

LITERARY WRITERS AND THE WORLD OF THEIR TEXTS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Judith Ezeamaka
Department of Languages,
Delta State Polytechnic,
Ogwash-Uku.

Abstract

It is said that the pen is mightier than the sword. This is because the capacity and the ability of the sword is limited by time and a host of other factors that will not allow it to go beyond its boundary, while with the pen it is not so. This paper examines the role and responsibilities of a writer in conflict resolution. In other words, it examines what a writer owes the society and writers contribution to national issues that can engender conflict resolution. The paper observes that though a writer fulfils his obligation without the sincere input of the reader, the contribution of the writer will not have any effect; therefore, the reader on his own part has a significant role to play for conflicts to be resolved. This paper proposes that we must not neglect the place of the text which is the main piece of art on both the hand of a writer and the reader. Furthermore, this paper examines factors challenging the impact of a text in conflict resolution and also suggests recommendations which if implemented will go a long way to resolving existing conflicts and also forestall pending conflicts.

Iloegbunem (1978:229), opines that “Literature is the representation of life or near-life in written or oral mode”. It therefore behoves that literature does more than can be imagined; it is a potentially subversive force. In an ever evolving universe that can be perceived as a complex semiotic scene filled with unprecedented mysteries and complexities, there is only one way of putting shapes, adding colour, and managing the entities in it and that is ‘words’. It is fascinating to observe that in its essence, the literally cosmos has closed correspondences with the phenomenal universe, because the literary writer is part and parcel of the universe.

Every literary writer possesses an indispensable tool at his/her disposal with which he/she is able to achieve desired objective and purpose. As a sword in the hands of a warrior, so are ‘words’ to the writer. With words, the literary writer manoeuvres his thought into the minds of his readers with the sole aim of convincing and making his

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readers see and perceive things and issues from his own perspective. To this end, literary writers and the world of their texts are inevitable entities if conflicts must be resolved and/or in the resolution of national issues.

In addition, every devoted literary writer stimulates a sense of awe and mystery, because a sensitive writer who is dedicated to his work invests much of himself in his text. However, the text is a gift to the reader, who ultimately decodes its meaning and also determines its life span. In fact, the text has no '*raison d' être*' without the reader. Therefore, in conflict resolution, both the literary writer and the reader must work together on the altar of the text for maximum results.

Conflict Resolution

It is of paramount importance we start by explaining what conflict resolution entails. Conflict resolution is "conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflicts and retribution". Conflict resolution is an expanding field of professional practice around the world. The escalating costs of conflict have increased the use of third parties who may serve as conflict specialists to resolve conflicts. As a matter of fact, many international organisations have seen the growing need to hire practitioners trained in conflict analysis and resolution.

Nigeria as a nation has been involved in peace keeping in Africa and the world at large. Its commitment to peace keeping must be contextualised and justified not just in historical terms as a relic of past achievements but that commitment must be reinvigorated and informed by imperative of contemporary global events. Africa possesses a substantial share of the worlds natural and human resources yet it is one of the most marginalized continents in the world. This is so intensifying to an extent that the notions of "recolonization" are re-echoing today in scholarly circles. Then, if this is true, it means therefore that the instruments and mechanisms that worked before could still come to play again. Strategies that helped fight colonization and apartheid as manifestations of imperialist domineering tendencies and marginalization from the 60's and 70's could still be adopted even in resolving contemporary issues. It is important we realise that the current conflicts are largely manifestations of these new and emergent forms of imperialism. The title "Literary Writers and the World of their Text" therefore becomes imperative for conflict resolution. Innes (1978:19-20) points out that:

While Nigerian writers agree with other nationalists about the importance of drawing upon traditional myths, legends, philosophies and artistic techniques, they also insist on the necessity of examining the

past critically and objectively lest the mistakes of the past be repeated, or so they can see in Achebe's words where the rain began to beat us.

The Literary Writers' Responsibility in Conflict Resolution

African literary writers do not just write for pleasure, though pleasure is what a writer enjoys as he manipulates words to create imaginary worlds of his own. However, every African literary writer is informed by an acute consciousness of the dialectics of history and so, conceives literature as a complete depiction of the truth of life, as a preserver of history, as a potentially subversive force, as a miraculous weapon. Therefore the literary text for them is not just a thing of play and pleasure but rather, their text which is often born out of history, confronts history and serves as a battle field for explosion of accumulated tensions and also as basis for the resolution of conflicts. Viewed from this sense we see that the literary writer has great responsibilities in resolution of national issues and therefore must not be undermined.

Firstly, the literary writer is an informant, a revealer of truth, a luminary. Owing to Africa's peculiar history, every African literary writer is a representative and as such is motivated by a vivid sense of the moral weight of his obligation toward his society. Many today are ignorant of events around them. It is the responsibility of a writer through his works to bring consciousness to an unconscious society and thereby deliver his environment from decay and danger. In the past, literary writers like Chinua Achebe (1973) in his popular work *Things Fall Apart*, Sambène Ousmane (1973) in *Xala*, Ferdinand Oyono (1974) in *Le Vieux Nègre et la Médaille*, etc with the pen resolved conflicts and re-arranged the cause of happenings. These authors took part in the revolutionary struggle by proxy and their literary texts constitute positive emotional and imaginative responses to our chronic dilemma. For instance, *Xala* by Sembene Ousmane, offers a provocative and dramatic solution to the phenomenon of unrestrained greed and corruption epidemic sweeping across the continent.

Secondly, the literary writer is saddled with the responsibility of addressing contemporary issues of his time with a strict focus on bringing direction to controversial issues. Innes (1978:19) points out that:

A writer should show the people how to react to contemporary economic and political events and issues, and should realise that to fight for national culture means fighting for liberation of the nation; that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible.

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It is obvious that an authentic rebirth cannot be divorced from history. A look at our colonial era and history shows our writers as agents of change, writers who were wholly in tune with the burden of the people. Their works which stood as search lights on the depredation of events led to our independence and is also comparable to that which contributed decisively to the French revolution.

The literary writer is a preserver of history. For effective conflict resolution, the place of history cannot be undermined. Innes (1978:19-20) argues that:

While Nigerian writers agree with other nationalists about the importance of drawing upon traditional myths, legend philosophies and artistic techniques, they also insist on the necessity of examining the past critically and objectively lest the mistakes of the past be repeated, or so that they can see in Achebe's words "where the rain began to beat us.

The literary writer is faced with the responsibility of documentation so that the upcoming generation could read, react and draw inspirational ideas from the past to tackle the issues and problems of the present. The literary writer does not just stay in the past, but he also makes articulate projections into the future. In other words, he is motivated by a vivid sense of a normal weight of his obligation toward his society.

The Role of a Reader in Conflict Resolution

To read a text means to manoeuvre coded and over-coded semantic information so as to decide what impact the text would make. Bestman (1995:2) supposes that: "The critic is the officiating priest in the literary temple constructed by the writer"

The role of a reader in conflict resolution cannot be over emphasised. The reader is very important for there to be conflict resolution because whatever the writer puts on paper remains impotent without a readership. This is to say that it is the reader or critic that gives life to the text of a literary writer and whatever impact such a text would make depends mainly on the disposition of the reader.

Also, the reader sieves beneficial and relevant information from literary texts as not all parts of the text may be needed as a tool for conflict resolution at that point in time. For this role of the reader to be effectively maximized, the reader must be sensitive and objective enough to know what part of the literary text is needed to ensure conflict resolution.

In addition, it is the duty of a reader to act on the text by implementing relevant ideas appropriately, which will in turn result in resolution of conflicts. A reader is also an agent of information to his immediate environment. He is expected to carry along those around him by informing them of new findings and ideas that could bring an end to conflicts especially the non literate class perishing in ignorance because they cannot decode needed information from literary texts.

The Importance of the Literary Text

The literary text is an offering, a gift to the reader; it is composed of signs which are left for the reader to decode. The text embodies the message and the mind of the writer; it exposes the reader to the views and ideas of the writer concerning any given issue. The text is the meeting point of the writer and the reader.

The literary text is very important in conflict resolution. It is the medium through which ideas and ideologies are transported to the reader who will then make use of these ideas to achieve a desired result.

Impediments to the Impact of Literary Texts in Conflict Resolution

In as much as literary writers through their texts could enhance conflict resolution, there are on the other hand, myriad of challenges confronting literary texts in conflict resolution. Some of these challenges we shall examine in this paper.

A major challenge to the impact of literary texts in conflict resolution is poor reading culture in our contemporary age. As earlier mentioned, a text has no 'raison d'être' without a readership. It therefore means that no matter the curative information embedded in a text, it can do nothing in conflict resolution until it is read and worked upon. Many people especially Africans today find it difficult to read. This standpoint is further corroborated with the words of Murdock who said that 'if you want to hide something from an African you put it inside a book and he may never find it. Instead of reading, they prefer electronic visuals like the internet, television or even handset.

Another challenge to the impact of the literary text is that of space or location unlike the internet. A text could contain the solution to a certain conflict but may not be available in the particular area where it is needed at that time. Though this setback is gradually fading away with the coming of the internet, writers can now have their texts uploaded to the internet thereby making these texts generally more accessible to the interested public.

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Also, many literary texts are characterised by symbols and literary masks such as irony, satire, humour and other modes of discourse, which makes it difficult for a casual reader to decode easily the message or the therapeutic ideas inculcated in a text.

Furthermore, the level of illiteracy in Africa especially in Nigeria, poses a barrier to the impact of literary texts in conflict resolution. It could be observed today that majority of those who have prolonged and unresolved conflicts are often the illiterates because of their low level of functional education and lack of basic knowledge. Illiteracy blurs a man's vision and shuts him out of stark realities. No matter the solution embedded in a literary text, it takes an enlightened mind to access and interpret it correctly. Little wonder the Holy Bible declares that 'My people perish for lack of knowledge'.

Conclusion

In all, a literary writer unveils the truth, though at the moment of writing enjoys himself while playing on words and symbols but yet conveys meaningful and strategic ideas into his text which the reader also enjoys but also derives solutions for contemporary issues. As a result, the reader complements the writer. In other words, a text without a readership is as good as dead no matter the lofty ideas inculcated in it. Therefore, a literary writer, the text and the reader work hand in hand for effectiveness which will in turn lead to conflict resolution.

Recommendations

Having looked at the title 'Literary Writers and the World of their Texts in Conflict Resolution' and having seen some of the challenging factors that pose as a hindrance to the impact of literary texts in conflict resolution, the following recommendations are suggested.

- **Cultivation of Early Reading Habit in Children:** There is an urgent need for the cultivation of a healthy reading habit. The culture of reading must be taught and implemented at the elementary levels of our educational system. Even from home before a child starts schooling, parents should take up the responsibility of inculcating the reading habit into the child by the use of picture books and story books instead of watching of cartoons. It has been proved that anything a child learns early in life cannot easily be forgotten or abandoned.
- **Accessibility and Decoding of Literary Text:** Literary writers also have a role to play in making their texts accessible and decodable. Of what use is a literary text if it cannot be accessed or even understood? There is therefore the need for literary

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writers to try as much as possible to paint clearer pictures in their texts so as to carry their readership along for effectiveness and better understanding.

- **Adequate Funding of Education:** More funding of the educational sector especially at the elementary and secondary levels should be given priority attention because these are the stages of formation and development. When the educational sector is adequately funded, illiteracy will be reduced to minimal giving room to enlightenment which will in turn help in reducing conflict and also in resolving existing conflicts.
- **Embracement of ICT by Literary Writers:** In times like these when Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is growing very fast and gaining much grounds, there is need for writers to maximise this avenue or means by making their texts accessible on line thereby making sure that these literary texts get the desired attention. This will also solve the problem of location and time limitation which is inevitable on printed materials

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