

Extractive Institutions in the African Novel: A Study of Chukwuemeka Ike's the Chicken Chasers

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Abstract

The goal of this study is to examine how the African novel tells of issues that affect the continent as a community of people with common history, who are in need of moral and cultural renaissance. It begins by arguing that the many years of decolonization which has failed to impact positively on the lives of the people of the continent is occasioned by the greed, selfishness and irresponsibility of native leaders who inherited power at independence and avers that this unfortunate situation has continued to incite the creative impetus of African novelists, including Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike. In this study, we have argued that in *The Chicken Chasers*, Ike engages the technical form of the novel genre in order to expose and lampoon the few men and women in leadership positions - "extractive institutions", whose words and actions negate the promises of independence, particularly the need to right the wrongs of cultural misrepresentation which characterized colonial period in Africa.

Keywords: Africa, Novel, Extractive Institutions, Culture, the Chicken Chasers, Techniques

Introduction

In their insightful work entitled *Why Nations Fail: the Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*, Acemoglu and Robinson (2013) argue quite convincingly that nations fail because they have extractive institutions. The meat of extractive institutions, according to them is the presence of "a small group of individuals in authority, who design socio political and economic institutions in order to further enrich themselves and perpetuate their power at the expense of the vast majority of the people in the nation" (p. 399). Using many Third World nations as typical examples of places where these institutions thrive, they posit that extractive institutions are the reasons why some nations have remained perpetually impoverished and underdeveloped despite their many years of decolonization.

They however maintain that though, these institutions may succeed for a while, they must ultimately fail when the societies they rule reach the frontiers of knowledge. These ideas of vested interests of few individuals in power; their seeming initial success, and eventual collapse have continued to form the major preoccupations in many African novels, including Chukwuemwka Ike's *The Chicken Chasers*. The novel centers on the misplacement of priorities by selfish African diplomats delegated to deliberate on issues of culture. A keen study of this novel reveals that the indulgence of the diplomats in various abuses of national consciousness stems from one selfish reason to the other. These include inordinate quest for power, greed for wealth, insatiable sexual urge, envy, and the agitation for personal comfort accruing from leadership positions occupied in their respective African nations.

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Thus, it is implied in this narrative, in tandem with Robinson and Acemoglu's argument, that those who constitute extractive institutions in independent African nations are bound to fail when the neglected and dispossessed individuals in these nations acquire the necessary consciousness required to challenge the status quo in order to engender the desired positive change.

Contemporary Africa and the Relevance of this Study: A Brief Overview

From the mid-1940s to the early 1950s, when the wave of liberation struggle swept across Africa, it was generally felt that with power in the hands of natives, the black continent was on her way to restoring her battered image, culture, as well as engendering rapid human and infrastructural development. Unfortunately, after over five decades of the attainment of 'flag independence' in majority of these African nations, the existential reality of majority of Africans remain an antithesis of the aspirations of their nationalist forefathers at independence. Presently, these nations are riddled with divisive issues which threaten their very existence as truly sovereign nations. The ranks of the disaffected, dispossessed, disillusioned, marginalized and the poor have multiplied while few individuals in leadership positions scramble for the distribution of scarce collective resources. Chronicling the African predicament of underdevelopment, with Nigeria and Liberia as typical examples, an American journalist, Maier (2000) in *This House has fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* gives an insight to contemporary African predicament when he declares that successive Nigerian leaders since her independence are responsible for this unfortunate development. He declares that "the Nigerian state is like a battered and bruised elephant staggering towards an abyss with the ground crumbling under its feet" (p. xx). He further argues that despite the nation's "generous endowment with oil", the citizens still remain impoverished due to the selfishness of the leaders who are guilty of siphoning public funds to overseas private bank accounts. (54) Based on this premise, Maier concludes by calling for a behavioral change on the parts of both the leaders and the led, if the nation must attain the desired human and infrastructural development.

In the same vein, Campbell, a former American Ambassador to Nigeria (2004-2007), decries the unfortunate status of the Nigerian nation as an international pariah despite her generous endowment with natural resources. Hence, his baffling interrogation, "If Nigeria is so rich, why are Nigerians so poor?" (2010, p.11). In this somewhat eye opener, Campbell traces the reason for this abject poverty in the midst of plenty to greed, incompetent leadership and the people's mind-set of individualism in place of collectivism while emphasizing the threat this unfortunate development poses to the continued unity and survival of this diverse nation as a single entity.

On his part, Branch (2011) in *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair: 1963-2011*, succinctly declares that irresponsible leadership has remained the greatest undoing of the Kenyan Nation since independence. He decries the continued relegation of culture, alienation of the masses and the increasing level of injustice, insecurity, and the inability of the "leopards" to provide basic infrastructure, and economic opportunities for the masses. Like the leopards that prey on other animals for survival, the leaders sacrifice their nation's collective well-being for personal gains. Branch concludes this work by suggesting that, it is:

Only when the leopards are dislodged will Kenya finally enjoy the fruits of independence. Kenyan politicians have by now proved that they are utterly incapable of halting political violence or stopping corruption (p. 299). Similarly, Chinua Achebe bemoans the painful parting of ways between the native intelligentsia and their political counterparts soon after independence was won. While clarifying why he chose the part of the critic in the Nigerian socio political scene, Achebe in Adekunle Olowunmi(2008) declares: Having fought the nationalist movement and had been on the side of the politicians, I realized after independence, that they and I were on different sides, because they were not doing what we had agreed they should do. So I had to become a critic (p. 60). Again, in *The trouble with Nigeria*, Achebe identifies the ineptitude of the Independent Nigerian Leaders as inimical to the challenge of Nation building, Achebe declares: Trouble is simply and squarely a failure in leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. The Nigerian problem is the Unwillingness or The inability of its leaders to rise to responsibility, to the challenge of personal examples which are the hallmarks of true Leadership (1983, p.1). Achebe's disgust for bad leadership is evident in his repeated refusal of numerous national award offers by different Nigerian leaders. Thus, the ineptitude, corruption and selfishness of these leaders resulted in the neglect of the masses whose sweat and blood hastened the sack of the colonialists. Consequently, the creative spirit after independence "now focused on the problems of building a nation" (Udumukwu, 2007:9).

Thus, the thematic concerns of this sensibility range from the hopelessness of African elites in leadership positions, to the hunger, cultural denigration, oppression and abandonment of the masses. Since art is an imaginative reflection of reality, it then means that the issues of cultural relegation, moral bankruptcy, greed and misplacement of priority raised by Chukwuemeka Ike in *The Chicken Chasers* and most of his novels, portend an urgent need for moral and mental re-orientation required for the deconstruction of the extractive institutions responsible for the anomalies in the shared communities of the nations in Africa. Indeed, Ike's thematic concerns in his novels have been commended by critics such as Ezenwa Ohaeto, Grace Okafor and B. E. C. Oguzie. Determined to draw readers' attention to the dire need for positive change, Ike deliberately advances the stories beyond the mere portrayal of the anomalies in the nation and goes further to proffer possible ways through which these anomalies in the nation can be surmounted. In other words, his novels portray a lot of similitude to reality.

His peculiarity as a Nigerian novelist lies in his ability to chronicle real life events and experiences of Nigerians in particular and Africans at large through the imaginative realm. For instance the three year Nigeria/Biafra war is captured in his novel entitled *Sun Set at Dawn* while the rampant examination malpractices and leakage of the West African regional examination questions form the subject matter in *Expo 77*. *The Chicken Chasers* deals with issues of cultural relegation, greed, immorality and economic waste on continental grounds. Also, the incessant Nigerian students' unrest and occasional clashes with parents and those in leadership positions in the nation are portrayed in *Our Children are coming*. These preoccupations and more are stoked and fanned by his working experiences as war-time officer and an astute administrator in various citadels of knowledge in Nigeria in particular and the West African sub region at large.

In *The Chicken Chasers*, the subject matter and the characters we encounter are not alien to us in terms of irresponsible leadership, greed, envy, economic waste and moral laxity. Through the careful manipulation of the plot, delineation of characters, voices, action, themes and settings in the novel, Ike creates situations which arouse the consciousness of the protagonist to the need for necessary action needed to effect desired change. Notably, the characters are portrayed in the dialectics of villainous versus virtuous individuals. While the villainous who are greedy for power, money, comfort, and sex work for the nations' failure, the virtuous characters struggle against all odds to save it from international disgrace and total collapse. By weaving and resolving the conflicts in favour of the virtuous characters who, in the end triumph over the villainous characters, Ike may arguably be said to be desirous that independent African nations, particularly his Nigerian nation, rose to the challenges posed by the selfishness, irresponsibility and other inimical tendencies of, to borrow Acemoglu and Robinson's term 'extractive institutions' if these nations must meet the millennium development goals.

Plot of the novel

The *Chicken Chasers* deals with the unbecoming activities of delegates sent from various fictional African nations for the 15th executive meeting of the African Cultural Organization (ACO). It is expected that the major concern of these delegates at the conference would specifically be on the best ways of rejuvenating and propagating an African culture which is still in the process of recuperation from the distortions of colonialism. Unfortunately, on arrival at the venue of the meeting, the delegates ironically opt to engage in the blind pursuit of power, increase in remunerations, comfort and sex, thereby relegating the issue of culture for which the conference is convened to the background.

As the narrative begins, all roads lead to Plassas, the venue of the 15th executive meeting of the African Cultural organization. Other member nations are Manu, Benachin, Dumboy, Matoki, and Kuntu. Foremost on the list of issues for deliberation is not culture but the removal of the Secretary General of the organization whose first four-year term is due to expire in a fourth night. Next in the order of importance for deliberation and decision is the issue of legitimization of the numerous fringe benefits and pamperings to be enjoyed by delegates by virtue of their appointment as diplomats of their various nations. Meanwhile, the Secretary General (S-G henceforth) they plot to remove is portrayed as a disciplined, humane, hardworking and innovative leader under whose regime the organization has attained huge developmental strides. As the action of the plot unfolds, it is revealed that those who plot the removal of the innocent S-G do so for one selfish reason or the other. These reasons range from greed, quest for power, to envy, and drive to satisfy their sexual urge. The most prominent plotter is Mrs. Peace Bozo, otherwise known as Baby Face who hails from the same Manu nation as the S-G. Her major reason for plotting the removal of her country man from such an exalted office is purely selfish. To her, the S-G is guilty of not responding to her various sexual seductions.

Through an interior monologue, the reader is informed that with her high reputation of getting men to do her bidding, the only man who has beaten her hollow is the S-G. And that is why she has come to Plassas- to humiliate him. In order to successfully accomplish her mission, Baby face sets out to educate and convince other delegates, including those from other nations on the need to destool the S-G. Foremost amongst the delegates convinced and used by Baby Face to educate others is Mat-her fellow Manu citizen who is almost a stooge in her hands. From the moment he is convinced on the need to destool the S-G, Mat assumes the voice and bidding of his mistress Baby Face and succeeds in winning over other delegates such as Sela and Saki to their side. Other prominent plotters in the removal of the S-G include intellectuals such as Professor Funmi and DrStom. These two intellectuals covet the office of the SG in order to boost their finances and ego as intellectuals. They also desire to occupy such an exulted office in order to succeed in wooing prospective mistresses as they are reputed for insatiable sexual urge.

Most part of the novel is preoccupied with the evil machinations of these selfish individuals to ensure the removal of the innocent S-G from office. These machinations include the tactical prevention of two nations- Matoki and Benachin from attending the meeting. To their minds, the S-G enjoys very strong support of these two nations. Thus, the absence of Matoki and Benachin from the meeting would deny the S-G the crucial votes of the delegates. These schemers are also of the opinion that the absence of these two nations will save them the risk of losing the votes of the delegates who could be won over by the absent delegates. The extents to which they go in ensuring that these two nations are absent and therefore not represented on the executive board include not mailing their copies of the notice of the meeting. Saki confirms this evil scheming when he confesses that Benachin and Matoki's own copies of the notice of meeting: "Went through the franking machine and were recorded in our books as having been mailed. Thereafter, they were shredded and the shreds burnt. When they cabled to enquire about the meeting, no reply was sent. The cables have disappeared" (p. 16). Apart from preventing ardent supporters of the S-G from attending the meeting, these evil schemers also engage in the blackmail of the S-G to all who care to listen. For instance, they falsely accuse the innocent S-G of involvement in illicit affair with his secretary Afua whom they nickname the S-G's 'Sexual Assistant' (SA). They also gather lots of fake documents with which they intend to indict him (pp. 7-8).

Interestingly, as the wild inferno is about to consume the innocent S-G, events take a dramatic turn. In her capacity as the chief delegate of Manu, the chief plotter Baby Face is called upon by the chairman to deliver her government's assessment of the S-G's work and conduct in the past four years as well as his application for a second term. Baby Face, ironically changes her mind about the S-G. To the consternation of everyone, she commends the embattled S-G for his dedication and hard work, approves a second term for him -leaving all those in the chicken chase sprawling to bite the dust with nobody but themselves to blame.

The story of Chukwuemeka Ike's *The Chicken Chasers* is one of pure denigration of the same African culture whose distortion and misrepresentation by Europeans incited the anti-colonial struggle by the native elites in the days of colonialism. During the days of anti-colonial struggle, it was felt that with decolonization, the native rulers would ensure the restoration of the African and his culture to their rightful place of glory in the world's scheme of things. Unfortunately, on their ascent to power, the native elites opt to satisfy their personal whims and caprices to the detriment of the degenerating age-long African culture. Thus, in this novel, Ike reminds us of the harm done to African culture due to the selfishness and greed of the native leaders in Africa. Perhaps a brief overview of the implication of the incongruities of these ill-focused native leaders will suffice at this point.

Generally, culture is regarded as the totality of the ways of life of a given people. It encapsulates issues of value in any given society such as language, art, history, politics, education, diet, values, morals, and plans for the future. Thus, the neglect or abdication of issues of culture by members of any given society portends a neglect of the people's identity-especially as it relates to their past, present and future. The African Cultural Organization is Ike's fictitious name for African Cultural Society (ACS) in real life. The ACS was inaugurated in Paris in 1956 to propagate 'Africanness' in the totality of its meaning. Fanon (1963) articulates the supposed aim of a society of this nature in Africa. According to him, the society was set up: [T]o affirm the existence of an African culture, to evaluate this culture on the plane of distinct nations and to reveal the internal motive forces of each of their national cultures. But at the same time, this society fulfilled another need: the need to exist side by side with the European cultural society (pp. 172-173).

Evidently, these aims and objectives for which the cultural body was set up are being derided and indeed neglected by a similar body in our contemporary Africa due to the selfishness and greed of few individuals in positions of leadership. This is the major challenge which Ike sets out to expose and condemn in *The Chicken Chasers*. In order to achieve this aim through the imaginative realm of fiction, the author engages such novelistic elements as plot (conflict and its resolution), characterization, setting, theme, and narrative technique.

Characterization

In order to paint a vivid picture of economic waste, cultural denigration and the failure of the native leaders to live up to their responsibilities in the navigation of the ships of their various independent African nations, Ike creates characters whose voices, internal monologues and actions depict the dialectics of the villainous and the virtuous, the good and the bad, the greedy and the honest, the innocent and the guilty. The few prominent characters who play the roles of the virtuous are the Secretary General, Afua, ABC, Junior and Samjo. Prominent amongst the villainous characters are Mrs Peace Bozo better known as Baby Face (prior to her repentance), Professor Fumi, DrStom, Matt, Chass and Paddy.

Secretary General (S-G): The S-G is a distinguished citizen of Manu and the occupant of the highest post in this organization set apart to foresee issues of culture in the whole of Africa. He is the highest paid and most enumerated of all the delegates from various African nations. It is this juicy attraction that predisposes the man and his office to the admiration, envy and covetousness of other delegates. The S-G is said to combine these rights and privileges with lots of sterling qualities. In the story, this unnamed character is portrayed as an upright, hardworking, innovative, dedicated and unassuming gentleman. The African Cultural Organization (ACO henceforth) under him has made positive contributions to cultural renaissance in the various member nations. Workers directly under him attest to his hard work and style of leadership by example. Afua his personal secretary describes him as a fellow who “set an example of punctuality, industry and innovativeness which he expected everyone to follow. He made you feel that the secretariat belonged to you” (p. 58). To Junior, another subordinate in his office, the S-G is a caring gentleman “who would stop by to chat with you, exchange jokes with you, discuss your work and your family if you have one, and leave you severely alone thereafter (p. 71).

Apart from his uprightness, caring attitude and dedication to duty, the S-G is naturally endowed with enviable physical features—a tall, handsome man with an impressive carriage. Though endowed with these features, the S-G, unlike the other delegates, does not see women as objects of sexual exploitation. Hence, all attempts by the two major female characters at seducing him, fail. Prof. Fumi, one of those who plot his removal from office attests to his high sense of discipline, and achievements:

It was not easy to trap a man who keeps his distance from wine, women or easy money... the S-G was doing an excellent job. The ACO under him was making positive contributions to cultural renaissance in the various member countries (p. 29). In addition to these, the S-G is portrayed as a deeply religious individual. The reader's emotion is moved when the innocent S-G is seen on his knees in a solemn prayer to God: The act of prayer had given him renewed strength. He subscribed to the popular mammy wagon adage that one with God was in the majority. God had always fought his battles for him. He would do the same again on this occasion (p. 137).

Given all these sterling qualities, the incumbent, therefore, seems to be the right candidate for the post. But, his detractors would not hear of this. They plot to unseat him for various selfish reasons. Nevertheless, the chief campaigner for the sack of the S-G ironically comes to his rescue as she votes him in for another four year term as the Secretary General of the ACO. This comes as a rude shock to the other active participants in the chicken chase. In the light of this therefore, one may not be wrong to say that Chukwuemeka Ike delineates the character of the S-G to depict the triumph of good over evil in all human society.

Afua, ABC, Junior and Samjo are the three subordinates who support and appreciate the S-G's hard work and uprightness. They do not participate in the evil machinations against him. Rather, they keep the S-G informed and updated on the turn of events in the enemies' camp. They also encourage him to remain resilient in his ambition for a second term in office. Through their voices and ruminations in the narrative, the author further intimates us on the high sense of discipline and incorruptible nature of the S-G. It is from these characters that the reader is able to gather objective assessment of the S-G's professionalism and high sense of discipline in terms of human relationship. Afua, popularly known as 'Black Beauty' in the story is the S-G's secretary and the most featured of these three. She is falsely accused of illicit affair with her boss- the S-G.

Her strong support for the S-G earns her so much hatred by his detractors who brand her such derogatory names as 'Black Bitch', 'S-G's Sexual Assistant'. Due to her ravishing beauty and youthfulness, she forms part of the reasons why the S-G's promiscuous detractors struggle to unseat him. This is because they intend to inherit her as their secretary and mistress on assumption of the coveted post of the Secretary General of ACO. Though these characters play minor roles in the story, they however contribute to the progress and understanding of the subject matter.

High commissioner of Manu to Plassas is another character through whom we see the S-G as a distinguished internationally and locally acclaimed scholar and administrator. He has no given name in the narrative. He disregards all attempts by Baby face at poisoning his mind against the innocent S-G. Throughout the narrative, he exhibits a stable personality and high sense of discipline. When faced with baby face's seductive attempts, he encourages himself with the saying that "when all the moves comes from a woman, a sensible man mounts his defenses" (p. 13).

Mrs Peace Bozo: Like the S-G of the ACO, Mrs. Peace Bozo hails from Manu. She is the occupant of the respected office of Manu's Chief Director of Youth and Culture (p. 25). She is popularly known as Baby Face due to her fashion consciousness and youthful appearance- despite her advancement in age. As the narrative begins, she is seen as the chief campaigner for the humiliation and removal of the innocent S-G from his exulted office. Her main reason for plotting the SG's removal from office stems from his failure to respond to her seductive moves. Her fury becomes deadlier with the S-G's adamant refusal to yield to her numerous love advances. In her ruminations, she wonders why the S-G has continually failed to yield to her love advances when she has built a reputation to get men to do her bidding. Thus, to her, the immediate task to be accomplished in this meeting is not the promotion of African culture, but the removal of the S-G. This is what has brought her to Plassas, "to humiliate him" (p. 22).

She is generally portrayed as a mischievous and promiscuous diplomat who sacrifices the responsibilities of her office on the altar of sexual desires- her status as a married woman notwithstanding. She is talkative and reputed for sleeping with any man who pushes for her love-such that men now perceive her as "a piece of cake which must be tasted by all". (p. 9). Her promiscuity knows no bounds as she is seen seducing both her superior and subordinate colleagues. Mat and the S-G are typical examples of both extremes.

The author introduces this promiscuous and irresponsible female character from the very opening pages of the novel. In her dialogue with Mat concerning the urgent need to destool the S-G, she instructs him to do anything worth doing to ensure the removal of her fellow Manu delegate from his exulted continental office. (pp.1-2). Afterwards, she sends Mat to Plassas three days before the meeting so that he would do enough underground work regarding the humiliation and removal of the internationally respected S-G (p. 2). She convinces and encourages other villainous characters in the battle for the removal of the S-G. For instance, on her arrival in Plassa for the meeting, she supervises Mat's scheming and moves from one hotel room to the other in her bid to garner enough support for the removal of the S-G.

Towards the end of the story, Baby Face ironically changes her mind and approves a second four-year term for the embattled S-G to the consternation of her fellow evil plotters. Her sudden turn-around from her evil ways in order to allow the S-G continue his good works in ACO portends the triumph of good over evil and a bright future not only for Manu but also for the whole of Africa. Indeed Baby Face is a round character in this story. Delegates from other nations who sought the removal of the S-G from office include Prof Fumi and Chass from Shika and DrStom from Plassas. Evidently, their determination to unseat the S-G is shrouded in unguarded ambitions spelt out in varying terms.

Professor Fumi: is the chief delegate of Shika- one of the member nations of the ACO. He is not in Plassas to discuss issues of culture. Rather, he is here to realize his dream of occupying the S-G's seat, and to 'soothe his nerves' with the poodles of Plassas--Poodles being their nickname for young pretty, shapely girls (p. 23). Though, a family man with children, Prof Fumi is a morally bankrupt intellectual. He is obsessed with "young girls with nothing higher than the 0-levels...you could always dazzle them with your Professorship, or your doctorate degree or your big car. Not so with the high-powered sophisticated, highly educated ladies" (p. 26).

His post as the executive chairman of cultural affairs council in the government of Shikanot with standing, his ambition to occupy the post of the S-G is not based on the desire to make positive contributions to cultural renaissance in various member nations. It is purely on selfish reasons. He continually ruminates on his reasons for this inordinate desire: ...the S-G's salary was clearly three times his own. And it was tax free! When you add the innumerable allowances, the free this and free that, garnished with full diplomatic status and immunity, the S-G operated in a dream world. Cruise round in an air conditioned Mercedes Benz car, bearing diplomatic number plates, with the ACO flag fluttering away in the breeze without bothering about the price of fuel! Buy choice booze from duty free shops, and give lavish parties at ACO expense (p. 29).

Furthermore, as the S-G of the ACO, Prof Fumi hopes to receive special education allowance and huge salaries with which he intends to educate his children abroad. To crown all these, Prof Fumi out of promiscuity, intends to inherit the S-G's secretary Afua as his personal assistant and mistress. Nevertheless, as the novel progresses to an end, we watch with pleasure as these inordinate selfish ambitions crumble like a pack of cards. This is attributable to Prof's moral bankruptcy. He falls a victim of what he loves best. Without his knowledge, his immoral act with the 15-year old Phebean is recorded by his political rival DrStom and distributed to all the delegates before the next morning in order to dissuade them from voting him to the exulted post of the S-G of the ACO. Thus, Prof Fumi falls out of the power chase on account of moral bankruptcy.

DrStom is the Chairman of the ACO. He is from Plassas – the host nation. The tactical elimination of Prof Fumi from the power chase makes him feel he is the best candidate left for the position of the S-G of. But it is obvious that his interest for the position is purely for three selfish reasons: he is envious of the incumbent. This is because he lacks the physical, mental and social charisma with which the S-G is endowed. This inadequacy gives him a feeling of inferiority whenever he finds himself in the presence of the S-G. Thus, the removal of the S-G from the executive board of the ACO will end his inferiority complex. Secondly, he plans to inherit the beautiful Afua as his secretary and mistress. Thirdly, and most importantly to him, he has his eyes on the numerous remunerations accruing to the office of the S-G. In the eighteenth chapter, of the novel, DrStom is seen ruminating on these juicy remunerations thus:

The salary alone is three times his current salary, before you add the expatriation allowance, the dependants' allowance, the children's education allowance; the allowances seemed to be endless. And he would spend so much time travelling and drawing additional allowances that he would not touch his basic salary. Did he forget the diplomatic immunity and privilege? (p. 136).

Thus, as the chairman of the ACO, DrStom approves unnecessary increase for allowances paid delegates. For instance, he approves "allowances for incidental expenses... double the present rate for delegates and treble the rate for the chairman" (pp. 156-157). "Plassas incidentals" in this context implies the young and pretty but terribly expensive girls in Plassas. With these, it is evident that as the Chairman of the ACO, DrStom's major concern has been with devising ways of enriching himself and inadvertently impoverishing the citizens of the various African nations they're expected to represent.

Chass is a delegate from Shika. He is a strong supporter of his lead Shikan delegate-Prof Fumi. His support for the removal of the S-G is hinged on the personal benefits he hopes to gain should Prof Fumi assume the post of the S-G of the ACO. Already, Chass owes three important part-time appointments to Professor Fumi. These include his membership of the executive board of the ACO as one of the representatives of the Shikan government. Therefore, Prof Fumi's appointment as the S-G of the ACO means better things and opportunities for him. For instance, he:

Could land the membership of a university council, he would be the happiest pensioner, spending all his time attending meetings. It would pay for more than a regular salary. And add to your social status-making you appear indispensable (p. 23). From the foregoing, it is evident that the delegates have come from their various nations to Plassas to enrich themselves financially and satisfy their sexual urge at the expense of their respective nations without adding value to their respective national culture.

Setting: The action of the novel takes place partly in Manu and mostly in Plassas. These two fictitious nations are Ike's metaphor for all places in Africa where leaders manipulate the apparatus of power for selfish interests. Such interests as portrayed in this novel include the inordinate ambition for power, agitation for higher remunerations for delegates including allowances for "Plassas incidentals" meant to satisfy their insatiable sexual urge.

Thus, Apart from the upright S-G, most of the delegates at the meeting, indulge in varied personal businesses at the expense of the nations' masses whose interest they are appointed to represent. The ACO which is the highest body on cultural matters in Africa was set up to serve the governments of its member nations on cultural matters. Hence, it depends on these governments for financial support, and therefore for its very existence. Unfortunately, after four long days in Plassas for this important all-expense-paid executive meeting of this organization, delegates are seen discussing nothing pertaining to culture. The author portrays this challenge of selfishness as constituting serious impediments not only to national but also continental development programmes.

In terms of setting of time, the novel is set in the independent period in Africa. Its subject matter could be located in the years following decolonization in most African nations when there was an urgent need to revive African identity which had been seriously eroded and distorted by the recently sacked imperial powers. It was this need to revive and reposition African values that led to the establishment of African Cultural Society (ACS). Rather than do the needful for African cultural renaissance, the native elites chose to serve their individual interests. It is this unfortunate development in the continent that Ike bemoans in *The Chicken Chasers*. The story gives us an insight into the failure of the native elites in delivering the promises of independence. Ike's fictitious African Cultural Organization (ACO) could be likened to real life international bodies such as African Cultural Society (ACS), Organization of African unity (OAU) and Economic Community of West Africa (ECOWAS).

These institutions were set up after decolonization to serve specific needs in the continent's march to development. It is a known fact that such bodies hardly attained the goals for which they were set up due to selfishness and corruption of those at the helm of affairs in these institutions. Delegates from the same nation antagonize and castigate each other, not foe collective gains, but for one selfish ambition or the other. For instance, in this novel Madam Bozo hails from the same Manu nation as the S-G who she plots to destool. Her sole reason for plotting his removal is because of his refusal to succumb to her sexual advances. Through this story, Ike expresses his concern for the need to end the economic waste incurred through selfish and irresponsible leadership. He also sensitizes and challenges his readers on the need for all to contribute positively to cultural renaissance in Africa. Thus, through the sudden turnaround of the chief plotter Madam Peace Bozo, the author shows that change is possible-only with the re-orientation of the minds and consciousness of both the leaders and the led towards the placement of national interests high and above selfish ones.

The themes explored in this novel include the themes of economic waste, immorality, greed, cultural denigration, and envy. The delegates engage in economic waste when all they do in four days in an international gathering meant to discuss African culture is to struggle for the realization of their selfish ambition for power, satisfaction of sexual urge and the upward review of their various remunerations. It is more worrisome to think that this expensive venture is sponsored by their various governments with tax payers' money. Apart from the hard working S-G, the other delegates are seen sacrificing issues of African culture on the altar of selfish interests. Thus, they are guilty of cultural denigration. All the delegates except the S-G are guilty of sexual immorality. While Madam Bozo's sexual immorality knows no bounds as she is seen in attempts at seducing almost all the male characters in the novel, Prof Fumi is determined to sleep with all the 'Poodles' in Plassa—Poodles being his euphemism for young girls old enough for his daughters. On his part, DrStom is in the race to unseat the innocent S-G because of his plan to inherit Afua the SG's secretary as his mistress. Also, he covets the S-G's office because of his greed for the numerous remunerations accruing to the occupant of this exalted office.

Narrative technique: The story of *The Chicken chasers* is told by a third person omniscient narrator. This implies that apart from the voices and actions of the characters, the author invades their privacy and penetrates the minds and consciousness of the characters in order to portray their internal monologues and ruminations. It is through this technique that the reader is able to access the innocence of the S-G as well as the various selfish reasons why the villainous characters are plunged into the chicken chase. For instance, the promiscuity of Madam Bozo and discipline of the S-G is revealed through the internal ruminations of the S-G. In the 'gin incident', he recalls Baby Face's earlier attempt at getting him make love to her (p.99). This reminiscence is occasioned by the unexpected visit of Madam Bozo to the S-G's hotel room. Also, DrStom's greed for remunerations accruing to the person who occupies the position of the S-G is revealed through the penetration of his thoughts (p.136). In terms of diction, the author employs simple and clear English language in communicating his subject matter.

It is obvious that his simplicity in language is necessitated by the need to easily communicate his recommendations on the need for national re-orientation to his targeted audience to whom English is a second language. As such, he subverts the English language in order to make his story authentically African as well as enhance an easy comprehension of his subject matter. For instance, he makes an extensive use of proverbs in the novel. In Africa, proverbs are meant to enhance easy retention and recall of ideas raised in conversations. Indeed, his engagement of this language form portrays an attempt at presenting an oral culture in a written form.

Through this approach, he justifies Achebe's earlier statement in *Things Fall Apart* that in Africa, 'proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten'. In *The Chicken Chasers*, we have such proverbs as "when a monkey sets off on a venture, it cannot afford to look back" (p. 18); "a sensible child will always answer when summoned. That does not necessarily mean that he will gladly go to any errand to which he may subsequently be sent" (p. 82); "a chicken does not pitch battle against a hawk" (p. 85); "the slave who smiles unconcerned when his fellow slave is being buried alive will face a similar experience someday" (p. 88); "a chicken never forgets the person who plucked its tail feathers during the rainy season" (p.163). Indeed, the novel ends on a proverbial note: "those who chose to chase chicken should blame nobody but themselves when they end up sprawling in the dust" (p. 185). It is from this proverb that the novel derives its title 'The Chicken Chasers'. Through this well-articulated title, Ike satirizes and reminds the self-serving independent African elites in leadership positions that selfish adventurism leads to ultimate failure and disappointment which is comparable to those chasing innocent chicken who end up sprawling and hurting their feet while the chicken saunters happily away.

Ike also employs the use of imageries which are rooted in the everyday African reality in the novel. The most prominent imageries in the novel are those of the chicken and its chasers. While the innocent S-G represents the chicken, the evil plotters represent its chasers. The S-G's enemies meet a dead end when he is reappointed to run a second four-year term despite their evil machinations against him.

The use of abbreviations also form part of Ike's diction in the novel. Often, when these are used, their full meanings are given. These include ACO for African Cultural Organization; S-G for Secretary General; and ASG for Assistant Secretary General. Ike's success in this novel to a reasonable extent lies in his ability to reiterate his subject matter with particular emphasis on his recommendations for a positive change. Through the portrayal of the complexities of human characters and situations in the novel, Ike highlights the triumph of good over evil. This is encapsulated in his repetition of the maxim "that truth will ultimately triumph" (pp. 95, 107 and 172). Thus, the innocent S-G succeeds not only because of his competence and national conscientiousness, but also because of the fact that the evil plotters lack enough justification for removing him from office. Indeed, the S-G's reappointment is an optimistic signifier of the ultimate failure of all extractive institutions in independent African reality.

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