Vice-chancellorship position is being backed by influential people in the novel. The episode below lend credence to this. In this episode, Dr. Okoro trying to show how the Okanu man of the novel is being backed by the English people who are really very influential in the context of the novel.

*That's why I've come home.
This man is being backed by two
Englishmen on our staff. But that
does not
pull a hair from my body.
Pg 52.*

In the episode above, it is evident that the said Okanu man being backed is given support by the Englishmen for him to become the Vice-chancellor of Songhai University, even though Dr. Okoro feels somewhat unperturbed.

In Nigeria people seek for the backing of others in whatever position they are seeking for they believe this is the only way success can come their way.

- The fear of opponent going diabolical in gaining Ascendancy: Within the Nigerian Socio-cultural milieu, people tend to fear that in seeking a position, care must be taking as the opponent may go diabolical in the process. This is made clear in "The Naked Gods" of Chukwuemeka Ike, with Dr. Okoro, nursing the fear that the Okanu man in the race for the Vice-chancellor is making attempt at going diabolical to become the Vice-chancellor at all cost. The episode below justifies this.

*They tell me he has been going
home frequently.
That would not have worried me
but for what happened
two days ago. My steward reported
to me that a corner of
the dish cloth he spread outside to
dry had been sliced off by
an unknown person. The steward's
wife said that the Okanu
man's wife had been seen in our
backyard not far from the
place where the cloth was hung to
dry. Pg 52*

The episode above shows clearly the fear of Dr. Okoro of his opponent. The fear of Dr. Okoro here, exemplifies the fear of Nigerians about whoever that is contesting a position with them. Nigerians believe that a fellow Nigerian can harm them to gain ascendancy over them. The unhealthy rivalry in the university of this novel. Typifies the rivalry in Nigerian university system when it comes to fighting for a position of authority.

- The setting up of committee to investigate issues for decision making: Within the Nigerian university system, decisions are not taken haphazardly, rather committee is often set up in looking at critical issues to arrive at the best decision. This is what Chukwuemeka Ike has reflected in the operational system of Songhai University. The episode below shows that the

setting of committee before decisions are taken, is vital to the operational mode of Nigerian University System.

Another committee, known as the campus Beautification committee was set up to offer advice to house-holders on the establishment of gardens, lawns and hedges for the various staff houses. The meeting of the faculty in which the decision was taken sounded like a meeting of undergraduates. The first bone of contention was whether the committee should be an ad hoc committee or a standing committee. Pg 71.

The episode above shows that committees are central to the proper functioning of Songhai University. The essence of the committee, is for the management to arrive at the right decision at all times. Chukwuemeka Ike has used "The Naked Gods" to reflect the mode of operation of the Nigerian University System – setting up of committee, with the committee given its terms of reference with which to operate.

- The embarking on Protests by Students: In Nigerian universities, occasion abounds when students embark on protests, ostensibly to fight against what they consider intolerable. Chukwuemeka Ike reflects this in "The Naked Gods" to reflect the happening in the Nigerian universities. In the episode below, Songhai university students took up arms against the other, with one section supporting the cause of a lecturer by name Dr. Okoro and the other supporting another lecturer- professor Ikin.

Two major factions had developed among the student body, one supporting professor Ikin and the other Dr Okoro Pg 224.

The episode above showed the factions the Songhai University in the riot belonged – Professor Ikin and Dr Okoro.

The skirmish became serious that the faction of Professor Ikin made straight to Dr Okoro's house to attack him.

*Show us Dr Okoro or face the jazz!
They shouted at him.
Pg 226.*

The episode above shows the readiness of the students supporting professor Ikin wanting to attack Dr Okoro at all cost.

- The destructive effect of students' Riot: In the context of the novel, students go on rampage, and when they did, the protest was highly destructive, the episode below shows how students' riot often go via destruction of properties.

They were already leaving the house disappointed when one of them pointed to the car. "Do we leave this intact?" He asked. In response, the car lost its windscreen and the petrol tank fuel cover was removed and sand stuffed into the fuel pipe. When the mob marched away they were satisfied that professor Ikin had not got away too lightly. Pg 227.

The episode above exemplifies the destructive nature of students riots. Chukwuemeka Ike used this episode in "The Naked Gods" to typify how destructive students' riots can be. The way professor Ikin's car was destroyed, is the way university students in Nigerian destroy properties that they see when they are protesting.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion therefore, it is correct to say that "The Naked Gods" has been a literary work which Chukwuemeka Ike used to expose to the society the happenings within the Nigerian universities and by extension other higher institutions in Nigeria. Chukwuemeka Ike observes that the society must be in the know about the happenings in their higher institutions of learning. To this end he puts in place this novel to create awareness about the functionality of the university system in Nigeria and

its operational mode. Chukwuemeka Ike believes that literature is a veritable means of achieving social goals, hence his reason for writing "The Naked Gods" using it to push for societal awareness about various occurrences in the Nigerian University System. Chukwuemeka Ike notes that the university is a world of its own, but that the larger society should be aware of what happens in the micro world of the university system.

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