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**The [African] Novelist and the Nation: A Postcolonial Reading
of Chukwuemeka Ike's *Our Children Are Coming***

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Abstract

Even though the nation is an accepted “imagined community”, the process of nation formation and nation becoming in Africa has not guaranteed rights of its citizens. It is this failure to guarantee rights of citizens irrespective of age, gender, class, race, religion and ethnicity that incites the creative imagination of African novelists. This study is an examination of how Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike has appropriated the form of the novel in order to interrogate the abuse of the rights of the child and youth in his Nigerian nation. This is illuminated under postcolonial theoretical paradigm, as well as the qualitative research methodology. This study has investigated the relationship between form and content in Ike's *Our Children Are Coming*. We have established that through the elements of narrative fiction, the novelist has not only created the space of the nation as an imagined community, but has equally represented the unfortunate bleak future of his Nigerian nation occasioned by the continued neglect of the average Nigerian child and youth. He has in addition, dramatized through his characters' voices, and actions, the failure of the adult society, the disappointment of self-rule and its resultant disillusionment on the part of the youth.... the leaders of his nation's hazy future.

Key Words: The Novel, Novelist, Nation, Postcolonial, Ike, children, youth, adult society, self-rule, and elements of narrative fiction

Introduction

There is a symbiotic relationship between the novel and any given nation. This is because, the novel as a literary genre expresses real life events and everyday human experiences which can only be understood within the context of a nation. Unlike other forms of narratives such as legend, myth, fable, fantasy and folk tales, the novel, though, a product of the novelist's imagination, portrays everyday characters (men and women who are real flesh and blood) that exist in real life within a particular physical space and time. It is the expression of this realism in an extended prose form that connects the novelist to the nation. As in all forms of literary expression, the novelist's potential to combine the dual aspects of language and experience, of denotation and connotation, in moving from de facto concerns to their de jure alternatives, the novelist through his narratives represents the nation.

The novelist's fidelity to everyday human experiences in his nation is discernible in many ways. First, through his extended prose narratives, he expresses major concerns with actual everyday living besetting the average man and woman in his contemporary world. Characters in his novel are so 'believable' to the extent that they evidently mirror real people of the everyday life in the nation and time in which his novel is set. Through the actions, voices and internal monologues of his characters (who are often accorded fictitious names), the reader is invited to identify with their experiences and empathize with their emotions. More so, with the novel's emergence in the eighteenth century age of empirical realism which advocated knowledge acquisition through sense perception, the novelist is left with no alternative than to express facts about life in his world as he perceives it. Ultimately, the legitimate aim of the novelist at all times is the conveyance of facts. Secondly, the individual in any nation is defined with reference to two co-ordinates namely time and space. The idea of time is always blended with the idea of space. These two dimensions are inseparable in everyday life because we cannot easily visualize any particular moment of existence without setting it in its spatial context. Thus, in his works, the novelist engages in a detailed description of the physical world and moment within which his/her characters operate. Thirdly, the novelist employs the use of words which are the basic units of language rather than figures to build vocabularies with which he/she interrogates reality in the realm of imagination. The focus of this interrogation is often dependent on the prevailing circumstances in his/her society at the time of writing. In his fictitious account of actual everyday events and human experiences, the novelist relies heavily on his skill as a narrator. Thus, it is his ability to effectively marry his subject matter (content) with the artistic form of the novel genre(form) in telling facts about life in his nation as he perceives it that makes his novel realistic (see Ian Watt, 11).

Concerning the novelist's fidelity to everyday realism in the nation, Charles Nnolim declares that:

The major concerns of the novel are with the problems of everyday living, the problem of human relationship, close attention to the realities of the bourgeois...the problem of life in modern cities; increasing class mobility. (Approaches, 27).

In the same token, Homi Bhabha succinctly captures the role of the novelist and his work in the documentation and dissemination of perceived socio political situation in the nation when he declares that:

The space and time of the modern nation is embodied in the narrative culture of the realist novel... To study the nation through its narrative draws attention to its language and rhetoric... it also draws attention to those easily obscured but highly significant recesses of national culture...youth, the everyday nostalgia, new social movements, the politics of difference. They assign new meaning and different direction to the process of historical change ("Introduction", 2-3).

Indeed, these preoccupations of the novelist with contemporary realities in his nation are also the major preoccupations of the African novelist. Thus, the African novelist may arguably be described as a novelist of African descent whose subject matter is about Africa.

Nation Formation, Nation Becoming and the African Novelist: A Postcolonial Reading of Ike's *Our Children Are Coming*

Generally, from the moment of colonization till date, the African novelist has been progressively involved in charting the cause of the people of his nation in particular and continent at large. This is decipherable in his consistent engagement with the realistic mode of representation in chronicling the events and experiences of the people of his nation. To suit this purpose, he engages in the subversive use of the English language, delineation of African character types and a detailed description of African space and time. In other words, the tone and subject matter of his creativity at any point since colonization has been conditioned by the prevailing socio political circumstances in the continent at the time of his writing. For instance, during the era of colonial intrusion in Africa which saw many African communities disintegrated, brutalized, and dispossessed of their ancestral heritage due to the economic interests of the colonizers, the tone of novels by Africans at this time expressed this unfortunate sense of loss, pain, despair, and desire for freedom. These feelings incited such narratives as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, and Arrow of God, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Weep Not, Child*, Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* and Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom*, to mention just a few. Again, the misplacement of priorities by native leaders at the

dawn of independence in Africa ushered in a new set of novels by Africans through which they expressed the disappointment of independence and the disillusionment of the masses in their respective nations. This unfortunate development in the post decolonization era in the continent has incited such fictional prose narratives as Chimeka Garrick's *Tomorrow Died Yesterday*, Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sun Set at Dawn*, *Our Children Are Coming*, *Chicken Chasers* and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road*, to mention just a few. Thus, as a member of the shared community of his nation, the African novelist portrays his commitment to the wellbeing of the generality of his fellow citizens through this inevitable fictitious narration of the sensibilities of the people in his nation. It is in doing this that he exposes the underlying juxtapositions in the experiential quality of lives of the people in his nation. In other words, his ultimate aim at all times is to engage his artistic impetus in raising readers' consciousness to the prevailing deviations from the promises of independence as well as create awareness on the need to engender the desired change in the nation. It is this quest for positive change in the nation that has conditioned Chukwuemeka Ike's choice of subject matter in *Our Children Are Coming*. Precisely, his concern in this novel is anchored on the need for the adult society to rise up to the occasion of social, moral and economic responsibility required to prepare the Nigerian child and youth for their future leadership roles in the nation.

The concept of the 'nation' and the term 'postcolonial' are both immersed in multifarious interpretations and definitional controversies. For instance, in his popular essay entitled "What is a Nation?" Ernest Renan declares that:

A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things which in truth are but one constitutes this soul or spiritual principle. One of this is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present day **consent**, the desire to live together, the **will** to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received To have common glories in the past and to have common will in the present; to have performed great deeds together, to wish to perform still more (19).

This definition, portrays the nation, not only as an all-embracing entity but also emphasizes the need for collaboration of all and sundry irrespective of age, gender, race and ethnicity in the realization of the ideals of the groups who constitute the nation. In the same token, Benedict Anderson perceives the nation as:

[A]n imagined political community. It is imagined because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the mind of each lies the image of their communion (6).

In Furtherance of this position, Anderson stresses that the nation is imagined as a community because regardless of the actual inequality, marginalization, neglect and exploitation that may prevail in it, the nation is always conceived as a “deep horizontal comradeship”. Ultimately, “it is the fraternity that makes it possible, for so many millions not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings” (7). It is these imaginings that propel the driving force for colossal sacrifices for the nation.

On the other hand, the term “postcolonial” theoretical paradigm in literary interpretation is deeply rooted in the history of imperialism as well as its resultant self-assertion, struggle for emancipation, decolonization and contemporary resistance against neocolonialism in former colonial contexts. As Rumina Sethi puts it, postcolonialism became integral to cultural studies due to its endeavor to reform the institutions of social democracy by adopting an intellectual and political stance that sought to counter all imperial designs (Postcolonialism, 3). It is therefore not surprising that Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin define it as “all the cultures affected by imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Empire, 2). It is within this hazy continuum of subjugation and liberation of the nations of Africa from the powers that hold them down, that we can locate the space and time of Chukwuemeka Ike’s *Our Children are coming*. As an approach to literary interpretation, Postcolonial literary theory is a paradigm for the analysis, criticism, and responses to discourses on colonial and neocolonial issues, especially the struggle for identity, rights and entitlements in the former colonies of Europe and indeed all human societies where the challenges of deprivation, inequality and dispossession exist. This critical paradigm lays emphasis on the need to give voice to the deprived, dispossessed and marginalized people in the world’s scheme of things. Whenever a writer portrays issues of inequality within the nation space in his works with the aim of liberating humans from circumstances that enslave them, he is termed a postcolonial writer. As such, a postcolonial scholar/critic is expected to critique/analyze discourses about the peoples of the former European colonies with his/her critical lens focused on how the writer has addressed these issues of inequality through the basic elements of the novel genre such as plot, setting and characters’ voices and actions. In the light of the concerns expressed, situations portrayed, and believable characters delineated in Chukwuemeka Ike’s *Our Children Are Coming*, the postcolonial literary paradigm proves an appropriate paradigm for our analysis. It is the concern for culture, the abuse of self-rule as well as the future of the nation that form the major preoccupations in *Our Children Are Coming*, written by one of Nigeria’s foremost, but often neglected novelists Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike.

Postcolonial Analysis of *Our Children Are Coming*

In *Our Children Are Coming*, Ike portrays his Nigerian nation as an entity stratified along the lines of age. The youth are at variance with the adult society whose

desperate pursuit of personal gains has resulted in the alienation, and moral bankruptcy of their children who are the future leaders of the nation. Through the imaginative realm of the novel, the author condemns this unfortunate situation as well as proffer suggestions on ways to go in order to engender the desired change in the nation. A brief summary of the plot of the novel will suffice.

Set in independent Nigeria, the novel begins with the constitution of a commission of enquiry by the government of the day called the Presidential Commission on Juveniles Below Twenty-One. The commission is expected to propose recommendations on how best to solve the problems associated with the youth such as indiscipline, lack of motivation, laziness, sexual, promiscuity and so on. As the plot unfolds, it becomes evident that the youth are unhappy with this commission set up to discuss their affairs for two reasons. First, the youth are not represented in the commission's membership. Secondly, the members of the commission are men and women of questionable integrity. The National Association of Students (NAS henceforth) requests the inclusion of students in the membership of the commission. When its request is turned down, NAS takes the federal government to court. It loses out and sets up a parallel commission called the National Commission on Parents over twenty-one years. Through this commission, the youth expose leading members of the adult society in their nakedness. They also bring to public notice the highly placed men and women ruining rather than running the nation despite their oath to serve and protect the nation. The shocking revelations of the scandalous lifestyle of the adults in the nation as well as the resilience of the youth in the pursuit of their rights, force the government to effect some positive changes. The changes include the dissolution of the Presidential commission on Juveniles below twenty-one, the disbandment of the National Commission on Parents over twenty-one; and the immediate recall of the members of the presidential commission from their extravagant overseas tour. Thus, bringing to an end, further economic waste incurred by the promiscuous and self-serving members of the presidential commission.

Ike's subject matter in this novel is not alien to the Nigerian nation since. In reality, the continued neglect, marginalization, deprivation and abuse of the younger generation by the adults since decolonization have often incited students' protests and agitations for proper representation and consideration in their nation's scheme of things. Often, these protests degenerate to the loss of lives and property. The 'Ali must go' students' riot of 1978 in which a number of students lost their lives including Akintunde Ojo of the University of Lagos; the recent protest against school fees hike without due consultation, by students of the university of Port Harcourt which claimed school properties and the life of a student activist Peter Ofurum are typical examples. It is the same atmosphere of students' struggle to make their voices heard in their nation's scheme of things that Ike imaginatively creates in *Our Children Are Coming*. Through the use of multiple characters, voices and actions of both the adults and the

youth, Ike exposes the individuals/extractive institutions whose lifestyles negate the ideals of nationhood. Prominent among members of these undesirable institutions as portrayed in the novel are parents and those in positions of authority in the nation. He decries the failure of these members of the society to live by example and invest in the future wellbeing of their nation through the proper upbringing of their children.

Employing such proverbs as “The training you give the puppy determines how he behaves as an adult dog” (24), and “It is from the parent snake that the baby snake inherits its venom” (327), Ike draws our attention to the fact that the children of any society are reflections of their parents. As such, he exposes the vices in the lifestyle of the adults with the aim of checking their being inculcated in the children who are the future adults of the nation. These vices are encapsulated in the numerous themes that run through the novel. These include themes of nepotism, human and economic waste, moral corruption, and generation gap. Others include collapse of educational system, cultural denigration and the need for the oppressed and marginalized youth to take their destiny in their hands through a radical revolution.

In his article entitled “corruption”, Dan Agbese argues that the “difficult and perhaps the most pernicious corruption is moral corruption” (15). Through this novel, Ike decries the disheartening degree of moral decay in his nation. Almost all the members of the Presidential Commission are guilty of moral misconducts. The chairman of the commission Mr. Justice Okpetun is haunted by the illicit affair he had with Apolonia, an undergraduate who is old enough for his daughter. As Arch Deacon Obi –Apolonia’s father stands before the commission to report his daughter’s sexual promiscuity, the chairman is perturbed by “his involvement with her... he could feel a stir below his navel and a lightening of pressure on his head” (105). Also, the only female member of the Presidential commission is not free from moral misconduct. Though a married woman, Chief Mrs. Winifred Edo is entangled in an illicit affair with Dr. Joko who is also a married man. Thus, when NAS threatens to expose the chairman and other members of the commission for indulging in economic waste and immoral acts while pretending to be studying the problems of Nigerian youth, the news “shot her blood pressure up, precipitating the malignant headache” (119). Her headache is as a result of her fright that her sexual immorality will be made public by the students.

Ike exposes the high degree of nepotism and economic waste which have for so long kept his nation behind the wheels of progress and development. In real life these were dominant features of the democratically elected Alhaji Shehu Shagari’s regime in Nigeria. During this time, the government of the day had a penchant for the constitution of none economically viable commissions of enquiry. In the appointments of members of such commissions, those in authority gave a lot of preferences to their party loyalists based on the “You chop I chop” ideology. This resulted in the appointment of mediocre who were incompetent in the issues they were appointed to

proffer solutions to. In order to affect this ideology, they set up so many beaurocratic commissions of enquiry made up of mediocre. The author bemoans this fact when he declares:

such appointments, including appointments to governing councils of universities, board of parastatals and government owned companies were hardly ever based on merit. You had to be a loyal member of the party in power... (115).

The implication is that people who are grossly incompetent in certain spheres of government life are appointed to make recommendations on them. Hence, we have such people as Alhaji Adamu and the promiscuous Chief Mrs. Edo as members of the presidential commission of inquiry. Instead of brainstorming on how best to improve the lot of the nation's youth, these committee members are occupied with the thoughts of the commission's all-expenses-paid overseas tour which, according to them, is their "chance to see the world and at the same time make some money" (119). It is interesting to note that the all- expenses-paid global tour of all the members of the committee covers such major cities of the world as "Taiwan, Hong gong, Manila, Tokyo Rio de Jenerio, New York, London, and Zurich" (97). The author draws our attention to the irrelevance of the overseas tours undertaken by members of the committee. He posits that they need not embark on such an expensive tour in order to make useful recommendations concerning the youth to the government. He informs us that well researched books by Nigerians on issues concerning Nigerian youth are available within the nation. For instance, Dr Bankole a Nigerian intellectual, specialized on the issues pertaining to the nation's youth is said to have presented his findings and recommendations on the issues and challenges of the Nigerian youth to the commission. Unfortunately, his work is flung back at him with flimsy excuses by the committee members who are bent on extracting all rights and privileges accruing to them by virtue of their membership of this commission.

The challenge of unnecessary national waste does not escape the author's attention. He shows that waste, whether economic or human is not in the interest of the nation's development. The chauffeur-driven air conditioned cars allocated to every member of the commission for the duration of the enquiry, the commission's all-expenses-paid global tour and the commission's members' numerous allowances cost the nation a staggering amount of money which could be channeled to other ventures that could add value to the lives of the teeming population of needy citizens in a nation:

[In] which thousands of graduates roam the streets jobless, in which teachers' monthly salaries are irregularly paid when paid at all, and lack of funds have led to the postponement of crucial and overdue educational reforms (287).

When we compare the commission's expenses to the paltry sum spent by the rival commission set up by the National Association Students (NAS), it becomes evident that the presidential commission of enquiry is engaged in mere economic waste.

Furthermore, through Ayo Junior's case, the author draws our attention to the problem of human waste in the nation. His father is to blame for this. Ayo Junior is an only male child in the midst of many female children. As a child, Ayo is denied parental care due to his father's anxiety and determination to "give him the best" by sending him abroad to study. The result is that the boy grows up delinquent and absurd: he fails his GCE O-Level examination, engages in sexual promiscuity, impregnating an Irish girl, and smashes his father's friend's Mercedes Benz car. Junior's case shows that lack of parental guidance and counseling leads to irreversible life-long mistakes.

Through the voice of Dr Ben Abia, Ike bemoans the defects of Western Education on his nation's culture. This according to him is evident in the current threat for extinction of his nation's arts, crafts, languages and culinary lifestyle. Concerning the nations Culinary habits, the author advises that indigenous meals like breadfruit, yam, millet, cassava and plantain should not be discarded for costly foreign alternatives like bread, cornflakes, rice, and tea. By this, the Nations cultural values will be preserved and passed on from generation to generation. He posits that in as much as education is good for the Nigerian child, it should not be a means of alienating him from his community /roots, parents, (Culture) and traditions. Rather, education should be:

A process of socialization designed by each society to acquaint the young members of the society with the values and traditions of the society. It is also aimed at equipping the youngsters to play their roles effectively within that Society (142).

Lack of adequate of adequate care for the youth is the most prominent theme in the novel. Here, the youth are the ones at the periphery of the nation's scheme of things. They are acutely neglected by both the government and their parents who have failed to live up to expectations or by example. Speaking through the voice of NAS President Comrade Falase, Ike bemoans the failure of government as an apparatus of power, to impact positively on the youth who are the future leaders of the nation. Through the commission set up by NAS, the author portrays the degree of alienation of the youth from their homes and their Nations scheme of things. Thus, the subject matter of Comrade Falase's press conference centers on the numerous injustices suffered by the youth in the hands of the adult society. Adopting the voice of this student unionist, Ike decries the deteriorating standard of education in his nation. This deterioration according to him is evident in the fact that the Universities where the nation's future leaders are trained are no longer carefully planned. This is worsened by the acute shortage of qualified staff, fund and facilities, despite the increasing

population of students. In addition, lecturers who are expected to act as students' role models are guilty of engaging in retrogressive activities such as petty jealousy, trivial rivalry, charms, tribalism and other anti-social activities in order to attain and maintain their desired positions in the university (180-191)

Still speaking through the voice of comrade Falase, the author calls on the government to reconsider its current vote for student facilities and welfare because everything that is required in the provision of high academic standard is on the decline. He notes that when compared to high educational standard of the 1940's, the present state of the nation's educational system is disheartening. For Instance, in the youth of the adult, the emphasis was on all round development of the mind and body of the child. In order to achieve this aim, the government provided them with:

Facilities for a wide range of hobbies, including carpentry and metal work, a first rate library, and first rate laboratories and workshops ... The students house, with house masters and prefects provided invaluable laboratories for the development of leadership qualities in the students. Every effort was made to establish and nurture an ideal climate for values and bringing up the country's future leaders (269).

It is therefore understandable that the lack of maintenance and improvement on these facilities for contemporary students leave them with no alternative than to turn rebellious and anti-social. This is confirmed by Chief Taiwo's remark that the young people cannot be better than the educational system designed for them. This idea is also supported by witness 013 who notes that:

If in spite of the excellent educational system provided for our parents in their youth, they have turned this country into the mess it currently is. It is the height of hypocrisy for them to expect angels to come from the poultry ruins that they erected for us under the dignified names of universities (271).

In order to bring to the fore, his suggestions for lasting solutions to these challenges in both the family institution and the nation at large. Ike adopts the voices of the various witnesses that appear before the students' commission, as well as the recommendations of the commission. Ike advises parents to look more honestly and critically at their own lives before passing judgment on their children. He posits that it is the failure to do so that estrange them to their children. The case of the first witness before the students' commission is a typical example. She is a mulatto or an "African profit in undergraduate Parlance" (195). By this is meant that she is born of an American mother and a Nigerian father in the United States. She suffers because of her father's moral misconduct. When she was barely one-year-old, her father makes away with her to London, leaving her poor American mother who had earlier assisted him financially in

an untold heartache. In England, the Mullato is brought up with the lie that her mother was dead. This childhood devoid of maternal love makes her plan an early marriage in order to make a family of her own. Unfortunately, she falls in love with the son of her father's colleague and rival over an erstwhile girlfriend. What follows is that these fathers use their children as mere "scapegoats for settling old, dishonorable scores which they all will not admit publicly" (20). Consequently, their fathers' immorality and selfishness drive these two young people into each other's arms which results in unwanted pregnancy which culminates in the poor girl's estrangement to her father. It is evident that the psychological torture which they both suffer is as a result of their fathers' moral misconduct. Through this witness, Ike draws our attention to the need to avoid bringing up our children with lies and deceptions. In a passionate sympathy with the mulatto and speaking as a concerned parent and human rights' activist, Ike's recommendation is voiced through the chairman of the National Commission on Parents Chief Dipo Taiwo. He declares that:

Before parents rush to mete out punishment to children for any offense, they should count their teeth with their tongues as it were. They might discover that they have committed more heinous crimes than their children but have been lucky not to have been found out (210).

Closely related to the mullato's case, is the declaration of the fifth witness before the national commission on parents. She is a brilliant student with great love for lawyers and a dream to be one. Unfortunately, against her will, she is forced to study Medicine in the university by her parents because each of them set out to study medicine and failed. Her parents' selfishness and lack of good parental guidance and counseling do not only deny her of qualifying as a doctor or a lawyer but also land her in a psychiatric hospital.

It is pertinent to note that in this novel, Ike does not only expose the social ills that strain the relationship between parents and their children but also goes further to show what an ideal relationship between parents and young ones should be. Through Dr Chinwuba and Dr Bankole, who are his model fathers, the author suggests that parents, and indeed the entire adult society should encourage mutual relationship with their young ones in the manner of a round table, heart-to-heart talk. They are advised to consider the views and feeling of their young ones in order to get them mentally tuned for their future roles as nation's leaders. Through this mutual relationship, they would discover the inner most thoughts, fears and aspirations of their children. It is only when their children are free enough to share their challenges with them, that they will be able to show them the right path when they stray to avoid being crisis managers.

Although some of Ike's recommendation for a perfect relationship between the youth and the adult society appear unattainable, or to borrow Emenyonu's words in his article entitled "Visions of youth and Future" "farfetched or utopian in this country"

(122). They at least provide the necessary guidelines needed in the match towards an egalitarian future of his Nigerian nation.

With the foregoing, it is evident that Chukwuemeka Ike has shown a sustained interest in the well-being of the youth in his Nigerian nation. His success in this novel is portrayed in the employment of basic literary techniques especially the third person narrative technique and authentic and verifiable settings as well as his choice of diction which is easily understood by his targeted audience.

In terms of diction, the author employs simple English language in order to ensure an easy comprehension of his subject matter. Apart from an extensive use of idioms and proverbs which relate to parent/child relationship, he also employs the use of abbreviations and acronyms in order to avoid unnecessary repetition of long phrases. These include the following:

OSN-----Operation Save the Nation
 NAS-----National Association of Students
 SAN-----Senior Advocate of Nigeria
 SOS-----Save our Soul
 BF-----Boy friend

Setting and Character

The thin line between real life experiences in terms of parent child/relationship in Nigeria and Ike's fiction in this novel is easily decipherable. This is evident in the portrayal of the typical Nigerian names of characters and places in such a way that it does not take the perceptive readers much to identify familiar persons and places where most of the actions take place. Such familiar names include Chief Mrs. Edo, Justice Solomon Okpetun, Dr Chinwuba, Dr Chu Nwoke and Alhaji Adamu. Also, familiar places where most of the actions take place include Kings college Lagos, High court of Ibadan, Ikoyi Club, Anthony Village and Apapa. It is also pertinent to note that when the author employs the use of fictitious names for certain locations, there are clues to decode the actual places in real life. For Instance, National University refers to University of Nigeria, Nsukka, while the authors Premier University refers to the University of Ibadan Which is the venue of NAS press conference and commission's hearings. The Youth Service Scheme refers to NYSC programme which is a one-year compulsory service to father land by every Nigerian graduate.

In terms of setting of time, the situations, events, and characters in *Our Children Are Coming* are traceable to Nigeria's second republic under the democratic leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and indeed other subsequent regimes in Nigeria since decolonization. The political social and economic situations portrayed in the novel are characteristics of these regimes. These regimes are notorious for their economic waste, lack of focus and obsession with bureaucratic commissions of enquiry

aimed at settling family members, and associates of those in power. In these regimes, all that is needed is to be associated with those in power or belong to the ruling political party to be appointed as a member of one of the numerous commissions of inquiry whose major interests are on improving the individual lots of members. Thus, the similitude between reality and Ike's fiction portray Ike's consciousness of his membership of the Nigerian nation. The ensuing recommendation on issues concerning Nigerian youth implies his commitment as a concerned citizen and parent who desires improved national well-being in the present and future of his nation.

In terms of character and characterization, the author employs the use of multiple characters who are representatives of the groups which they belong in the Nigerian Nation. These groups are stratified along the lines of age such as Adults and Youth, parents and children, lecturers and students. The relationship between these groups is one of conflict. Here, the youth are poised to save the nation from poor parenting, moral corruption and economic waste from the hands of the adult society. The major characters among the adult group are members of the government commission of inquiry on Juvenile delinquency namely Justice Solomon Okpetun, Chief Mrs. Winifred Edo, Dr Chu Nwoke and Alhaji Adamu. Others are parents who appear before the government commission of inquiry. They include Chief Olabisi, Reverend Obi and Professor Aliyu. On the other hand, the youth represented by NAS officials namely Comrade Falase, Comrade Demas Brown, Comrade Sunday Ibe and the various witnesses who appear before the NAS Commission. Through their voices and actions, we learn a lot about the entire Nigerian Nation to which they belong. It is evident that the author's sympathy is with the youth, the neglected, marginalized, deprived and untapped group in the Nation. This is because their vehement resistance of the leadership of the adult society force the government of the day to effect desired positive changes in the Nigerian nation. For instance, the youth led by Comrade Falase are instrumental to the disbandment of the notorious, ill focused commission of inquiry as well as bring to an end, the global tour embarked upon by the members of the commission thereby saving the nation from further economic waste. Above all, they also succeed in gaining their much desired recognition from the adults and government officials. Hence, the mere mention of NAS, gives immediate freedom to Comrade Falase who is marked for incarceration by the police commissioner.

Other techniques employed by the author to authenticate his subject matter as well as leave a lasting impression in the mind of the reader include irony, humor and satire. Ironically as earlier mentioned, all the members of the government's commission of Enquiry are guilty of the very misconduct for which they are appointed to probe in the youth. Justice Okpetu is guilty of sexual promiscuity because of his involvement with Apollonia who is young enough for his daughter. Apollonia's father comes before the commission to report his daughter's sexual misconduct when ironically he is unoblivious of his daughter's involvement with the chairman sitting in

judgment over the very girl. Mrs. Winifred Edo and Dr Chu Nwoke are also guilty of this moral corruption. Hence they lack the moral justification to sit in judgment over the youth for this very moral misconduct.

The author also employs the use of satire blended with humor in order to tone down his castigation of the adults in their failure to properly protect their children and youth, to convey his call for re-orientation of minds and psyche of Nigerian citizens towards the pursuit of collective interest rather than selfish ones. By exposing the hidden and open thoughts and actions of those who engage in acts which are inimical to the well of the generality of the nation's citizens, the author makes a conscious attempt at altering the reader's attitude towards certain modes of conduct in the nation. For instance, the chairman of the government commission is indicted through his illicit affair with Apollonia. He perceives this innocent girl as a secret apple:

The Yet-to-be patented "Vitamin Q" which, taken last thing at night shot tingling sensation right through your toe nails and kept you vibrant with vivacity for the ensuring twenty-four hours! (106)

Unfortunately, but humorously, this well-guarded secret leaks one night, "he had forgotten he was home with his wife, before exclaiming "Fantastic Apo" before coming face to face with reality (111).

From the above therefore, it is obvious that Ike engages simple diction as well as the basic elements of the novel genre in order to portray the failure of both the Nigerian parents and Government in the proper upbringing of the future leaders of the nation. To the government, he proposes more investment in the educational sector and indeed all issues concerning the youth. Negative indulgences of the parents which in turn have negative effects on the children are portrayed in order to show that the family is at the center of the nation, and as such its harmony is crucial to the harmony and development of the nation. This implies that disciplined individuals make a disciplined community which could be extended to mean a disciplined nation.

Addressing the parents with such proverbs as "It is from the parent snake that the baby snake inherits its venom", and, "the training you give a puppy determines how it behaves as an adult Dog" (p. 24), Ike calls on parents to live lives worthy of emulation by their children who are the nation's future leaders. The exclamation mark (!) which forms part of the title of the novel (*Our Children Are Coming!*), symbolizes the urgency in the need for the adult society to be mindful of their actions and lifestyle as these have negative influences on their children who learn by example.

Conclusion

A keen study of Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike's *Our Children Are Coming* reveals that the criminal neglect of issues concerning the Nigerian youth, as well as the

challenges of moral and economic corruption of the adult society are still prevalent with us in Nigeria and Africa at large. Indeed, vices such as greed, selfishness, penchant for foreign goods and trips, unhealthy rivalry, moral and economic corruption, as well as the abuse of the rights of the youth, which Ike craftily condemns in this novel negate the ideals of nationhood and a desire for a developed future. In view of the context-specific challenges ravaging contemporary Nigeria and Africa, it has therefore become increasingly necessary to pay urgent attention to the struggles and challenges of contemporary Nigerian child and youth, as they have the propensity of falling easy prey to extremists, who recruit them to unleash mayhem on their fellow citizens.

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