

Review

Appraising a Historian's Literary Contribution to Social Order: Prof. Okpeh, Ochai Okpeh, Jnr

Robert, Odey Simon

Sandaji College, Shendam Road, Lafia; Bridge Gate Research Consult Ltd, Lafia, Nasarawa

Author E-mail: greatrobert1st4fame@yahoo.com , 08030410087

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Although historians and men of letter, the literary minds/writers, particularly those of their oral forms, are seemingly and professionally (scope-wise) inseparable, only a few historians venture into literature, particularly poetry that involves the economic and technical use of condensed language to say much in a few words. Literary minded and talented erudite historians, like Prof. Okpeh, Ochai Okpeh Jnr, continue to sustain the ageing relationship between literature and history vis-à-vis men of letter and historians via their enormous literary contributions to knowledge and the society. There are unique historians, for every scholar can be a writer but not every writer can be a poet. They go beyond history, their area, delving into literature, sociology, economics, anthropology, archaeology, politics, international relations, philosophy, languages and linguistics, among others. This makes such historians multi-disciplinary and versatile. Okpeh is one of them, and thus deserves an art appreciation of this kind while alive for inspiration to many now and later as well as a well-done or a motivation to him and such others to do more. The study draws more from oral sources- interviews, observation and intuition- and a few closely relevant written materials. The paper concludes that Prof. Okpeh is a rare historian and man of letter that should be immortalised in various ways like Achebe, Soyinka, Dike, Amali's and others.

Keywords: Appraising, Prof. Okpeh, Historian, Literary contribution, Social order.

INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, literature and history with their professionals have been sharing close narrative and record-keeping affinity though in their respective ways, perspectives, manners, methods and so on. Past events constitute historical facts, even though not all such facts are historical. These facts are basically the products of literature, oral and written, but oral more. These literary events and products are expressed via oral literature forms: myth, folktale, legend(ary), oral poems, e.g. ballad, and drama. Drama erstwhile was often performed without scripting. The historian does the pro-/post-creation of the original creation of literature vis-à-vis its professionals- men of letters. These oral aspects of literature which double as indigenous and oral tradition are together most often regarded by many as folklore but with exclusion of poetry.

According to Okpeh (2005:24), the nature of the knowledge about the past, i.e. the form in which it appears to the historian poses a number of interesting problems. For example, not only are they incomplete but also they are always 'necessarily' partial. Indeed, facts

about the past in the way they appear cannot give (or tell) the historian everything he needs or wants to know about the past. In addition, they are always conflicting and in most cases inconsistent. Thus, the facts contained in them do not come to the historian innocently. Swai (1986:3) notes, 'As a social act or process, the context of their knowledge and the manner of their transmission cannot be devoid of the prejudices of the people whose activities they symbolise.' It is from the foregoing that the raw facts, at first hand manufacture, are not historical neither the products of history cum historian. History, thus, both oral and written, 'romances' literature for its facts- historical facts. Alagoa (1981:7) lends credence to the above thus:

In Africa, the most significant documents may come to the historian in the form of oral literature or tradition, in intangible ethnographic practices and customs of communities in language spoken by present populations, or in material objects such as artifacts from archaeological excavations or implements used in daily life or ritual.

'History is the historian's experience. It is 'made' by nobody save the historian: to make history is the only way of making it' (Oakeshott, 1961:22). To write history, or even to read it, is to be endlessly engaged in the process of selection. No part of the job is more difficult or more important (Fish, 1970:60). This also proves that aspects of culture, like literature, create events/facts from which history, via the historian, selects and makes historical. So, the facts of history are made to exist and available to the historian by the original creator, the man of letter who first creates orally, since every knowledge can only be reduced to writing after it had first existed in oral form. Oral tradition is the basic source of both literary and historical traditional/indigenous knowledge. This connectivity expresses the ageing inception relationship between history and literature. Since historians agree that 'past events', i.e. 'facts' are made by men in the form of such things as social, political, [culture] and economical institutions (Temu and Swai, 1981).

It could be inferred that past events are created and passed down by artistic/creative men through oral trad-media such as archives, translations, poetry and folkloric media like proverbs, songs dance, idioms, folktales, music, legend, story-telling, drama, masquerade, etc. (Ismail, 2015), which are forms of both oral literatures and history that express traditional/indigenous knowledge. Okpeh (2005:26) muses, 'The point therefore is that the historian's choice of an aspect of the past, the selection of the facts about that past and their interpretation all constitute the processes by which the facts of history are created.' This reflects the muse of Elton quoted by Gomyork (1990) that facts dictate in writing history by the historian involves the two-way process of molding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts. Literary facts cannot be criticized likewise to avoid deviation from established conventional norms, message/meaning distortion, subjectivity and solecism.

The learnt/acquired writing skills of various writers showcase the manifestation(s) of their profession/career. That is, most historians, are bound to be historical while others go beyond that to being literary in contributing to the social order of their societies. And, only a few of them can venture into core literature, oral and/or written. As such, most of them only adopt and get so much engrossed to only historical narrative, unlike the men of letter who go beyond historical sources, narratives, perspectives, scope(s) and methods. A few rare erudite historians, like Okpeh, Ochai Okpeh Jnr, are multi-disciplinary writers, who contribute to the social order of his Nigerian society, via the prose genre of literature.

Wa Thiongo (1981:75) writes on the extent to which the writer can help in society's struggle thus: *The extent which the writer can and will help is not only by explaining the world but in changing it will depend on his appreciation of the class and values that are struggling for a new order and new society, a more*

human future and which classes and values are hindering the birth of a new and the hopeful. And of course, it depends on which side he is in these class struggles of his times.

Okpeh, Ochai Okpeh, Jnr is in the functional, vibrant, learned and philanthropic elite class of his Nigerian society, who often frowns at societal man-made hindrances who rouses hope in the hopeless of the society by prevailing on his fellow elites of the other end to do all that is right for and expected of them from their society and its populace. This he does via his prose gospel and criticizing ed. Asked why he writes, Okpeh explains:

Writing basically involves giving messages or disseminating information of appraisal- appreciation or criticism. When things go wrong, the writer speaks against it through his/her pen- write up. Specifically, I write for the fun of it; to speak to a heterogeneous audience- the society, the world- as my own means of gospel; criticizing ed, wide impartation and contribution to the literature and the society; and to effect social change (order).

Remarking on writers who write with either a static or dynamic world order in mind, Ngugi Wa Thiong in his *Writers in Politics* (1981:74/5) had criticised Chinua Achebe for 'merely capturing and reflecting the struggling around him, and Wole Soyinka for his heroic stand as a social individual.' This, Uwatt (2015:1) explains,

To Ngugi, the writer's role is that of helping in the community's struggle for a certain quality of life free from all parasitic exploitative relations; and the relevance of literature as that of helping in our daily struggle for the right and security of bread, shelter, clothes and song, the right of a people to products of their own sweat.

Okpeh is one such rare writer that significantly plays such role of helping in the community's struggle for certain qualities of life free from parasitic exploitative relations, expressed from literature, one of the best means of struggling for and ascertaining social order/change and development. He is an erudite non-fictional prose writer.

Again, Uwatt (2015:1) elusively yet concisely writes, *From the struggle for the evolution of democratic nation states up to the more recent African and Arab springs, revolution remained effective weapon for changing the world order. Be it in American or French revolution, or the Kenyan and Tanzanian revolutions, or the Harlem renaissance or Negritude movement, the writer has always been struggling side by side with the nationalists or Pan-Africanists against colonialism, slavery, tyranny, cultural aberration, psychological disorientation, etc. Literature itself is a representation of the struggling in society at human spiritual, economic, social, cultural, religious, [and] environmental levels within the self. The writer's stand in these struggles is shaped by his vision of the world order and the role he elects to play in the envisioned world order.*

Writers and literary giants like Chinua Achebe of *Blessed Memory*, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, Lenrie Peters, J P Clerk, Okigbo, Afigbo, K O Dike, Akiga, Shamsudeen Amali, Erim O Erim, Okon E Uya, Florence Nwakpa, Ngozi Chimamanda, Idris Amali, to mention but a few have engaged in such struggles at different times and degree. Achebe and Soyinka engaged in the Nigerian Civil War mightily with their golden whistling pens, besides engaging in virtually all the other struggles of the society- politics, economy, religion, culture, education, environment and geography, literature, history, tradition, humanity, psychology, etc. As noted above, literature itself is a representation of all these struggles. These various writers' stand in all these struggles was/is shaped by their vision of the world order. Okpeh Ochai Okpeh Jnr. Is one such writer of the contemporary Nigerian society, so-shaped to play the role he/she has chosen (chooses) to play in the struggles of his society via literature, as s/he delves almost specifically into non-fictional prose, an aspect of the prose genre of literature, shaped by history, his career and immediate constituency. Like Osundare's poetry, Okpeh's prose volumes predominantly revolve around values and class contestation, a call for change (revolution), inter-group relations and conflicts, development, equity- bridging gender gaps, and historicisation of several other non-history fields. He writes not just for the fun of writing but with the sole intent of changing the world order, identifying with and criticizing the contending classes and values in struggle, and voicing the plights of the Nigerian populace, which constitute the social contradictions that are obstructing the birth of a new order. He often criticizes culture and social change (e.g. patriarchy, gender stereotype/discrimination and violence against women); satirises political and social anomalies (e.g. gender exclusion politics, ethno-religious politics of rancor and bitterness, obnoxious policies); interrogates and lampoons imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and criticizing e.

Engels cited in Idyorough (2008:15) notes, *The final causes of all social change, conflict and political revolution are to be sought not in men's brain, not in men's better insight into eternal truth and justice, both in changes in the mode of exchange.*

Furthermore, historical critics approach literature in two ways: (i) they provide a context of background information necessary for understanding how literary works were perceived in their time; (ii) they show how literary works reflect ideas and attitudes of the time in which they were written. These two general approaches to historical criticism represent methods and approaches that might be termed 'old historicism' and 'new historicism' (Di Yanni, 2002:2082). Di Yanni (2002:2076) argues that for the formalist perspective of criticism, the proper concern of literary criticism is with the work itself rather than with literary history, the life of the author, or a work's social and historical contexts. For a formalist, the

central meaning to a literary work discovered via a detailed analysis of the work's formal elements rather than to consider other issues, whether biographical, historical, psychological, social, political or ideological.

Some may wonder why the writer talks about art appreciation, criticism and art history here. This is because appraising involves considering or examining somebody or something to form an opinion about them or it is the progressive form of 'appraise' which also means the afore-stated. In addition, 'to appraise' means 'to make a formal judgment about the value of a person's work, usually after a discussion with them about it' (Hornby, et al. 2010). Thus, since this writer makes a formal objective judgement about the value of Okpeh's works- non-fictional prose of both literary and historical narratives- after having had a fieldwork interaction with him about his works and choice role in his envisioned world order, shaped by his vision of the world order, background, career-history, occupation-disposition and prowess and what criticizing e the society, who, where, when, which, how, to what extent and what could be done? Besides, by this appraisal and art appreciation, the writer appreciates the works of Okpeh, with a view to classifying them, ascertaining how literary they are, his narrative, approach, method, perspective and idiosyncrasy and highlighting the relationship between literature and history vis-à-vis historians and men of letters, the general writers and the criticizing technical writers. Literature and History are both Arts and of Humanities, the argument on History's scientific status notwithstanding. Simply put, history, via historians, continues to romance literature, as it keeps fetching from both the raw and manufactured materials (products) of literature, both oral and written sources, over times. Literature on the other hand, derives from or relies on language (linguistics), art, philosophy, society, humanity, divinity, culture and tradition. Literature and History share both oral and written forms as well as narratives, sources, media, and so on. The facts selected by the historian, as attested to by Okpeh (2005:23, 24-27), are most of the manufactures of literature via the man of letter, its custodian, and made historical facts are mostly literary. After all, historians have agreed that not all facts/events are historical (Okpeh, 2005:23).

Accordingly, Okpeh (2005:23,25-26) muses: *It is not all facts about the past that are historical facts or are regarded as such by the historian. ...The selective instinct in the historian is therefore an important aspect of history writing since it informs his sense of critical appreciation [i.e. literary appreciation or art history] of the facts. ...Many facts are called but few are consciously chosen, on implicit and rational criteria of factual significance. ...For a fact about the past to be historical or considered so by the historian, it has first of all got to be accorded... 'the conscious process of selection', conducted by the historian himself. ...For the selected fact to graduate to the club of historical facts, it has to be 'recognised and accepted' by other historians.*

[And] whether or not a fact about the past becomes historical depends on the historian's choice of his subject matter.

Literature vs History, Art Appreciation vs Art History

Art appreciation' simply means being able to look at works and form your opinion (Funch, 1997:312). Bramble (2014:1) explains art appreciation as the knowledge and understanding of the universal and timeless qualities that identify all great art. The more you appreciate and understand the art of different areas, movements, styles and techniques, the better you can develop, evaluate and improve your own artwork. This clearly highlights the fact that this writer's appraisal or art appreciation of Okpeh Jr is strictly formal, academic and not for any personal gain/reward, inducement or subjective eulogy/sycophancy.

Robert (2014:2) notes,

Although art appreciation is criticizing ed, treated, discussed, defined and explained by various authorities in varied ways, approaches and perspectives, all seemingly point to the fact that 'it is the appreciative critical judgment, treatment, evaluation, analysis and appraisal of art (art works), generally based on facts and constructive criticism devoid of bias and subjective criticism. In other words, art appreciation is the application of art to other human endeavours to derive its creative aesthetic values and pleasures as well as its appraisal, based on its significance, achievements and or failures, scope, hallmark, stages/periods, advancement, expansion, offers and opportunities vis-à-vis those involved. It is simply the ability with prowess and dexterity to critically create, infer and explore art works from available sources, upon valid understanding, treatment and judgement to achieve artistic prominence and pleasures.

Art appreciation is also regarded as art criticism. It is closely associated with Art History, both of which are relatively new, i.e. their formal emergence. This partly accounts for why they are both combined as a single field in most universities and colleges. Art Appreciation is recently said to deal with the nature of arts and artists, while Art History is seen as the study of art movements, influential times, periods and famous artists (Beltons, 2013). Art History studies art in the context of world historical development periods and elements and methods used in art appreciation.

Art appreciation and art history span the entire history of arts itself and mankind, from the pre-historic times to the contemporary era (Funch, 1997). The remote origin of art can be traced to Sumer, Athens and Greece, the cradle of philosophy, knowledge, art and civilisation, among others, as Sumer, the ancient Mesopotamian City State, is to be the world's first in virtually everything formal. Both art appreciation and art history have gone through the historical epochs, beginning with the Greek

period, began in the 3rd BC (cf. Agbedo, 2000:8-19). This, however, does not presuppose that art appreciation began in the 3rd century. The era only marked the peak of its formal beginning, with the emergence of classical philosophy, philosophy (linguistics) and general arts by the Pre-Socratic Greek, the 5th century rhetoricians, Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, Vitruvius, Augustine, among other (Agbedo, 2000:9). Thereafter, art appreciation and art history rose, along with Romanticism between the late 15th and early 17th centuries, when it became widely spread, following the era of civilization- the renaissance period, though art appreciation (criticism) rose before art history. Art appreciation rose to appraise, discuss, evaluate and judge art works from one stage of human existence to another, with a view to creatively appreciating or criticizing art works and the artists in writing.

In the 18th century, precisely 1719, the English painter, Jonathan Richard, coined the term 'art criticism', developed perhaps to incorporate other arts besides literature, since it was seemingly the exclusive preserve of literature, known as literary appreciation or criticism, a term for 'appraising' or 'appreciating' literary works. Art criticism as genre of writing gained its modern form in the 18th century. Art criticism (appreciation) has many aspects as there are many people practicing it. It is simply a discussion of art and its value. Depending on who is writing on the subject/artist, art criticism may not exist at all or include art history within its framework.

Finally, art appreciation involves the descriptive methodology, where the work of art is sufficiently translated into world's reviewed, appraisal, analysed and interpreted so as to allow a case to be made. The evolution of art that follows the description (or is interspersed with it) depends as much on the artist's output as on the experience of the critic. There is an activity with such a marked subjective component, a variety of ways in which it can be pursued based on the Aesthetic theory of the known socio-cultural context the artist is immersed in to discern their intent (cf. Benedict, 2013; Gettlein, 2013; Sayer, 2009).

The Multi-disciplinary Historian Prose Writer, Prof. Okpeh, O O Jnr

Responding to this writer's interview question, 'Who is Prof. Okpeh?' Okpeh stated briefly thus:

Prof. Okpeh Ochai Okpeh Jnr is the second child but first son, of Mrs Grace and Mr Ogri John Ochai Okpeh, of about ten children, two of which are late. My dad died long time ago. I am a native of Ochogbo, Ohimini Local Government Area, which was carved out of Otukpo LGA, Benue State. So, I am an Idoma. My lecturer brother at Federal University, Lokoja, makes the second Okpeh academia at present. Another of the Okpeh brothers just graduated from Kogi State University, Anyingba. We got a barrister and a civil servant siblings, in the family too. I

am a married Christian, born on 12th December, 1968. Being from a well-disciplined and education-oriented family, I grew up with strong passion for formal education. My father often said he did not want us to stay back, like he did for his own father, farming for him.

Further, Okpesh Jnr is an erudite versatile historian scholar, with both literary and historical narratives and styles. He became a Professor of African History in 2010. His family background has played a very significant role in his life, education, career, scholarship and writing. This is a rare lesson to learn from good parenting. Thus, irresponsible parents must have to sit up and build the life foundation of their children and wards. This is a thankless task that becomes a thankful one in the long run. It was determination, efforts, hard-work and persistence that drove home the aspiration of the poor but rare, uneducated but education-minded father, which in turn injected the crave for formal education, from the basic to the highest level, into his children, with which their dreams have been fulfilled. If he were a certain father, he would have said, 'I who did not acquire the education am living like many of my contemporaries; we are the same.' 'If you wouldn't be serious with/about your education, don't make me waste my little resources on you in vain.'

Okpesh Jnr badges PhD in African History, MA in Economic History and BA in History, all from the University of Jos; 'A' Level (IJMB) from the School of Basic Studies, Makurdi, now College of Advanced and Professional Studies (CAPS); WASSC ('O' Level) from Government College, Makurdi. He had his primary education in Otukpo, moved on to Government College in 1980, and finished in 1985. Between 1986 and 1988, he ran an IJMB programme and was later on personally considered for admission into History Department, University of Jos, by Prof. Stephen, the then HOD, History, having walked up to him, after being denied admission offer into Law with his IJMB 10 points, since he (Okpesh Jr.) had no influential person to stand for him.

He had wanted being a lawyer. He drew some strong inspiration from his paternal uncle, the only then educated member of the family and a civil servant. For that, Okpesh Jnr decided not only to be very close to him but also stay with him. He wishes this uncle were/alive to behold these his days. In 1984, he got a scholarship to study Law at the University of Benin, but his uncle objected, considering distance and other factors, opted rather for his nephew to go for Diploma in Law, but his friend refused and advised that Okpesh Jnr should rather run an IJMB (Interim Joint Matriculation Board) Programme. Okpesh began writing at the School of Basic Studies (SBS), Makurdi, now (CAPS), where he was spurred up into writing and learning basic English by Ted Anyobe, who was teaching them English. Okpesh's words read:

I went into History in anger. I have no regret ever being in History. When I began writing history, no sooner it became part and parcel of me. As an academic, after my

PhD, I base my interest in Gender, Development, Conflict and Inter-group Relations Studies as well as African History. My professional coverage/constituency is The Historical Society of Nigeria. I often take History into other disciplines [i.e. Applied/Macro History, our classification], particularly the methodology and philosophy of history. I got early interest in Literature and later in English too at SBS, Makurdi. There, I usually did some creative writing- essays and articles- and minor literary writing- imaginary and real short stories.

Okpesh has over 200 works, published and unpublished: over fifty journals, over fifty books chapters, four reviews, sixty-four (64) international and national conferences papers, 12 workshops papers and six (6) consultancy and technical reports. This learned professor and writer had got wealth of experiences in life, academic and otherwise. At secondary level, for instance, he had taught History, Government and Literature-in-English. And, he has been teaching/lecturing History at university level since 1995, when he joined the Benue State University (BSU), Makurdi, as a Graduate Assistant, till date, and now at the Federal University Lafia, Nasarawa State, which he joined in 2014. He had held all the University positions (cadres), students' unions positions, secretary to several bodies/institutions including the Historical Society of Nigeria and ASUU, Students' Staff Adviser, Member of committees and organisations, Chairman of formal bodies, e.g. ASUU, BSU's History Post-Graduate Seminar Committee, Co-ordinator of BSU's Diploma in Nigerian Cultural Studies and History Department Post-Graduate Programme, HSN North Central Zone Vice President, and Head of Department, History at both BSU and FULafia, the latter which he has been since January, 2015 to date, as at the time of this write-up. Also, he is a Member of Historical Society of Nigeria (HSN), West African Research Association (WARA), League of Researchers in Nigeria (LRN), Nigerian Society of International Affairs (NSIA) and National Association for the Promotion of Studies in Arts and Social Sciences (NAPSASS). He is a well-travelled fellow and academia, who has gone to USA, Germany, France, Ethiopia, Ghana, Egypt, Sierra-Leone, Togo and Benin Republic several times respectively.

At university, this erudite and versatile historical scholar has been teaching History courses like:

- (i) Africa in the 19th Century
- (ii) Africa in the 20th Century
- (iii) East and Central Africa to and since 1800
- (iv) The Military in African History
- (v) The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade
- (vi) the Idoma Speaking People
- (vii) Russian History in the 19th and 20th Centuries
- (viii) History of Africa since 15th AD
- (iv) Problems of Nation Building in Africa since 1945
- (x) Europe to the Age of Revolution
- (xi) Nigerian Urban History
- (xii) Europe and the Wide World since 1870

- (xiii) Theories of Imperialism
- (xiv) Modern Revolution: Selected Case Studies
- (xv) History of Scientific Ideas
- (xvi) Nigerian History
- (xix) African Economic History
- (xx) Comparative Historiography
- (xxi) The Social History of Nigerian Women, 1800-1900
- (xxii) West African Women, from 1945 to the Present
- (xxiii) Traditions of Origins and Migrations (selected Case Studies).

Interrogating him on his self-most cherished works, with which he 'exploded' in writing, he pointed out:

*The first is the 40-chapter work I co-edited with Prof. Dogara and Akinwumi: **Inter-group Relations in Nigeria During the 19th and 20th Centuries**, Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2006. I have two chapters in it, which both became prominent because they brought strong conceptual and methodological approaches. The second book is the one I edited with Prof. Mike Odey: **Historical Research and Methodology in Africa: Essays in Honour of Professor Chales Creswell Jacobs**, Makurdi: ABoki Publishers, 2007. And, that with Prof. Pam Sha: **Gender, Power and Politics in Nigeria**, Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2007. When people started citing me here and here, I became very impressed, because it shows that they made impact. The impact of one's works is not in the volume but the impact they make on the society and people, including frequent citations. These three works are my off-shot to fame.*

Other titles by Okpeh, Ochai Okpeh Jnr, a few of which he co-authored/edited other scholars, include:

- (i) *The Idoma and Their Neighbours: A History of Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria during the 19th and 20th Centuries*
- (ii) *The Idoma and Minority Group Politics in Northern Nigeria 1944 – 1960: A Study in an Aspect of the National Question*
- (iii) *The Historical Evolution of the Ochobo Clan Community in Oglewu District of Otukpo LGA*
- (iv) *The Idoma and the Middle Belt Movement, 1946 – 1960*
- (v) *Government Strategies and the Empowerment of Women in Contemporary Nigeria*
- (vi) *Pre-colonial Akweya Society of Central Nigeria*
- (vii) *Rehabilitating or Liberating the Past for National Development? An Appraisal of the Contradictions of Postcolonial Africa 2, Cultural Policies*
- (viii) *Globalization and the African Question in the 21st Century*
- (ix) *Ordinary Nigerians and the Dilemma of Democratization and Good Governance*
- (x) *Nigeria and the Political Economy of the Inter-War Years*
- (xi) *The New World Order, Nigeria and the Challenges of Cultural Imperialism*
- (xii) *Culture and the Gender Question in Nigeria*
- (xiii) *Society and Violence Against Women: An*

(xiv) *Analysis of a Neglected Critical Aspect of the Women Question in Nigeria*

(xv) *Demilitarization Strategies, Democratic Transition and Good Governance in Nigeria: The Myths, the Realities...*

(xvi) *The Crises of the Post-colonial Nigerian State and the Hope of Democracy and Good Governance in Nigeria*

(xvii) *The Decolonization Process and the Entrenchment of Neo-colonial Structures in Nigeria*

(xviii) *Nigerian Women, Politics and Political Participation: An Analysis of the Past Present and Future Prospects*

(xix) *The Middle East Crises and its Western Imperialist Roots: A Historical Analysis*

(xx) *The Imperatives of Girl-Child Education in the Women Empowerment Question and National Development in Nigeria*

(xxi) *The Phenomenon of Commercial Sex Trade in Nigerian and its Implications on Morality and National Development*

(xxii) *Ethnic Minorities, Decolonization Politics and Political Participation: A Study of the Idoma Hope Rising Union (IHRU), 1944 – 1960*

(xxiii) *The Dominant Social Order, Unity and National Development*

(xxiv) *The State and the Management of Primary Health Care Delivery System in Nigeria: Towards an Appropriate Role*

(xxv) *Between the Theory and Practice of Student Activism: Some Lessons from History*

(xxvi) *Economic Liberalization and the Changing Structure and Role of the Contemporary Nigerian Family*

(xxvii) *Towards an Ideology for National Integration in the 21st Century Nigeria: Some Lessons From History*

(xxviii) *Contending Issues in the Resource Control Controversy: A Historical Appraisal*

(xxix) *Democracy in Nigeria: the Role of Civil Society Organizations*

(xxx) *African Renaissance and the Globalization Process: The Challenges Facing the Humanities Disciplines*

(xxxi) *Democratic Transition, the State and the Development of Higher Education in Nigeria, 1999-2004: Emerging Issues and Lessons*

(xxxii) *University Education, Social Change and National Integration: A Study of the Benue State University and the Reality of the Benue Situation*

(xxxiii) *The Rural Woman and the Women Empowerment Question in Nigeria: A Reflection on Some Issues*

(xxxiv) *The Humanities, Social Change and the Challenges of the 21st Century: Confronting the African Reality*

(xxxv) *The Historian and His Facts: A Reflection on Historical Theory and Methodology*

(xxxvi) *Africa and the International Trade: A Historical Analysis*

- (xxxvii) *Africa and the Challenges of the Globalization Process: Some Preliminary Comments on Available Options*
- (xxxviii) *Perspectives on Gender Relations in a Traditional Society: A Study of the Idoma of Central Nigeria*
- (xxxix) *Journalism and the Challenges of Ethnicity in Nigeria in the Twenty-First Century*
- (xl) *The New World Order, Diaspora Africans and the Racial Identity Question: A Historical Reflection on Some Emerging Issues*
- (xli) *The Historian, Historical Consciousness and National Development*
- (xlii) *The Globalization Process and International Aids Politics: Towards Indigenizing African Development in the 21st Century*
- (xliii) *Neo-Liberal Reforms, the Nigerian University System and the Challenges of the 21st Century*
- (xliv) *Towards Repositioning the Humanistic Disciplines in Africa: Some Ideological Imperatives*
- (xlv) *Patterns and Dynamics of Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria, 1800– 1900 AD*
- (xlvii) *Towards Peaceful Co-existence in a Multi-Ethnic and Multi-Religious Society: Interrogating the Nigerian Experience*
- (xlviii) *In the Eye of the Storm? Implications of China on the Corridors of Global Power*
- (xlix) *Democratic Transition, the State and the Development of Higher Education in Nigeria, 1999–2004*
- (l) *The Struggles for a New Social and Political Order: What Role for the Humanities in Nigeria?*
- (li) *Democracy, Good Governance and Development in Nigeria*
- (lii) *The State of the Nation*
- (liii) *Beyond Racial Myths, Prejudices and Stereotypes: Reconstructing Africa/Black Diaspora Studies in a Changing World*
- (liiii) *Would Africa Survive the 21st Century*
- (liv) *Themes of Inter-Ethnic Stereotypes and Prejudices in Nigerian Civil War: A Study of S. O. O. Amali's Ibos and their Fellow Nigerians*
- (lv) *Economic Impact of the Slave Trade and the African Diaspora on Africa*
- (lvi) *The Pre-colonial Political Organization of the Idoma People*
- (lvii) *The Emergence, Growth and Development of ASUU and Other Staff Unions*
- (lviii) *The Sovereign National Conference: Issues and Perspectives*
- (lix) *The Sovereign National Conference: An Historical Appraisal of Contending Issues and their Implications for the Corporeality of the Nigerian Nation*
- (lx) *The Ufia: A Socio-Cultural Setting*
- (lxi) *The Origins and Development of Scientific Ideas*
- (lxii) *Traditional and Political Developments among the Idoma*
- (lxiii) *Youth Leadership and Politics: An Appraisal of Role Identification, Articulation and Consolidation*
- (lxiv) *Re-conceptualization Violence Against Women: A Critique of Existing Perspectives and their Implications for Sustainable Development*
- (lxv) *The New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and the African Crisis: The Myths, Realities and Possibilities*
- (lxvi) *Dimensions and Implications of Military Transition Programmes in Nigeria, 1976– 1993*
- (lxvii) *Mainstreaming Gender in the African Development Process: A Critique of NEPAD and the Women Question*
- (lxviii) *Inter-group Relations in Nigeria During the 19th and 20th Centuries*
- (lxix) *Conceptual and Methodological Issues Arising from Studies in Inter-group Relations in 19th and 20th Centuries Nigeria*
- (lxx) *Colonialism and the Changing Nature of Idoma Relations with their Neighbours*
- (lxxi) *A Cultural History of Nigeria: Selected Case Studies*
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- (lxxiii) *Historical Research and Methodology in Africa: Essays in Honour of Professor Gloria Ameagwali*
- (lxxiv) *The Sense of Nonsense in History as Science*
- (lxxv) *Idoma Traditional Religion and Festivals*
- (lxxvi) *Gender, Power and Politics in Nigeria*
- (lxxvii) *Patriarchy, Women's Quest for Political Leadership and the Democratization Process in Nigeria*
- (lxxviii) *The Middle-Belt in the Shadow of Nigeria*
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- (lxxxi) *Historical Perspectives on Post-colonial Nigerian Conflicts*
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- (lxxxiii) *Origins, Migrations and Settlement of the Idoma*
- (lxxxiv) *Idoma Pre-colonial Economy*
- (lxxxv) *Population Movements, Conflicts and Displacements in Nigeria*
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- (xc) *Post-Civil War Reconstruction in West Africa: A Comparative Study Nigeria and Liberia*
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(xcviii) *Themes on Nigerian History and Culture*

(xcix) *Federalism in a Historical Perspective*

(c) *Falola and Economic Transnationalism, Globalization, and the Postcolonial State in Africa*

(ci) *Historical Consciousness, Social Engineering and Nation Building*

Okpeh" A Revolutionary Writer

Okpeh is not just an erudite African historian with multiple approaches to history, but also a social critic, reformer, unionist, catalyst, teacher, narrator as well as man of letter, and an activist, analyst, artist, advocate-gender equality, culture, political educational, economic, social and societal change advocate- and orator. He writes for change- social order, a new world. In his writing, he makes projection, particularly of the supposed but lacking social order of different classes. His works are predominantly satiric prose in terms of literary appreciation/art criticism. He acts as an agent of social change, the new world, and the voice of the voiceless, especially the relegated, battered, stereotyped, molested, neglected, abused, discriminated against and impoverished woman of the patriarchal society. That means he stands on the side of the ordinary people (nonentities) of the society in the class struggles of this time. His narrative and style depict his revolutionary intent, calling for a new world- social change in all regards. As a revolutionary writer on prevalent societal gender issues, prescriptions and anomalies, he condemns patriarchy and all forms of unfavorable cultural and religious practices that linger the realisation of the evolving image of the contemporary women in Nigeria and beyond, and calls for social change- new world order.

Among his numerous works on 'gender', one of his core pursuits or research/writing areas, is that entitled 'Patriarchy, Women's quest for Political Leadership and the Democratization Process in Nigeria' in *Gender, Power and Politics in Nigeria*, Okpeh, O. O. and D. P. Sha eds (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2007) is seemingly the first and foremost that suffices for all others. Recall that he personally stated elsewhere here that this book chapter contribution is one of his three prime fame-off-shoot works. The chapter basically stresses the following:

(i) Culture is an important factor in the framing of cross-gender relations and probably exerts greater influence on how women are perceived.

(ii) In the social, economic and political articulation of gender, patriarchy supplies the ideological basis for the subordination, marginalisation and oppression of women.

(iii) And, a thorough understanding of the relationship between gender, power and politics and its implications of the gender question and the democratic process in Nigeria necessarily requires the deconstruction of patriarchy as a male power ideology of domination which survives on culture.

Okpeh (2004:176) contends that the quest for women political inclusion and leadership in Nigeria is, first and foremost, the assertion of their rights and therefore an objective struggle for social justice and equity. Indeed, Nigerian women are demanding for political inclusion and empowerment not just because they are women but because they have the capacity and capability for such responsibility. He laments that patriarchy is responsible for the discrimination Nigerian women suffer in the society; adding that as a matter of fact, every community in Nigeria has fixed ideas about the female gender- who she is, what she is and what she hopes to become in the future.

Next, in his 'The New World Order, Diaspora Africans and the Racial Identity Question: A Historical Reflection on Some, Emerging Issues,' Okpeh (2006: 91-113) scholarly examines the trajectory of the New World Order and its relationship with the experience of Diaspora Africans and the racial identity question. He argues that the emerging New World Order (NWO) in the context of globalization process has created new challenges for Diaspora Africans and compounded the problems of racial prejudice and stereotype, such that the activist and revolutionary writer calls for a new Pan-African movement that is rooted in the concrete historical and cultural experiences and realities of the African race.

In his words,

The paper contends that with the rise on xenophobic tendencies, inter-racial animosity and conflicts, diaspora Africans would confront teething challenges that could further peripheralise their fate, thereby compounding the problems of the continent in the global system. As a strategy for circumventing this seemingly grim threat, a general case for a renewed Pan-African fraternity is advocated. The paper concludes with a call for the actualization of a broad cultural Process through the instrumentality of the African Union. This should be anchored on the institutionalization of deliberate state policy on the imperatives of an authentic African cultural history.

In it, he lampoons the Westerners for their sharp unceasing extreme racism against the South, dubbed the *underdeveloped nations*, having been (and continuously being) impoverished, dehumanized and humiliated.

As an activist, Prof. Okpeh appreciates all legends who are activists in different regards. He preaches activism, historicising it. His paper: 'Between the Theory and Practice of Student Activism: Some Lessons from

History' is an example. In it, he periscope the life of Tyover Livingstone Kwanga, a student activist, who, while alive, attempted to show that student activism is a noble endeavour, underpinned by the struggle for social justice and the search for truth, and thus part and parcel of the academic tradition (Okpeh, 2004:43). He pays tributes to Kwanga for his indelible contributions to the history of student activism in Benue State University, Makurdi. While praising the good focused activist students, he blames and lampoons the other students for the spate of violence that has characterised campus life in our tertiary institutions, like students out-burst; hooliganism, cultism, exams malpractices, gangsterism, etc.

According to him, (Okpeh, 2004:44), as a student, you must understand the trajectories of your social system, the forces that are determining its particular nature and character and the specific role you will necessarily have to play in this general scheme of things. The ideal student is that person who while searching and acquiring knowledge applies it to the understanding of his/her being. He/she is part of the community, from which he/she is acquiring knowledge; has a lot to contribute to its development; is conscious of the contending forces in this system; and is not isolated from this general process. The ideal student is never aloof. He/she is critically involved because there is always a stake he/she must and will always defend. The ideal student has a stake which transcends passing examinations at the end of the semester.

Okpeh (2004:45) explains,

The student activist is essentially a mobiliser of progressive forces against all atrocities perpetrated on students. The activist at this level understands the locus of the contending forces in the larger society and how this is determining the plights of students on campus. ...The forces he/she usually confronts are forces that may (and in fact, almost always) transcend the university community. At that point, activism assumes a national posture and becomes an integral part of the national question. An activist at this level seeks to defend the rights of students by insisting on a fair deal for them at all levels of the academic community. He/she tries to educate his/her colleagues about this, and strategises on possible ways out. Student activism therefore entails the guaranteeing and defending of students' right[s] in a system that they are unarguably, important stakeholders. It is about the struggle for social justice, equity and fair play for students who are almost always at the receiving end of university administrations' high-handedness and lecturers' professional rascality.

The words of Kwanga (1997) reflect the above, viz:

I desire to be a great hero and quite frankly I shall be one. I want to be recognized as a great mobilizer of progressive forces. I am interested in fighting injustice, oppression and exploitation of BSU students. But I can only do that if I get them (BSU students) to understand that they have an interest that they must learn to always

defend. My problem however... is how to start (cited in Okpeh, 2004:49).

As an activist who as well supports student activism, Okpeh explains thus:

Realizing how passionate he felt, and sounded, I encouraged him to start by getting involved. I told him, 'you do not initiate change by standing aloof; you must have a context to operate. Leadership is about organization, charisma and sacrifice (Okpeh, 1997:6).

In another development, Okpeh (2003:26,29) points out the significance of the 'Sovereign National Conference' (SNC) in Nigeria, situating significance within the context of class struggle between the defenders of the old order and the protagonists of the new. The manifestation of this struggle stridently indicates that whatever will happen depends on whichever class triumphs in the final analysis. He notes that in very many ways, the call for an SNC and the controversy it has generated are significant, both for the survival of the Nigerian nation and the growth and development of its citizens. He identifies the following as the contending issues in the SNC question:

- (i) The structural nature of the Nigerian nation;
- (ii) The structural imbalance of the Nigerian nation;
- (iii) The nature and character of the state and its ruling elites;
- (iv) Inter-ethnic competition, polarization and conflicts;
- (v) The military factor;
- (vi) The disempowerment of civil society.

Finally, here, Okpeh's paper: 'The Historian and his Facts: A Reflection on Historical Theory and Methodology', suffices for the various other works on his history- historical- writings. In it, he posits that: (i) it is not all facts about the past that are historical facts; (ii) the basic facts thought to be the bedrock of history do not per se constitute history; (iii) the need to establish these basic facts depends on any special qualities in the facts but indeed on the ultimate decision of the historian; and (vi) the relationship between the historian and his facts is complementary, each needing the other in the process of historical reconstruction (Okpeh, 2005:23). In sum, he contends that:

In the evolution of historical theory and methodology, the interaction between the historian and his facts, on one hand and the other, his subject matter and the purposes; all these services constitute the bedrock of history, its reconstruction and study. To understand the real essence of history and its utility value to humanity, therefore, scholars must understand this interactive process, which gives history its rhythm and the historian relevance as a scholar in the service of humanity.

CONCLUSION

Rare writers deserve to be objectively written on. And that is art appreciation/appraisal or art criticism, an aspect of literature that historians have also ventured

into and developed as art history. History often taps from literature, among other fields, from time immemorial. Literature and history thus share some ageing relationship with obvious considerable similarities and differences. Okpeh, Ochai Okpeh Jnr is such a rare writer and historian, and thus this objective (art) appraisal on him to eulogise his literary and historical contribution to social order in Nigerian society and beyond. He employs both literary and historical narratives, perspectives, facts and forms. For instance, he draws from both oral history and literature. This paper thus calls for more works of this kind on rare writers of all societies which must be objective.

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