

Chukwuemeka Ike and his Craft: An Analysis of Didactic Elements in Selected Novels of an African Fictional Icon

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Abstract

Despite a massive intellectual effort lavished on theories of African development, with particular emphasis on sensitizing members of the society on the need for mental and moral re-orientation, to see if society can make desired developmental progress, there appears to be little or no success. To these efforts, social scientists have added the didactic elements in Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike's fiction. Within here also is a massive effort geared towards positive transformation of society through consciousness raising. Through the technicalities of setting, voice, character and action, Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike engages his art in order to portray his perception of the numerous social, economic and political realities of his day. Amongst these realities as expressed in his eleven novels are issues of Nigerian Biafran war and its devastating effects, the challenge of irresponsible leadership and economic waste by the democratic leaders who inherited power at independence, the need for harmony in the family, the African conspiracy of silence on the issue of fatherless children in the society, his concern with the youth, the-neglected future leaders of the nation and many more. Ike presents these concerns as essential for attaining the much-desired developmental progress in Nigeria and Africa at large. Sadly, the ink in the pen of this erudite African fictional icon has faded with his departure for the great beyond. Certainly, his arrival in the abode of his ancestors will be heralded with much joy because of his indelible foot prints on the sands of time in African prose fiction. But their gain is certainly our loss! We will surely miss his peculiar approach to the art of storytelling, particularly his refraction of reality into fiction. We will miss his humor, subtle satire as well as the didactic elements embedded in his fictional creations, particularly his legacy of advocacy for family coherence and proper upbringing of the child. This paper therefore examines the life, legacy, and didactic elements encapsulated in notable works of one of Africa's first-generation literary giants, His Royal Highness Professor Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike.

Key Words: Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike, Ndikelionwu, Fiction, Child-upbringing, Nation Building

Introduction

The transition to the great beyond of Professor Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike has certainly created

a vacuum in the world of African realist fiction. His demise sent a wave of rude shock to both critics and readers of his craft, particularly those

with interest in the role of the African novelist in nation building. A handful of his novels are characterized by the skillful deployment of language and verifiable subject matter, setting, and careful delineation of everyday characters through whom he addresses topical issues in his Nigerian nation and African continent at large. Of particular interest in these creativities are his concern for responsible leadership, national development and proper upbringing of the child. It is also evident in his craft that apart from the portrayal of specific realistic challenges in his Nigerian nation, Ike advances a step further in his craft to proffer possible solutions to the specific societal challenges he portrays. Unfortunately, despite his huge contributions to the African creative oeuvre on issues of nation building and character development for a better society and nation, there is a paucity of critical materials on his works.

Scholars and critics have arguably not done much on the works of this erudite novelist, especially when compared to available critical works on the writings of his contemporaries like Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi and Cyprian Ekwensi. It is obvious that as Chinua Achebe fictionally documented the realities of colonial era and the early days of independence in Nigeria in his works, Ike's works are equally predominantly preoccupied with fictional documentation of verifiable Nigerian socio-political realities of the period following independence in Nigeria and Africa at large. But before delving into an overview of the works of this great fictional icon, it is worthwhile to consider the life, career and life of this erudite Nigerian intellectual.

Eze Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike: A Biography

Chukwuemeka Vincent Ike was born on April 28, 1931 into the Ike royal family of Ndikelionwu

Village in the present Orumba Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. He studied at Government College Umuahia and University College Ibadan where he graduated in History, English and Religious Studies. Afterwards, he proceeded to Stanford University, California, United States of America for his Master's Degree. On his return to Nigeria, his career path spanned across military service, administrative and human capacity development in Nigeria. Additionally, he worked in various capacities as a school master, University registrar and Provincial Refugee Officer during the Nigeria/Biafra war between 1966 and 1970. From January to November 1970, he was the Chairman of the Planning and Management Committee which re-opened and managed the affairs of the war-ravaged University of Nigeria Nsukka. He moved from University administration to the international scene as Chief Executive of the multinational West African Examination Council (WAEC) with headquarters in Accra, Ghana. He held this post for almost nine years – 1971 to 1979 after which he retired from active public service.

As an Igbo Prince, a man of wisdom, and propagator of African culture, he was crowned king in succession of his father with the title "Eze Ikelionwu XI" in his Ndikelionwu autonomous community in Anambra State of Nigeria. He was on this throne till his unfortunate demise on Thursday 9th January, 2020 at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University Teaching Hospital, Nnewi. He was 88 years old. Interestingly, as his subjects in Ndikelionwu mourn the departure of their respected son and king, they maintain that their King lives on. To them, Eze Ikelionwu XI, like his predecessors, has not died but has sojourned to the land of his ancestors.

He was married to Professor Adebimpe

Olurinsola Ike, nee Abimbolu. They had a son, Osita Nnanyelugo Adeolu Olusanya. Sadly, Osita's sudden demise on 17th December, 2016 left trails of inconsolable anguish on his aged, now childless parents. However, Osita's marriage was blessed with a son Chukwuemeka Ike Jnr.

Chukwuemeka Ike's departure is indeed a huge loss to readers and critics of his engaging fictional works. With his eternal departure, readers and critics alike have lost a great teacher; a teacher whose instructions and advice are embedded in the stories he tells. Nevertheless, his legacies of advocacy for human capacity development, family coherence and artistic documentation of relevant History for future readers remain ever green.

Literature Review

There is a scarcity of critical analysis on Chukwuemeka Ike's fiction. Amongst the few critics who have studied his works are Ernest Emenyonu, Ezenwa Ohaeto, Kunle Ajibade and Patricia Anyanwu. In his article titled 'Chukwuemeka Ike', Ohaeto attests to the socio-political relevance of Ike's thematic concerns to contemporary African society. Ohaeto avers that, in *The Chicken Chasers*, Ike derides the quest for vested interests which is a common occurrence in the postcolonial African society. He further maintains that the author uses this story to illustrate some of the trivialities that constitute impediment not only to continental but also to national development (145).

In his article entitled, 'Of Visions, Youth and Future': Chukwuemeka Ike's recent writings – '*Our Children Are Coming*' and '*The Search*' Emenyonu examines Ike's portrayal of the crises of youth development in the Nigerian society as portrayed in *Our Children are Coming*. He particularly notes Ike's engagement of humor in the conveyance of his subject matter. Ike's effort at portraying the lack of adequate attention to the welfare of the youth in Nigeria is what

attracts Ajibade's attention. In his article titled "A Vote for the Young", he describes *Our Children Are Coming* as a commendable attempt by Chukwuemeka Ike, not only at analyzing the problems of youth development, but also making recommendations which could lead to solutions to the nation's challenges. Thus, Ajibade describes this novel as both "A Vote for the Young" and "*A Celebration of Youth*" (26). On her part, Anyanwu calls on all and sundry to pay particular attention to socio-political issues raised in Chukwuemeka Ike's novels, particularly the issues of national development, leadership and proper upbringing of the nation's future leaders. Thus, in the article entitled "The African novelist and the Nation: A Postcolonial Reading of Chukwuemeka Ike's *Our Children are Coming*", she declares that:

In view of the context-specific challenges ravaging contemporary Nigeria and Africa, it has therefore become increasingly necessary, like Chukwuemeka Ike, to pay urgent attention to the struggles and challenges of contemporary Nigerian child and youth, as they have the propensity of falling easy prey to extremists, who recruit them to unleash mayhem on their fellow citizens (n.p.).

In another article entitled "Extractive Institutions in Chukwuemeka Ike's *The Chicken Chasers*" Anyanwu maintains that Chukwuemeka Ike is apt on issues of leadership in independent Africa. In view of this, she opines that:

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... Ike creates situations which arouse the consciousness of the

protagonist to the need for necessary action needed to effect desired change. (“Extractive institutions”).

To Chukwuemeka Ike’s credit are eleven novels, a collection of short stories and other non-fictional writings. To a large extent, most of his subject matters are hinged on his childhood experiences, as well as his experiences as a war time refugee officer, school administrator and chairperson of a multinational examination body (WAEC), creative writer and traditional ruler of Ndikelionwu community. His works and dates of publication include *Toads for Supper* (1965), *The Naked Gods* (1970), *The Potter’s Wheel* (1973), *Sun Set at Dawn* (1976), *Expo ’77* (1980), *The Chicken Chasers* (1980), *The Bottled Leopard* (1985), *Our Children are Coming* (1990), *The Search* (1991), *To my Husband from Iowa* (1996), and *Conspiracy of Silence* (2001) Aside of these, he wrote and published three non-fiction works namely, *University Development in Africa: The Nigerian Experience*; University of Nigeria 1960 – 1985: An experiment in High Education (jointly edited with E. Obiechina and J.A. Umeh) and *How to Become a Published Writer* (1991). A brief overview of some of these fictional works will suffice at this point.

In *Toads for Supper* Ike focuses on the life of a Nigerian undergraduate named Amadi who impregnates three girls simultaneously and is rusticated by his University at the same time. The novel explores the crises in Amadi’s life and the lives of those connected with him. *The Naked Gods* reveals the devastating squabble over the post of the Vice Chancellor in Songhai University. The British and Americans are interested in placing their own candidates in top administrative posts to ensure that they are still able to control the university after indigenization. In order to occupy the post, candidates resort to

charms and intimidation of opponents. Thus, the university metamorphoses from an academic setting to a site for sordid activities. In this novel, Ike shows that the supper-powers not only seek to control the economy of third world countries but also seek to control their intellectual and mental development. Though this novel is over forty years, the subject matter explored are still applicable in contemporary tertiary institutions in our clime.

Sun Set at Dawn is about the Nigerian civil war. Here, Ike examines the sudden break out of a devastating war in a newly independent African nation. Through this fictitious adaptation of a verifiable and realistic subject matter, he explores the physical and psychological complications of the Nigerian civil war in order to discourage a re-occurrence. This is portrayed through the prominence of hunger, suffering and emotional disturbances which the characters go through.

The Chicken Chasers assumes a continental dimension. It depicts the high degree of irresponsibility and *squandermania* attitude of independent African leaders. As the narrative begins, we see representatives of African nations gather in the fictitious nation of Plassas for the 15th Executive meeting of the African Cultural Organization (ACO). Top on the agenda is not the propagation of culture of the various member nations. Rather, their main reasons for this all-expense-paid journey to Plassas include the dislodgement of the hard working and morally upright incumbent Secretary of the organization, as well as to deliberate on ways of further enhancing their financial entitlements as representatives of their respective nations. Despite the excellent performance of the secretary of the organization, majority of the members of the organization vow to remove him

due to vested interests. The narrative ends on a note of optimism. The selfish intrigues of the self-serving diplomats come to nothing as the incumbent Secretary retains his position. The triumph and re-instatement of the honest incumbent Secretary General portrays Ike's perception of the power of good over evil. It is obvious that African Cultural Organization (ACO) is Ike's fictitious version of Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Set in the two worlds of Ndiokwu village and Government College, Abia, *The Bottled Leopard* depicts the experiences of a teenager Amobi Ugochukwu. His admission into Government College Abia comes as the only opportunity to obtain answers to the mysteries of his traditional beliefs. Amobi is poised to engage Western scientific and Christian beliefs to unravel African mysteries and beliefs. In his characteristic deployment of verifiable settings in his narratives, Ike's fictitious Government College Abia, is obviously a fictional version of his real life alma mater Government College, Umuahia in Abia State, Nigeria. Of particular importance in this novel is the dramatization of the 1947 real life total eclipse of the sun. In the fifth chapter, Amobi's father Mazi Eze describes this historical fact as "The sudden darkness in the middle of the day" (33). In *Our Children Are Coming*, Chukwuemeka Ike continues his message on the need to adequately care for the young. Here, he empowers the youth to fight for their right in the scheme of things in a nation that has neglected them for so long. This is the only way they can attract attention from adults. *The Search* is anchored on the expression of the author's concern for national well-being through ethnic tolerance. Here, he advocates a peaceful co-existence between people of different ethnic groups in his Nigerian nation. The novel ends on

the note that the nation can still be revamped from its present predicament, only if leaders and the led will turn around from seeking ethnic and individual interests to collective ones. Ike's other narratives include *To My Husband from Iowa* (1996), *Conspiracy of Silence* (2001), and *The Accra Riviera* (short stories).

In *Conspiracy of Silence*, Ike indicts religious leaders and the adult society for their conspiracy of silence on issues concerning fatherless children in the society. Here, Ike tells the story of a thirty four year old protagonist Nwanneka Ofoma. She is a pediatrician. At the age of eleven, Nwanneka discovers that Mazi Uche Obioha, the man she knows as her father is indeed not her biological father. Neither the church nor responsible adults is able to unravel the truth due to the culture of silence on issues of children with questionable paternity. Ike takes us on a course of her search for her real father. Nwanneka engages a novelist to chronicle the predicaments of fatherless children in the society with the aim of raising the consciousness of adults on the physical and psychological predicament of children in this category. In the end, Nwanneka discovers that she is an offspring of two siblings: her mother and her brother (Nwanneka's uncle), Barrister James Ikenna Ofoma. Devastated by this exposition Nwanneka resolves to approach life differently. She remains celibate for life.

We shall adopt *The Porter's Wheel*, *Expo '77* and *To My Husband from Iowa* for purposes of textual discussion and analysis in this paper. This is with the aim of emphasizing recurring thematic concerns of Chukwuemeka Ike's fiction.

Analysis of Three of Ike's Novels

The Potter's Wheel

Set in the village of Umuchukwu during the WW 11, *The Potter's Wheel* (TPW hence)

stresses the need for parents to shun all sentiments in order to impact the much-needed moral and academic upbringing on their children. It is the story of Obuechina Maduabuchi told by a third person omniscient narrator. Obu, as he is fondly called in the narrative is the only male amongst the seven children of Mazi Lazarus Maduabuchi and his wife. *Obuechina* literally means “The compound must not revert to bush” (12). Thus, by virtue of his position as the only son, Obu is cherished by all in the family, particularly his mother who is ready to compromise anything for his sake. As a growing child with his other siblings, Obu sleeps on the bed with his mother while all his sisters sleep on the floor. Obu bed-wets and sees nothing odd about it. He habitually wakes up late, takes no part in anything that is done in the house; all he wants is to wake up at leisure; to be given what food he wants, at any time he wants it, and to be left to play whenever he is not eating or sleeping. Worse still, he shows no interest whatsoever in what goes on around him. Thus, Obu turns out hopelessly lazy and rude due to his mother’s excessive protection and pampering. Concerning this negative attitude of Obu at the age of nine, Ike employs Mazi Laza’s voice in the admonition of his laziness “Every person who breaths must regard work as an essential ingredient of life, and everybody who eats food must work for it. Everybody who shunned work was bound to end up as a ne’er do well” (TPW, 25).

Afraid that his only son would grow up an irresponsible man, Mazi Laza takes a tough decision to send Obu to Aka as a house boy to Teacher Zaccheus and his wife Deborah, a decision perceived by Mama Obu as murderous. Meanwhile, Teacher Zaccheus is a dreaded disciplinarian who is:

Popularly feared and known as a

dare-devil who carried out his intentions without caring whose ox was gored ... the only teacher capable of administering 3 biting strokes of cane to each of the 220 pupils in the school without showing any strain (TPW, 75).

On arrival at Aka, Obu’s crude nature soon begins to manifest: He shakes too much oil into madam’s yam pottage, talks back at Madam when admonished for wrong doing, and steals meat from Madam’s soup pot, making it sour. For these offences and more, the young Obu is severely punished by Teacher Zaccheus and his wife both at home and in school. He is subjected to strict academic, moral and domestic training without pity and sentiment on his position as the only son in the family. Under this strict tutelage, Obu soon realizes that he can sieve fermented cassava, tie the fish basket over the fire, and cook tasty yam pottage with Utazi leaf. Surprised at his abilities in the kitchen, he exclaims, “cooking was not that mysterious after all” (124). Thus, Aka becomes a site for Obu’s metamorphosis from a lazy and disrespectful child to a domesticated, respectful and hardworking young man. After one year in Aka with Teacher Zaccheus and his wife Deborah, Obu returns to Umuchukwu with a glaringly transformed attitude to life. Concerning this, the omniscient narrator tells us that, “he runs errands cheerfully” (250), He “joins his sisters in farm work happily” (251), he goes to the river to fetch some water in order to assist his sisters. After his vacation in Umuchukwu, Obu surprisingly shuns his mother’s persuasion to stay back at Umuchukwu and returns to Aka to continue living with Teacher Zaccheus. Unlike his first journey to Aka, this time, he is unaccompanied by his dotting mother.

Obviously, Ike’s preoccupation in this

narrative is hinged on his advocacy for parents to teach their children on the way to go irrespective of gender, as prescribed in the biblical passage, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22: 6). Using the character of Mazi Laza as an example of proper parenting, Ike calls on parents to shun sentiments and embrace corrective discipline in moulding their children into responsible adults. To effectively achieve this aim in the course of narrating this subject matter, Ike deploys lots of related proverbs and riddles to buttress his point on the importance of proper child upbringing in the society. These proverbs and riddles in this text include the following:

“It is those whose legs go to the river that the river can drown” (2).

“Nobody tickles the eye with the stick intended to tickle the ear” (77)

“There is no sweet without sweat” (99)

“Obey and respect your master and mistress and any others there older than you” (100)

“The rat which accompanies the lizard to the stream for a swim should ensure that it leaves the river with a dry skin like the lizard” (166).

Do not flog a child the day he spills palm oil (167).

When a child receives a haircut, the size of his head becomes obvious (207)

Nothing without labour (256)

Nobody who does not suffer can succeed in life (256)

Tell me what goes into the earth single and comes out with offspring ... answer is cocoyam (171)

Just as the title of the novel *The Porter's Wheel* connotes, here, Ike raises awareness on the

communal responsibility of bringing up the contemporary child. Thus, implicit in the title of this narrative is the fact that every child, including Obu is like a wet clay in the hands of the porter. Just as the potter processes wet clay through fire to form beautiful utensils, shapes and works of art, so are parents expected to direct, guide and discipline their innocent children into responsible adults. Like the wet clay in the hands of the porter, whatever parents do with their innocent children from infancy “depends on what they want the finished product to look and feel like” (“Potter”, *Wikipedia*).

EXPO ‘77

In *Expo 77*, Ike exposes the syndicates behind the rampant cheating in Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE). This is perhaps his fictional name for the real life West African School Certificate (WASC). The author’s preoccupation in this novel is probably informed by his experiences as a one-time administrator of multinational West African Examination Council (WAEC). Here he adapts details of the real life Secondary Certificate Examination (SCE) question paper leakage in Nigeria under his watch in 1977. This leakage was popularly tagged “Expo ‘77”. In this context, “expo” implies candidates having a foreknowledge of their examination questions. “Foreknowledge being defined as having access to the contents of a question paper before the date scheduled for the paper” (164)

As the story begins, it is revealed that the National Education Board (NEB) has received series of anonymous calls, messages and petitions confirming the leakage of the on-going Certificate of Secondary Education examination in the country. Despite the numerous watertight and terribly costly security arrangements mounted by the National Examination Board (NEB),

examination questions continue to leak across the nation. The Acting Registrar of National Examination Board, Dr. Buka is worried about this development. Meanwhile, this easy access to examination questions leads to laziness on the part of students across the nation. From Lagos to Benin City, Onitsha to Aba, and Owerri to Enugu, the story is the same. Candidates continue to purchase examination question papers from vendors. Comfort is a typical example of the examination cheats. The omniscient narrator tells us that “She could not make head or tail of the Bible Knowledge syllabus; all her hopes rested on her ability to buy not only the questions but also model answers to them” (28). In order to trace the sources of this embarrassing leakage, the board engages Mr. Mora who is a former police officer. He is now the managing director of Tutuntu and company, a detective outfit. Mr Mora and his underground detectives unravel the various strategies employed by the ruthless examination question cartels in order to gain access to examination questions. These strategies include midnight raid or armed robbery at the homes of examination question reviewers, threat to their families, bribing of domestic staff of examination question reviewers to keep the window unbolted, to make way for easy entry into the home of examination question reviewers. He paints a vivid picture of their criminal activities thus: On entry into the home of their victim,

They hold them hostage and force them to dictate the questions... afterwards the teacher was warned that if the questions turned out to be false, he and his family would be eliminated. He was also warned not to mention the incident to anybody”. (27).

In this narrative, Ike brings to the fore the numerous code-names for leaked examination questions in this clime. These include “expo”, “Sure banker”, “this one na proper one”, “this one no be panya”. As professional detectives, Mora and his co-detectives go beyond the vendors and detect the underground syndicates described as their Oga, as well as other accomplices and collaborators. For instance, Koko, one of his detectives uncovers the syndicate’s tricks, hide-outs and modus operandi. He traces them from Agege to Apapa. Here the syndicates are found in a clever disguise with mystical powers, operating in a seeming hospital services environment. Koko tells us that on arrival at this syndicate hide-out:

you were instructed to deposit the correct fee for the ‘drugs’ you ordered in an enamel plate as you entered the ‘prescription’ room ... the doctor claimed to see the questions in visions. He then went into a trance and, in no time, a sheet of paper dropped at his feet from nowhere. The paper looked blank until you placed it over a boiling kettle or other source of heat. Then the blank sheet became question paper (100-101).

In this context, ‘drugs’ imply the particular subject sought by the candidate, while ‘prescription room implies the cubicle from where the papers are accessed. Thus, Mora and his team of investigators are able to unravel the syndicates and culprits who include Seminarians, herbalists, headmasters and even examination administrators, especially Dapri the Rivers state man (164). In his characteristic style of concluding his narratives with recommendation for a better world, Ike ends *Expo '77* with advice for examination board administrators through the

voice of Buka thus “Set up public centers for the examination in select urban areas and assign candidates to them from the surrounding schools ... yes no more school centres ... do away with all custodians, be they school principals, bank managers, or sub-treasurers. Question papers will no longer leave Lagos for the centres weeks before the first paper is due to be taken ... after all the Daily Times Newspaper is distributed from Lagos to all parts of Nigeria every single day throughout the year ... we can do something similar for the CSE exam (190).

To My Husband from Iowa

In this novel, Ike deploys the character and voice of a female first person omniscient narrator to comment on topical issues in the Nigerian society and Africa at large. These issues include the need for support and harmony in the family, propagation of African culture, the need for sustainable development and sincere leadership in Africa. Ify, a thirty two year old published creative writer, leaves her two tender children Chuchu and Junior with her supportive husband to participate in a three and half month international writing programme in faraway University of Iowa, USA. The programme is sponsored by the United States Service for International Development (USAID). Ify is one of the four women in a keenly selected group of 22 writers from all over the world including Bulgaria, India and the Philippines. The entire narrative which is structured into twenty-six cassettes is the voice recording of her American experiences as sent to her husband back in Nigeria. Ify gives her reason for this unique way of keeping in touch with her minors back home as she tells her husband that: “Chuchu and Junior may not follow each story as you play the cassettes, but they’ll at least hear mummy’s voice and be assured that Mummy has not disappeared

completely” (8-9). Implicit in this is Ify’s conviction that the continuous hearing of their mother’s voice as recorded in the cassettes will fill the psychological vacuum caused them by her physical absence from home. In this narrative, Chukwuemeka Ike harps on the need for spouses to support each other in order to harvest positive results in the family. In this regard, Ike engages the voice of Ify to appreciate her husband’s support in ensuring the attainment of the height of her profession as a published writer:

I have a husband who believes that marriage should not bare a woman from attaining optimum intellectual and professional self-fulfillment, and one who creates the ideal atmosphere at home to facilitate this. How else could it have been possible for me to attain fulfilment as a woman, as a professional, and as a published creative writer? If I were to start life all over again, I’ll end up marrying you (9).

Thus, the love and understanding between Ify and her husband cannot be overemphasized. Herein lies Ike’s advocacy for unconditional family coherence and harmony.

Through Ify’s American experiences, Ike also delves into obvious cultural differences between her homeland and America, comparing them with those she is familiar with back home. For instance, she is baffled by the American culture of idolizing animals, particularly dogs. She notes that apart from extensive television adverts on dogs’ food, Americans waste precious time on trivialities. She tells her husband:

I saw a TV advert last night asking the viewer if he was embarrassed by his dog’s bad breath. Before I could figure

out why any normal human should be concerned about dog's breath, I saw on display a new brand of dog's food which would guarantee dog white teeth and sweet breath! Was that what it meant to live in an affluent society? (10).

She is also baffled with the American culture of individual's savings or "insurance to cover cost of his funeral whenever he died". She is surprised that here, issues of funeral expenses are advertised by professional organizations such as Murdoch Funeral Home. According to them, this arrangement "enables you to freeze your funeral costs at today's prices, and save your dear ones the problem of making a difficult decision on your behalf after you are gone" (152). She exclaims her surprise at this culture "you see what civilization is doing to these people?" (152). On history and preservation of cultural artefacts, she visits the museum of arts and national history and is amazed by the American careful preservation of history and describes them as a "people clutching desperately at history" (120);

Aside of portraying cultural differences between Nigeria and America, Ify also takes us on an audio tour of both leadership, university education, health, banking, comparing them with what obtains in her Nigerian homeland. On banking, she is amazed by the swift attention she receives in American First National Bank and exclaims "I wish our Nigerian bank chiefs would come over here and see what it means to bank without tears" (132); on health, she commends the staff attitude and sophistication of the University of Iowa's hospitals and clinics with its over 1,000 physicians and dentists and concluded that "only an extremely naïve Nigerian will expect facilities in Nigerian universities to match

facilities here" (145); on leadership and education, she bemoans the inordinate quest for power in Nigeria and commends American academics for towing the part of honor and competence in filling the position of the university Presidency, following the voluntary resignation of the incumbent. Ify expresses her surprise at the integrity of the incumbent "How unlike our Nigerian experience for a man with so much in his favour to say he is not interested in such an exalted position, with an annual salary recently raised" (145). On education, she commends the University of Iowa for qualitative education, especially their sophisticated environment, infrastructure, particularly their computerized reference library and notes that it cannot compare to what obtains in her Nigerian universities. She also commends the university's management for their prioritization of staff and students' welfare and wishes that Nigerian universities' management would learn from them.

In his characteristic style of presenting obvious and verifiable national challenges in the nation, and proffering possible solutions to these challenges, Ike concludes this novel *To My Husband from Iowa*, by advising his Nigerian nation through Ify's voice thus:

I would like to see my country advance technologically, like the United States of America, to improve the standard of living of our people, but with a caveat. We must hold fast to our traditional moral values ... (267)

Ike deserves commendation for the employment of this rare Point Of View (POV) narrative mode of voice recording captured in a structure of twenty six cassettes in this text.

Conclusion

Embedded in the craft of Chukwuemeka Ike are

numerous sociopolitical issues which are of contemporary relevance. Such salient issues include issues of unity in a multiethnic and multi-religious nation as portrayed in *The Search*; the need for proper upbringings of children who are future leaders of the nation as portrayed in *Our Children are Coming and The Porter's Wheel*; the need for integrity in the pursuit of academics as portrayed in *Expo 77*; and the need for responsible leadership and accountability from those in positions of authority as portrayed in *The Chicken Chasers*; and the need for family coherence as depicted in *To My Husband from Iowa*. No doubt, readers and critics of his works will sorely miss the history, information and education embedded in his writings. His narratives are based on real life and verifiable

personal and collective experiences. As he tells us in the preface to *To My Husband from Iowa*, "The University of Iowa in the story is the University of Iowa in Iowa City, USA. The story reflects the actual experiences of a Nigerian writer who participates in the international Writing Programme of the University of Iowa. Ify who tells the story is, however, imaginary" (7). No doubt, Vincent Ike, left a legacy which ought to be preserved. This study therefore recommends more critical attention to his craft as well as lends a voice to that of Mikky Attah in the call on all and sundry "to do whatever it takes to unite his grandson, Chukwuemeka Ike Jnr to the family" (22).

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