THE NATURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE NOVEL IN ENGLISH IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

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(Ph.D/FASS/12774/95-96)

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D) IN LITERATURE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND DRAMA
FACULTY OF ARTS
AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA

MAY 2005

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and the sources of information suitably acknowledged by means of references.

ABEL JOSEPH

CERTIFICATION

This thesis titled "The Nature and Development of the Novel in English in Northern Nigeria" by Abel Joseph meets the regulations governing the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Literature of Ahmadu Bello University and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother Maria-Anne Agada, for all her love and also for believing in me. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like first, to thank God the Almighty for his benevolence.

I would like to thank Associate Professor Abba Aliyu Sani not only for supervising me and helping with books and material but also for his untiring encouragement without which this work would not have been what it is today. My gratitude to him is beyond say. Similarly, I am deeply appreciative of the comments and suggestions of my second reader, Associate Professor Tanimu A.N. Abubakar, the depth of whose criticism helped me tremendously not only in eliminating many gaucheries of judgment and style, but also, provided me a deeper insight into the politics of Western education in Northern Nigeria.

I thank Dr. Francis Ngwaba for suggesting the area of study. He left shortly after his sabbatical in 1995 and I greatly missed his friendliness, enthusiasm and knowledge. I am immeasurably indebted to my brother and friend, Ed. O. Abah for being more than words could say. Thank you for being part of this story. I particularly want to thank Dr. Emmy Idegu, for the inexhaustible and passionate encouragement and prayers for me. Thanks are also due to Dr. M.I. Umar-Buratai for sparing time to redirect the focus of my first draft with his incisive suggestions. He gave unstingingly of his ideas, time and books many times at short notices. I am most grateful to Mu'azu Maiwada, for his critical suggestions, especially in shaping the broad lines of my introduction. Also for my friends and colleagues in the Department, such as Dr. Ahmed Kofa Babajo for his constant reminder, Dr. Gbenga Ibilieye, Shawai Bahago, Dr. (Mrs.) Gani-Ikilama, Chief Joe Udoh, Dr. (Mrs.) Sade Omokore, Keston Odiwo, Hadizah Ampah, Rabiu Isah, Dr. Sam Kafewo, Martins Ayegba, George Iwuchukwu, Chuks Ezirim, Sylvanus Dangoji, Ode Ekpeme, Dodo Lumumba and to G.Y. Pam for the friendship.

I thank Professor Dapo Adelugba for his guidance and passionate interest in my work. I appreciate Prof. O.S. Abah and Dr. Jenks Z. Okwori for their inspiration. I am equally indebted to a number of people especially the Dean, Faculty of Arts, Dr. Kabiru Chafe; Dr. Adebayo Joshua the Head, English Department for his kindly thoughts and encouragement. To other members of the Faculty, especially in the Department of Nigerian and African Languages, I thank them for giving me the opportunity to discuss this topic with them. Thanks also to Mallam Haruna Mohammed and Mallam

Muhammad Mu'azu of the Northern History Research Scheme, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria for their assistance. Also, to Rabi Usman in friendship and admiration.

To my family, especially my wife, Angela with all my gratitude for her tolerance, support, unfailing encouragement and inspiration – and to Willie, Anastasia and Aurelia for all the noise. In a special way, I am deeply grateful to Mr. Sunday D. Adeleye for coming to my rescue when I needed help in the final stages of the work on computer. Thanks are due to Malam Yahaya as well.

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ABSTRACT

Although the Nigerian novel in English is bound by its common concern with designating the Nigerian post-colonial situation, its evolution and growth have not occured evenly within the geo-political sections of the country. This novel assumes prominence in Northern Nigeria only lately and until recently, it has been numerically less widespread. In essence, this uneven development of the Nigerian Novel in English despite its common concerns requires investigation.

This dissertation therefore examines the peculiar conditions within which the novel in English evolved in Northern Nigeria. In particular, it evaluates the role of the Arab/Islamic and the Euro/Christian civilizations in the structural transformation of Northern Nigeria and how this affected the evolution and growth of the novel form. In this context, the study is concerned with the impact of complex historical conditions on the novel, especially as this relates to its paucity or, until recently, dearth in Northern Nigeria. Such critical factors as the nature of Western education, the development of literary culture, publication outlets etc give a fuller picture of the slow pace of literary creativity in English in Northern Nigeria.

Although literary creativity in English began late in Northern Nigeria and the push and pull of Judo-Christian and Arab-Islamic influence give the literature its local colour. These developments did not however blurr the focus of the literary works that emerged. The novel in English, for instance, transcends the peculiarity of its regional background and thus expresses issues of broad concern to Nigeria. In specific terms, this study is based on the novels of Ibrahim Tahir, Abubakar Gimba and Zaynab Alkali, three

prominent novelists from Northern Nigeria whose novels define the experience and identity of Northern Nigeria within the Nigerian socio-political context.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This study investigates the evolution and subsequent development of literary creativity in Northern Nigeria, especially as these relate to the nature and growth of the Novel in English. Furthermore, the study is premised on the assumption that in order to properly relate the novel to its social context, it is imperative to examine some of the historical factors that shape the transformation of Northern Nigeria. In this way, it is possible to identify the changes and influences that have significant bearing on the emergence of the Novel. In essence, the study focuses on the emergence of novelists in English in Northern Nigeria, including those from the area who are not necessarily Hausa, but who have been influenced by both the Arab/Islamic and the Judo/Christian traditions. In this regard, the study evaluates social transformation, its impact on the the novel genre and on the works of three novelists, Ibrahim Tahir, Abubakar Gimba and Zaynab Alkali. This is imperative because their novels draw from several influences in articulating the Northern Nigeria experience as a component of Nigerian experience.

In geographical terms, Northern Nigeria is the area herein referred to as the former Northern protectorate, province or region. At present it comprises nineteen of the thirty-six states of Nigeria, including Abuja, the Federal Capital (Hickey 2000: 280). Northern Nigeria encompasses a land area of nearly three hundred thousand (300,000) square miles; it is seven hundred and twenty (720) miles from its border with Dahomey in the West, to the Cameroon Republic in the East and four hundred and twenty (420) miles from its northern neighbour, the Republic of Niger (Adeleye 1971). The area is

located on an open Savanah land with scattered hills, thin woods and further north on a desert. The people of the area are largely agriculturalists, artisans and traders. Although Northern Nigeria is predominantly Hausa/Fulani, there are other ethnic groups who are also quite significant in number, especially those that lie around the middle belt which is the home to more than half of Nigeria's estimated three hundred ethnic groups. Matthew Kukah (2002:193) describes the middle belt as

> *...not a formal region or state, rather as its name suggest it stretches like a wide grindle across the lively central plateau that separates the strongly Islamic cultures of the Hausa Fulani and Kanuri peoples in the North from the mainly Christian Igbos in the south east and southern Western Yorubas who have embraced both religions (p.193).*

In spite of the complexity of the region and its exposure to Western education at the beginning of the 20th Century, it experienced an early literary activity informed by the intellectual developments that took place in areas which experienced Islamic and Arabic script, the *AJami* and the Hausa Language. It is inevitable that the development of the culture of writing in Northern Nigeria emanated from the predominantly Islamic background. Hiskett (1975: 13/14) argues that "the first author living in Hausaland to emerge into the full light of history was the Seventeenth Century scholar of Katsina, Ibn al-Sabbagh, in Hausa Dan Marina (the son of the dyepit). Dan Marina wrote a commentary on the al Fazazi titled *al – Wasa'il al – mutaqabba*, commonly known as *al – 'Ishrinyyat*', 'The Twenties'. Hiskett also mentions such scholars, poets or literary commentators as Abdullahi Sika (Abdullah Thiga) who flourished in Kano in the early Seventeenth Century, Muhammad al-Barnawi, who flourished in Bornu C. 1707 and Muhammad al-Wali, a native of Baghirmi, present day Chad who flourished in Bornu in

1720. This development not only explain the prominence of the Hausa language over indigenous ones in Northern Nigeria but also of the Arba/Islamic literary tradition. In the context of the literary tradition that these established, it is inevitable that the novel in English in Northern Nigeria would be influenced by the culture and character of the literary tradition that preceded it.

Between the 9th and 10th centuries A.D, beginning from the formation of the Hausa states, the people experienced changes which have shaped and influenced their ways of life. The origin and formation of the Hausa, like any other ethnic group in Africa is largely derived from oral tradition which has been researched into by several historians and scholars[1]. According to Pilaszewicz (1985: 190),

> *the homeland of the Hausa people is situated in the territory of present day Northern Nigeria and the Southern part of the Republic of Niger. Hausa colonies and settlements are scattered throughout a region stretching from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to the Red sea in the east, and from the Mediterranean in the north of the Gulf of Guinea and beyond in the south. The Hausa language, which is tonal, belongs to the Chadic group of the Afro-Asiatic language family…*
> *1*

Furthermore, the history of Bayajidda and the formation of the other seven Hausa states (the *Banza Bakwai*) of Zamfara, Kebi, Gwari, Yauri, Nupe, Yoruba (Ilorin) and Kwararafa (Jukum), lend credence to the significance of cultural diffusion in the evolution and development of Hausa. According to Omobowale (1997:36), the centrality of difussion and the consequent prominence of Hausa has given the language and culture a hegemonic character which at times silences the other languages and cultures. This is

[1] C.C. Ifemesia, 'State of the Central Sudan: (i) Kanem-Bornu', (ii) 'The Hausa States', in J.F. Ade-Ajayi and Ian Espie, (eds) (1965) *A Thousand Years of Western African History*, Thomas Nelson, Surrey, and G.P. Bargery (1973) *A Hausa-English Dictionary and English-Hausa Vocabulary,* 2nd edition, ABU Press, Zaria.

because "the remarkable diffusion of Hausa language, a member of the Hamitic – Semitic linguistic group, explains why some students discuss Northern Nigerian literature under the rather parochial term "Hausa literature".

This state of Hausa was fundamentally affected by their contact with the Arabs, the Kanem-Bornu Empire, the Sokoto jihad of 1804 –1809, the activities of Christian missionaries and the British conquest and occupation. From the early part of the 11th Century, around 1012 A.D, Islam had made far reaching impact on West African region and had become an integral part of life for many of its inhabitants. Arabic and Islamic education flourished as a result of the contact through commerce, slavery and immigration with the Berbers of North Africa. This development facilitated the introduction of the Arabic language and culture into the West African sub-region (Bovil 1970:22).

Consequent upon the spread of Islam, a class of Islamic clerics emerged who were grounded in the religion and who made significant input into the nature of state administration, the widespread and adherence to Islam. Consequently, existing indigenous religions, which involve spirit possession, *Bori*, came under strong pressure from the new religion adapted at the centre (Furniss 1996:3). Islamic scholarship developed through the activities of Islamic scholars who are knowledgeable in Arabic and the Koran. In essence, a literary inspired by the Koran and transmitted through Arabic gained prominence in such a way that even the social and political experiences of the people were drawn against the background of 'ecclesiastical exigency'. In terms of their compositions, most of these writings drew essentially from the Islamic and Arabic influence, especially in relation to their use of legends, beliefs and myths.

Currently, such scholars as Gerard (1981), Pilaszewicz (1985), Westley (1986), Furniss (1996) and Griffiths (2000) have undertaken extensive research into the nature of these early writings in Hausa land and the individuals who sustained them.

Gerard (1981:32), for instance, elaborately explores the various stages and changes which characterized the development of written compositions in Hausa land. He noted particularly the role of one Muhammad b Abdal-Karim al-Maghili (d.1504), 'a Muslim theologian, preacher and politician from Tlemcen in Algeria as a prominent intermediary in advancing the course of writing in Hausa land. Al-Mghili's contributions had been enormous and only consolidated in the 19th Century through the jihad of Usman Dan Fodio.

In a similar vein, Pilaszewicz (1985:194) argues that "the strong impact of Islam upon the Hausa people has caused the almost complete disappearance of their original beliefs and the erasure of myths from their memories". In other words, the religious nature of the changes and the writings that followed facilitated the suppression of traditional beliefs. As Furniss (1996:197) argues,

> *for the cleric class, poetry in Hausa was a medium for the communication of Islamic ideas to the local population, and took its place alongside Arabic poetry, Fulfulde, poetry, Arabic histories, biographies and treatises of many kinds which were extensively studied, copied and annotated. The significance of its being in Hausa was that it formed a key weapon in the battle for the hearts and minds of the ordinary people. That battle went on in conjunction with the military campaigns of the reformist jihad of the early nineteenth century.*

The point which Furniss makes is derived from the literary works' emphasis on and relevance to the Islamic tradition. The validity of the works is further reinforced by the fact that their medium of expression, which is Hausa, had a lot of support from

Islamic scholars and the elite. This link, therefore, provided Islam with the platform for propagation or spread via the medium of the writings in Hausa since most of the Islamic scholars essentially relied on Hausa. According to Pilaszewicz (1986:204)

> *The religious character of Hausa literature resulted from the fact that Arabic language, brought by Moslem missionaries and inseparably connected with Islamic literature, was the first and, until the beginning of the 20th century, the only medium of literacy in the area. All the literate Hausas had to be Moslems since the only way to literacy led through long years of study of classical Islamic literature in Arabic.*

In essence, Islam not only fulfilled a spiritual purpose but also acts as a medium of social intercourse through which the cause of literary creativity was advanced. In this context, David Westley (1986:68) quite succinctly makes the point that

> *the predominant forms of Hausa poetry were described by Arabic terms, wa'azi, songs of warning, madih, prophetic panegyric, and sira biography – usually of the prophet. There were also legal and theological versification, mystical verse, verse of political and social protest and astronomical and numerical verse, all based on Arabic models.*

Consequently, both the Arabic language and Islam established the foundations of literacy in Northern Nigeria.

1.2 THE EVOLUTION OF A LITERARY CULTURE

The evolution of writing in Northern Nigeria is a product of a complex interplay of ontological, social, economic and political factors. This is why literary culture and intellectual tradition in the region are closely associated with socio-political development. Although scholars like Pilaszewicz (1986:202) have argued that there are considerable debates about "the question of the age of written Hausa literature", the impact and

influence of Islam and Arabic language is quite fundamental to the evolution of literacy and writing in Hausaland. Mention has already been made of the prominent intermediary Muhammad b Abd al-Karim al–Maghili in this respect but the Kanem-Bornu Kingdom playeda role in the spread of literacy. According to Gerard (1981:33) "one of the best-known verse compositions of the early Eighteenth Century is the *shurb al-Zulal* which is often ascribed to Imam Muhammad b. Abd al –Rahman from Bornu". Gerard also mentions others such as the following Fulani from Katsina: Muhammad b. Muhammad (d.1760), Muhammadal –Tahir b. Ibrahim al – Fallati (d. 1776) and Sheikh Jibril b Umar (d. 1795) who was said to be quite influential in such Hausa towns as Gobir (p.34). These individuals in a fundamental way introduced the culture of scripting and thus laid the foundation for the shift from orality to writing. Consequently, other scholars in the numerous Arabic schools and Islamic centres provided room for further learning both on the principles of Islam and in Arabic poetry. In addition to using the Arabic script to write the Qu'ran or communicate, to the indigenous 'Ajami' was also used for the purpose of disseminating Islam. As Sharfe and Aliu (1967: 36) argue,

> *initially, learning meant knowledge of Arabic, the language of the Koran, and Islamic tradition. Gradually a force of nationalism arose, and the local languages of various areas were put into written form making use of Arabic alphabets. Where sounds did not exist in Arabic they were added, and known as* ***Ajami***

In support of the diffusion which produced the 'ajami', El-Miskin (1989:2) also argues that,

> *In Nigeria, three languages, Kanuri, Fulfulde and Hausa are known to have enjoyed the utilization of the Arabic script to write these languages, a system characterized as* ***ajami****. The* ***ajami*** *writing system of Nigeria first emerged in the Kanem-Bornu caliphate of the Saifawa rulers where*

> *it was applied to writing the Kanuri language. In the Nigerian context, it was in Brono that this writing system was first called* ***ajami.***

In essence, the *Ajami* became the medium through which the Hausa language was reduced to writing. In this way, the expression of the people's culture was realized not through any form of indigeniety but through the scriptural power of Arabic. Subsequently, the *Ajami* script became axiomatic of cultural diffusion within the Northern region since there were other cultures which were subsumed within the influence of the Hausa culture such as Kanuri, Jukum, Fulfulde etc. Although the introduction of *Ajami* was revolutionary, its appearance did not altogether stifle the already 'literate tradition in Arabic language.' Indeed as Gerard (1986:35) puts it, "the early decades of the Nineteenth Century, which witnessed the spreading of ***ajami*** writing, were also a flourishing period for Arabic scholarship and literature, due primarily to the triumph of the Fulani *jihad* in the Hausa states of present-day northern Nigeria."

The Sokoto *jihad* of Sheikh Usman Da Fodio (1754 – 1817) significantly influenced the life of the people as well as the pattern of historical development in the region in several ways. Firstly, the *jihad* fundamentally altered the religious, political, economic and social aspects of existence and destroyed the basis of the Habe dynasty, which supported 'paganistic practices.' In fact, the main inspiration for the *jihad* was what its leaders conceived as a decline in the practice and ethics of Islam. Secondly the *jihad* further accelerated the growth of literacy and the pursuit of intellectualism because the reform relied essentially on its intelligentsia, the *Ulamah,* who produced extensive writings in Arabic, particularly in the areas of education and literature. Arabic Poetry and Prose as well as religious materials increasingly became available. According to

Omobowale (1997:38), "both Uthman Dan Fodio and his son and successor, Mohammed Bello, were scholars of high repute, who encouraged the acquisition and diffusion of knowledge through books". A number of books and poems are recorded to have been written by the Shehu and other members of his family, some of which served as important source materials for the history of the *jihad*. These efforts by the Shehu's family significantly influenced the promotion of literary culture and also inspired a number of other members of the *Ulamah* who also draw from the oral traditions of the people such as tales, riddles, fables as well as historical legends. A number of these works also consisted of classical poetry in "verse called (*nazm*) based on earlier Arabic works in prose…didactic or homiletic…with regular metre and canonical rhyme, as in classical *qasidas*; containing elements of religious poetry and mostly recited in front of mosques…" (Pilaszewicz 1985:210).

In essence, the Shehu's family boosted the interest in literacy in Hausaland. In the reign of Mohammed Bello (1817-1837), Hausa writing flourished, especially through the works of Usman Dan Fodio's brother, Abdullahi Mohammed (1706-1829) and Fodio's daughter Asma'u (Nana) Bint Shehu (1794-1863). According to Gerard (1981:58) "they handled in Hausa the favourite genres and the main themes of Islamic writing: they produced panegyrics of the Prophet Mohammad and other saintly men, chiefly the founders of the brotherhoods."

It is important to note that although the Arabic-Islamic literary tradition provided the background for much of the writings in the *jihad* and post-*jihad* era, this trend went hand in hand with a sustained interest in *Ajami*. As this trend became entrenched, the Arabic language was essentially used for official communication even when the Roman

script was introduced for the writing of Hausa language. Thus, Islam and the Arabic language were very significant in influencing the life and literary culture of the people even when Europeans penetration became imminent at the turn of the Century.

The prominence or overall influence of the Arab/Islamic literary tradition and the relative absence of the English/Roman literary tradition led many people to assume that literature in general was absent in Northern Nigeria. Obiechina (1990:1) makes this point when he states that:

> *the growth of written literature in West Africa is a process that is often, erroneously, associated with the introduction of Western-oriented literacy into West Africa. The truth is that the Arabic script had already been in existence several centuries before the arrival of the Roman script in West Africa… no discussion on the growth of written literature in West Africa can be regarded as full if we completely ignore the place of Arabic in the evolution of the literary tradition in West Africa.…*

Obiechina's statement echoe similar arguments by such scholars as Albert Gerard, Graham Furniss, Stanislaw Pilaszewicz, Janheinz Jahn and other notable African and Africanist literary historians. These arguments are instructive in the sense that they reveal the previlege position of the English language, its Roman script and its role as a major ideological weapon for Christian missionaries, colonialism and globalization.

Despite this differenciation however, the transition from the pre-literate to literate Northern Nigerian society was both complex and reflective of conquest and comination. For both the Arab/Islamic and Judo/Christian traditions, the inculcation of writing and literacy was a device for the conversion of the Africans from their cultures through the material inscriptive power of the printed word. According to Griffiths (1997:141) "…to the Arab invasive influence as much as to the modern Christian influence, the idea of the

written text represented a fundamental sign of superior cultural value and identity". It is therefore significant that in the quest for the control and domination of Africa, both Arab/Islamic and Euro/Christian forces relied on the power of the scripted word in their perception and construction of "Africa and its people…under such potent binarisms as black/white, 'pagan'/'civilized', etc" (Griffiths 1997:141). In Africa, the absence of an effective writing system or sign of inscriptive permanence prior to the arrival of these two forces meant that its indigenous oral tradition and cultural values suffered great neglect as these two invading forces privilege themselves. It is precisely the absence of the written text that both Arab/Islamic and Euro/Christian forces capitalized on to justify their cultural superiority and thus sustain their proselytization campaigns. According to Griffiths (1997:142):

> *the Arabs see themselves together with the Jews and Christians, as as part of a unique group the people of the book (**ahl al kitab**), to whom the revelation of God has been entrusted through the prophets and so the idea of...the written text represented a fundamental sign of superior cultural value and identity.*

It is important that these two forces pursued their mission of proselytization in order to inculcate the culture of literacy and writing amongst the indigenous people for effective communication, domination and control. This is why the history of literary and writing in Northern Nigeria was closely related to the development of Arab/Islamic as well as Euro/Christian or Western education.

1.3 EUROPEAN PENETRATION AND WESTERN EDUCATION IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

The emergence of European explorers and Missionaries in the North in the 19th and early 20th centuries also produced significant changes in the life of the people especially in terms of its disruption of the cultural and political autonomy of the individual states and kingdoms. Of course, changes were bound to occur following Britain's growing interest in trade in Nigeria. This interest was anchored on the increasing penetration of the interior by European explorers and traders in the first half of the nineteenth century. Apart from trading interests, the European were also fired by the zeal for Christian evangelism. The 'discovery' of the mouth of the Niger by explorers like Mungo Park, Clapperton, the Landers brothers etc therefore opened up the interior for increased trade expeditions and negotiations with kingdoms such as Borno and Sokoto. The 1841 expedition up the River Niger by individuals like the Reverend J.F Schon, a German missionary of the C.M.S. and Samuel Ajayi Crowther further facilitated the processes through which the Christian evangelism could take place through contacts around the areas of Lokoja and Idah in the years that followed it.

However, It should be noted that prior to the coming of the Europeans, in such areas as Kano, Sokoto and Zaria, there were in existence highly organized societies, the political and intellectual arms of which were already versed in the knowledge of the Koran and the Arabic literary tradition. It was therefore inevitable that any threat on existing tradition and culture by the European would generate resentment since European culture was clearly different from what the people hitherto understood and upheld. This is why an understanding of the intrigues, the interests and interplay of forces in the Europeans' penetration of Northern Nigeria reveals the reasons for the much-vaunted apathy of the North towards Western education. At the center of this push and pull is the

desire of the Europeans to secure and protect Europe's interests in Africa. As Balewa (1994:21) argues,

> *..intellectually, European travelers to West Africa were limited in their interests, and their accounts of the societies with which they came into contact were essentially answers to the issues that interest them.*

Added to this was the desire by the missionaries to convert Animists and a few Muslims. In practice, the pursuit of this desire made the Muslims deeply suspicious of the intention of the white man and this led to the conviction that Western education provided was not secular but Christian-oriented. As Ayandele (1966:286) argues:

> *This fanatical religious concept of schools by Christian missions was central to the development of education….it defined the limited scope of their contribution to education during the period and affected vitally the development of secondary schools,….Christian missions in Nigeria continued to look at education from strictly evangelical view point throughout the period….Training institutions were established with the sole purpose of rearing school masters who were to graduate as catechists, deacons and then priessts, while girls' schools were established mainly for the wives and fiancées of their male workers.*

Similarly, in the words of Crampton (1975:91):

> *Miller said that in an interview with Lugard in 1900 he strongly urged him to adopt the Roman script because he felt that the scholars of the future would thus be drawn to 'the endless storehouse of Western literature' and ' the priceless heritage of Christian thought' rather than 'the somewhat sterile Muslim literature and the religion of Islam'*

It is against the background of such views and policies that Arabic and its antecedent literary tradition were neglected in preference to the Christian-oriented or evangelical education. In the long run, as Fafunwa (1974:102) argues,

> *Christian-oriented or evangelical education slowed down the progress of secular education in northern part. Since missionary schools were established primarily to convert children and young adults to the Christian faith, the Muslim in the north and south saw this a definite threat to their own faith…It would therefore have been interesting to see what would have happened if the first type of education offered to the Northern and Western Muslim was the secular type run not by missionaries but by teachers and administrators*

Even though the proclamation of the protectorate of Northern Nigeria on 27th December 1899, the appointment of Sir Fredrick Lugard as its High Commissioner and his 1902 policy limited missionaries to the non-Muslim areas, the preoccupation with conversion did not stop. In almost all the northern parts of Nigeria, from Yola to Bida and Zaria to Kano, the all-consuming desire for proselytisation by missionaries made the acceptance of Western education difficult for Muslims. Inevitably, this led to uneven spread of Western education in the region. As Crampton (1975:107) states,

> *By the time of self Government in 1959 the missionary societies and the daughter churches were playing a major part in the educational system of Northern Nigeria and it was those areas in which Christianity was strongest that the demands for further facilities were most vociferous. By that time certain people in the far North were becoming concerned at the backwardness of their own parts of region compared with the Riverine Areas.*

However, the late take-off of Western education can also be attributed to the role of the colonial government itself. In this context, Omolewa (1986:14) contends that "…he (Lord Lugard) did not like the fact that the new mission-educated elite showed little respect for traditional rulers…" in other words, the colonial administration showed little interest in encouraging Western education without interfering with the people's religious beliefs, in addition to the excuse that the colonial administration lacked the man

power to effectively supervise the schools. This limitation is a matter of interest and not of incapacity. As Mahmud Tukur (1990:116) argues, the promptitude with which the colonial administration established and maintained such institutions of coercion as prison, police, warders, tax collectors etc was not replicated in the development of educational institutions. In other words, the British displayed a lack of interest by not committing "massive economic aid to keep its western education system going" during the economic depressing of the 1930s (Tibenderana 1914:415). Tibenderana examined the contending views on the late start of Western education in Northern Nigeria and argues that:

> *true western education was never regarded, as a substitute for Quranic education, which every Muslim needs for the understanding of his religion, nevertheless, many parents were willing to send their children to Native Administration schools if only such schools had been available in large numbers and the curriculum followed in the few available schools had not over emphasized technical knowledge at the expense of literary learning (p.3)*

The poor content of the education being provided and the limited access to it, more than the 'fear of Western education' fundamentally affected the attitude of Northern Nigeria towards Western education. Tibenderana also makes the interesting point that Sir, F.D Lugard's attempt to liberalize western education was frustrated, especially by the officials in Colonial Office who "were largely influenced by the belief that any expanded educational programme would make Northern Nigerians unduly difficult to govern as mass education in India had made the Indians (Tibenderana 1974:398).

In the light of the foregoing, it is imperative to contextualise the people's poor response to Western education within the framework and philosophy behind European occupation of Northern Nigeria. As Tukur (1990: 122/3) succinctly argues,

> *...the attitude of the rulers but especially of the people of the emirates towards the imposition of British taxation and forced labour, to cite just two British measures, was downright hostile. Yet this hostility did not stop the British from going ahead and imposing these measures, which were essential to their colonial domination over the emirates. In the same manner one can vividly argue that had educating the people of the emirates been essential to the British, they would have gone ahead and introduced that education on a large scale, irrespective of the feelings and the attitudes of the people themselves.*

In addition to this non-challance, the British further alienated the ordinary people by mainly enlisting the sons of Chiefs and Emirs into Government Schools. Although such Schools as the Kano Emirate Provincial Schools, the Katsina Emirate Provincial School, the Kano Industrial School, and the Survey School provided elementary education, this was not for the entire Northern populace but only for "imparting some Western literacy to the aristocratic class, to the exclusion of the commoner classes" (Tukur 1990:121). This practice was prevalent up to the 1920s and 1930s when there was renewed interest for the British to expand the schools. Interestingly, not only were prominent Northern Emirs and Chiefs like the Sultan of Sokoto and the Emir of Gwandu interested in the expansion of the schools but were, by 1933, "demanding the establishment of schools for girls in their respective emirates…by providing the necessary building and being prepared to pay the salaries of the necessary European female teachers to run the school" (Tibenderana 1974: 404)[2].[2] Their enthusiasm for the schools was so compelling that when the Chiefs were told of the difficulty in obtaining European female teachers they were ready to accept Yoruba female teachers. This enthusiasm did not illustrate the attitude of a people who were not ready or who were

[2] Extracted from N.A.K.S.N.P. 17/3/21303/1 Provincial Annual Report for 1933 by Commander Carrow (n.d.).

reluctant to learn other forms of literacy. If anything, "…the emirs concerned realized that western education was essential in the twentieth century context for material development of their people but it was never regarded as a substitute for Quranic education which every Muslim needed for the understanding of his religion" (Tibenderana 1974: 418/419).

In any case, the development of Western education continued in this state of flux and this state of affairs directly or indirectly affected the relationship between Christian missionaries and the people and enhanced the disparity in the distribution of schools and the development of Western education in Northern and Southern Nigeria. The contact between Southern Nigeria with Christian education dates back to 1842, while that of the North took place only from the early 1900, a few years after the British conquest of that area. "This makes for a handicap of some 70 years…" (Balewa 1994:130). By 1914 the North had no secondary school "while the south had eleven. The enrolment into primary schools in the South in 1913 was 35,716 as against the paltry 1,131 in the North for the same period" (Fafunwa 1974:113). These developments are significant in the sense that the conflict over access to and control of economic, social and political events and resources in Nigeria could be traced to this disparity in Western education.

1.4 THE ROMAN SCRIPT AND CREATIVE WRITING IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

There are several arguments by writers and scholars about the dearth of creative writing in English in Northern Nigeria. In the main, these arguments attributed this paucity to cultural, religious or political reasons as well as British imperialism for its policies, Christian-oriented policies which were distasteful to the Muslim intelligentsia. As Raji (1990:27/20) argues,

> *In Northern Nigeria, as elsewhere, British colonialism identified with Christianity. Therefore, inspite of the proclaimed policy of non-interference and indirect rule, Muslim intelligentsia anxious to protect the Islamic way of the Northerners saw colonial rule as nothing but a Christian invasion which must be resisted at least, intellectually. This reaction, in due course, helped to preserve the predominantly Hausa-Islamic culture in the context of which secular education was offered and so, minimized (in comparison to Southern Nigeria) the impact of Western literary tradition in the North.*

As Jibrin (1990:1) states, the suspicii8on and contempt towards British imperialism partly arose from "the character of education" available to the Northern Nigerian, and the fear of possible evangelization. Despite this, the consolidation of the Euro/Christian influence in the late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Centuries was accompanied by the introduction of the Roman script and Latin alphabets in the reduction of the Hausa language. This introduction of the Roman script was a threat to *Ajami* because it is a component of a package of change that had significant impact on both Islamic clerics and scholars as well as on the nature of scholarship on Northern Nigeria. According to Crampton (1975:99), "as early as 1900 Lugard was debating the question of whether to use Roman or Arabic script in the official Hausa orthography. Although some of his officials would have preferred Arabic script, Lugard chose the Roman". This policy had enthusiasts such as Reverend Miller and Hans Vischer both of whom recommended Roman characters for the obvious reason of perpetuating British colonial imperialism. The introduction of the Roman script and its adoption according to Adamu (2003:13):

> *...underplayed the significance of Arabic script in the education of Muslim Northern Nigerians, and ignored hundreds of years of antecedent literary substrata which*

> *the colonial machinery could have built upon, if indeed it had wanted the education of the colonized to have any meaning.*

Adamu's views further reinforce the argument that the colonial government contributed to the stifling of the Arabic script, which was already in use. Consequently, the Roman script was viewed with suspicion and largely ignored by the literate Hausa, especially by the Mallams and the poets because, as Zima (1976:171) puts it, the script was

> *automatically associated with foreign 'pagan'or 'unbelievers' ideas. The common name given to this Roman-script based literacy-**boko**-might well have been associated both with the English word 'book' and with the Hausa original sense, which means 'deceit' or 'fraud'.*

For many years after this initiative, therefore, the Roman script was ignored by the literate Hausa and largely employed only by missionaries such as Reverend J.F. Schon who is credited with the first publication in Hausa *Magana Hausa* written in 1866 and published in 1886 in England; Canon Robinson, and Walter and Ethel Miller (Skinner 1980: 167). In addition to the translation of the Bible into Hausa, there were other publications in 1913 such as Frank Edgar's *Litafi na Tatsuniyoyi na Hausa* (A book of Hausa Tales), A.J.N. Tremearne's *Hausa Superstitions and Customs* and R.S Rattray's *Hausa Folklore.* These attempts were the first indicators of literary creativity through the Roman script in Northern Nigeria. But even this came basically from European missionaries and colonialists.

The major task of the missionaries and colonialists was therefore to convince the people, especially the learned Mallams, to embrace the Roman script and the changes this implied to the concept of literacy. It is in this regard that efforts were made to expand

access to Western education, and in the process redressing the distortions and imbalance in its development. In this respect, the school system in the North was decentralized, leading to the establishment of such schools as the Katsina College in 1921. The Katsina College thus became "the sanctuary for the nurturing of western values and skills and the fountain head from which most Western education would spring from the North." (Abba 1997:163). It is imperative to understand the place of Katsina in the overall development of literacy generally in the north. Being a unique centre of learning, Katsina had the privilege of producing significant poetic compositions between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries by such scholars as Muhammad b. ^{c} Abd al- karim al – Maghili (d, 1504), a north African cleric and Islamic missionary and Muhammad al-Kashanawi ibn al – Sabbagh (Dan Marina).

The growing interest in Western education and the expansion of elementary schools in Lokoja, Wusasa Zaria and Kano consequently raised the problem of reading materials. This scanty and often non-availability of reading material made the colonial education department to established the Translation Bureau in Kano in 1929.

1.5 NORTHERN REGIONAL LITERATURE AGENCY (NORLA) AND THE NOVEL

The translation Bureau was first set up under C.E.J Whitting in 1929 in Kano. With time however, the Company went through series of mutations, becoming the Literature Bureau in 1933, the Gaskiya Corporation in 1945 and the Northern Regional Literature Agency in 1953. The Translation Bureau was essentially established to "translate the regulations and laws of the colonial administration into Hausa, conduct qualifying examinations for office posts and prepare school textbooks." (Pilaszewicz 1985:218). Basically, the Bureau was set up provide reading materials or in ideological

terms to promote literacy for the purposes of political and cultural manipulation. Consequently, a number of books were translated from Arabic into Hausa. Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya (1988) mentions a few of such translated works as *Dare Dubu Daya* (A Thousand and One Nights) from the Arabic *Alfu Laila wa Laila, Saidul Muluki* and *Abdullahi Tanimuddari* from Arabic into Hausa to mention just a few. These attempts demonstate the primacy of the Roman script over the *Ajami* and equally marked the shift from the oral tradition of tales to written stories as the Bureau drew largely from the European and Asian sources. According to Ampah (1989: 46), this situation led to the "assumption that good literature has to be printed and published either in English or in Hausa…among the emerging elites of Hausa land". In effect, such feelings led to the suppression of creative works in Arabic and *Ajami* script and accounts for the disdain and contempt which the *Mallamai*, the Hausa scholars, had for '*boko*' or Western education.

Under Dr. Rupert East, the Literature Bureau became an institution which formally initiated and encouraged the emergence of Roman scripted imaginative writing in Hausa. The competitions in imaginative compositions initiated by Dr. East between 1932 an 1933 for the best Hausa novel greatly stimulated the creative impulse in the North, thus, initiating secular compositions, mainly in Hausa. This development illustrates that although the novel was a Western and thus alien genre, this form of narrative could actually be appropriated in Africa. This is why Chinweizu et al (1980:8) contend that:

> *the African novel is a hybrid out of the African oral tradition and the imported literary forms of Europe, and it is precisely this hybrid origin which needs most to be considered when determining what technical charges could legitimately be made against African novels.*

This is the context that defines relationship between oral tradition and imaginative prose in northern Nigeria. Following R.M East's literary competition in imaginative writing, the following five works were awarded Prizes: Bello Kagara's *Gandoki,* Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's *Shaihu Umar*, R. East and J Tafida Wusasa's *Jiki Magayi*, Muhammadu Gwarzo's *Idon Matambayi* and Abubakar Imam's *Ruwan Bagaja.* This was the starting point of secular composition and "the first novels, from the beginning marked by varying degrees of realism" (Pilaszewivz 1985:18). These attempts demonstrated that a natural ability and flair in literary composition, which could draw from its traditional and cultural milieu existed in Northen Nigeria. The works draw from the oral tradition blended with elements of realism and they effectively created a recognizably different voice but focused on issues of moral and didactic significance.

Although an avenue for the emergence of imaginative prose in Roman script had been created, most of the authors that emerged therefrin did not challenge the status quo. Moreover, the Bureau itself failed to "truly promote literature in all the major languages of the North with the obvious exception of Hausa" (Abba 1988:21). The apparent exclusion of other languages from the work of the Bureau further demonstrates the covert motive of the colonialists to sustain a hegemonic condition that would benefit them. In spite of the efforts of the Literature Bureau and NORLA in the 1930s and 1950s, there was no significant encouragement towards developing imaginative prose in English in the same way that it was encouraged in Hausa. According to Abba (1988: 21):

> *because NORLA was, basically aimed at mass education and social mobilization, within the context of colonial domination, its overall literary and educational impact was at best modest. Much of the resources of NORLA were expended on improving literacy in schools in addition to*

> *promoting literary output in selected vernacular, especially Hausa.*

This argument shows that the Literature Bureau tactically aided translations into Hausa language rather than encouraging imaginative writing in English language. Following the Lugardian policy of 'indirect rule', most colonial institutions and agencies such as the Literature Bureau, deliberately focused attention on Hausa much to the neglect of the minority languages in the North, even when such languages were not directly under the hegemonic influence of the Caliphate. At best what NORLA did was the publication of news sheets in a few of the dialects in the north which did not encourage any literary creativity but mainly served as propaganda material to enlighten:

> *the colonized on the benevolence and patronage of 'their friends' - the British as well as alerting them about 'their enemies' – especially the nationalists based in the southern part of the country. A consistent theme of the newssheets and of other NORLA materials included the need to abandon subsistence, for commercial agriculture and the futility of revolt against domination (Abba 1988:18)*

Interestingly, there was little apathy towards Christian missionary activities in the non –Hausa and predominantly non-Muslim areas of the Northern region like the Benue – Plateau province. However, this area did not gain any advantage in terms of access to Western education or the opportunity for literary creativity in English. This neglect reveals the implicit design of British colonial policy towards providing only limited Western education and the pursuing of their interest through the hegemony of the Emirate system. This why the earliest examples of anything literary from this part of Northern Nigeria is the translation and publication of the *Akiga's Story: The Tiv Tribe As seen by One of Its Members* by R.M East in 1939.

The point therefore is that even in the non-Hausa and predominantly non-Muslim areas of the Northern Nigeria, literary creativity in English expression took a long time to emerge. Given the fact that the area in question did not benefit from the Arab/Islamic literary tradition, the minority ethnic groups from the non-Muslim North did not have a written literary tradition, religious or temporal, to fall back on for a long time. This explains the absence of creative writing in English from this part of the North for a long time.

However, even where publications were encouraged, they were mainly for the benefit of the colonial administration in terms of helping to legitimize its hegemony over the people. The scope of the newssheets published in non-Muslem areas, for instance, was indeed narrow and under the heavy influence of the colonial administration. Consequently, in spite of the efforts of R.M East, imaginative creativity in English expression was not encouraged. Much later, this neglect was evident in the politics of such multi-national publishers as Heinemann Educational Books. Heinemann's 'The African Writers Series' owned by a conglomerate called Tillings and which is traded on the London Stock Exchange" (Currey 2003: 579) conveniently overlooked Northern Nigeria in its sourcing of publishable manuscript on secular creative writing.

Although the efforts of R.M East in the 1930s were significant to the evolution of the novel in Hausa, it was indeed a difficult and challenging task. The difficulty is basically because the genre he was proposing had neither a literary precedent not the social basis to support it in Northern Nigeria. In other words, the promotion of the novel form in Hausa was thwarted because the Northern Nigerian society had yet to develop a literate and bourgeois class. Comparing the Northern with the English society, Cosentino

(1987:27) argues that "at least until recently, the society of the Hausa North was analogous to that of pre-industrial England, and so experienced a similar artistic superstructure. The novel cannot develop in such societies it is a bourgeois art form, which flourished only when a large bourgeois class emerges within a given society". Perhaps, this explains why Cosentino finds East's attempt at inducing the novel as 'very unrealistic since he appeared to have ignored the basic cultural and traditional indices that would have freely shaped or influenced its emergence'. However, Cosentino's comparison tends to ignore the basic differences such as reading audience, publication and the market which separate the Northern Nigerian literary experience from that of pre-Industrial England.

A more fundamental constraint which East faced was the skepticism and apathy of the *Mallams* towards the genre 'which to them was of dubious value'. Since its conception relied on the *tatsuniya* (tale), it was therefore difficult to convince the Mallams and scholars who have been heavily influenced by Islam to embrace this new concept. As Westley (1986:38) explains,

> *The word has come to mean a falsehood, an untruth. The Mallams, carriers of literacy in Hausa land for generations, have long opposed the falsehood of the* ***tatsuniya*** *and held it in contempt. The Koran, a written work is, the carrier of the truth compared to which the* ***tatsuniya*** *with its forays into the realms of the fantastic is a traversty. So Islam and literacy undoubtedly have much to do with the contempt with which the* ***tatsuniya*** *is held.*

In spite of this apparent neglect of the *tatsuniya*, Westley still contends that it "shows the strongest affinity with modern fiction…" (Westley 1986:37). The basic thread which connects the *tatsuniya* and the novel, is the 'story' through which both forms explore certain 'truths', either within the context of a real, stable society or the

realm of fantasy and spirits. Essentially, however, both forms require a certain level of freedom of expression as they create or recreate familiar or unfamiliar experiences. This situation partly explains why a number of entries, which responded to Ruper East's literary competition in the early 1930s, drew largely from the *tatsuniya* strain.

Over the years, however, the changes taking place within the Northern Nigerian society have tended to question Cosentino's argument that "it may be that Hausa society will never create novelists but will instead concern itself with other literary forms more relevant to its world view" (Cosentino 1978:28). The publication of Abubakar Imam's *Ruwan Bagaja* in 1934 thus marked the beginning of the emergence of the novel in Hausa in Northern Nigeria. Drawing essentially from folktales, fables, books of Middle Eastern and European tales, most of the books that followed were "particularly reminiscent of the tale tradition in Hausa where the logic of character and motivation takes precedence over any pretense of verisimilitude" (Griffiths 1996: 24). These early attempts were mostly characterized by an overlap or interaction between oral traditions of tales and fables and Arabian and European tales, and through which societal values and ethics were inculcated. Furniss (1996:8) contends that "…the early novels work with the stuff of popular discourse, the stereotype characters, styles of language, and recurrent interactions that come from a variety of sources: 'traditional' narratives, historical and religious traditions, as well as recognized rhetorical forms".

The five novels illustrate an attempt at synchronization of divergent historical influences. They thus contain interpolation of Oriental, Arabian and Islamic discourse over tales and fables, which revolve around adventure, destiny, perseverance and morality. Even if their motivation was imperialist, they negotiated a place between

Eurocentric and Afrocentric worlds. The importance of these writers, whether their writings contain elements of the *tatsuniya* or not, is their ability to reconstruct their cultural matrix in a sublimating process that combines imagination with synchronization. These works demonstrate the possibility of using varying degrees of realism and thus, "marked the beginning of a systematic separation between God and Caesar in the literary production of Northern Nigeria" (Rasheed 1990: 2140). The works also tended to shift from an essentially religious content towards the secular. In the shift from the predominantly religious motifs, the stylistic and thematic variation embraced the use of both realism and fantasy with stereotyped verbal images whose arrangements and juxtapositions "often represent a sophisticated process of metaphorization…" (Cosentino, 1978: 23). The juxtaposition of both the fantastic and the realistic in the narrative structure of the *tatsuniya* thus became the 'model' for the emergent novel in Northern Nigeria.

Cosentino (1987) and Furniss (1996) drew attention to the act of blending the fantastic with the realistic in the five narratives selected by R.M East from the competition, Cosentino's argument is that the works, specifically *Gandoki* and *Jiki Magayi*, are too preoccupied with the spiritual, especially by emphasizing 'the power of Islam over the heathen', their use of 'exotic characters' and the ever presence of the 'mythic quest'. As a result, Cosentino further states, they ignore other possibilities open to the world of the novel or the short story. Take as a whole, Cosentino argues that only Tafawa Balewa's *Shaihu Umar* contains a certain level of realistic narrative "…for Balewa does not use the structures of the oral narrative to compose his biography. Its plot proceeds linearly with little repetition or juxtaposition of images." (Cosentino

1978:27). It is also in this regard that Furniss praises *Shaihu Umar* for its 'narrative orignality'. In his words, *Shaihu Umar* contrasts with the other books "…in eschewing fantastical flight and the miraculous world of Jinn…" (Furniss 1996:31).

Cosentino's arguments are predicated upon the fact that the world the Northern Nigerian writer creates exists in an already pre-determined order, and more so, the nature and level of development in the society is pre-industrial and deeply steeped in the mysteries of religion. Consequently, Cosentino concludes that "it may be that the novel cannot be born in a corporate society, such as the Islamic North, where all the important questions are already and eternally answered" (Cosentino 1987:27). This argument ignores the fact that changes are bound to occur in all societies, European and African and thus reflect the colonial representation of African societies as static in works written by Europeans. Furthermore, Cosentino's views and the efforts of colonial officials to entrench the written word as part of a larger scheme of class formation in society. This is why in spite of the 'good' intentions of colonialists, anthropologists such as East, for instance, introduced a form (the novel) to serve the interest of the colonial power by creating an elite class that would help advance the course of colonialism. These 'cultural elites' who acquired the 'inscriptive and communicative' modes essentially acted as transmitters or agents who facilitated the process of acculturation. Since the scope of most of their works ranged within the 'sacred and devotional', they did not upset the balance needed by or the dominance of colonialists and missionaries. They could not afford to upset the status quo because the writers relied on the structures provided by the colonialists and missionaries for publishing. As Griffiths (1997:148) puts it, "from the nineteenth century until well into the 1940s, the missionary societies were not only the

dominant educative force, in establishing literacy in Africa, but also the major patrons of writing and the written text"

Although "the missionaries introduced the printed word into Africa for their own end…it was an instrument which was amenable to the many other and quite different purposes which were to emerge in the years to come" (Griffiths 2000: 55). The printed word came to symbolize first, the means through which proselytization was effected and also acted as the medium through which cultural/political nationalism and unconsciousness was initiated in the African. There was thus the deliberate attempt by the Euro/Christian missionaries to create a few 'cultural' elite who, according to Griffiths (1997:147/8):

> *Could be successfully allied to the inscriptive and communicative, forms of the dominant culture by education…. Literacy education became the primary means by which the Christian missions sought to effect change an set up the conditions for conversion, unconsciously, echoing the processes of their Islamic precursors some eight centuries earlier.*

A few of these African elites who used publication outlets provided by the missionaries include individuals such as Olaudah Equiano and Samuel Ajayi Crowther, others were Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912), James Aficanus Beale Horton (1835-83) James (Holy) Johnson (1836-1917). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were other voices of Rev. Attah Ahuma, John Mensah Sarbah, Mojola Agbebi, Rev. Samuel Johnson Kobina Seky and Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford (Griffiths, 2000:27). In spite of these developments the progress towards the printing and publishing of literary materials from Africans was still slow and negligible since the works had to pass through missionary and colonial structures and institutions. As a

result, the scope of these works was limited to what the structures allowed. In other words, the colonialists and missionaries applied some measures of control or censorship over the publication of certain materials, especially of those that tended to unsettle or challenge them.

In spite of the Missionary control and religious fervour of the texts, these individuals laid the foundation for the articulation of other secular African interests through a fundamental appropriation of the English language and the tool of writing. These pioneers along with their European Missionary counterparts created a literature which cut across the generic forms of religious texts, tracts, ethnographic narratives, travel accounts, orthographic, "dictionaries and grammar of the various African languages" (Griffiths, 2000:35). By the early 1950s, therefore it became apparent that the task before the educated Africans was to challenge colonialism by reiterating the African cultural values that where hitherto neglected or suppressed in missionary accounts and travelogues of European adventures.

By the end of the Second World War, there was a significant shift in the scope of literary creativity in the North from secular concerns with moral, social and political dimensions, although the Islamic influence remains. The works of such notable poets as Sa'adu Zungur (1915-1958), Na'ibi Sulaimanu (1929), Mudi Sipikin (1930), Salihu Kontagora (1929-1980), Mu'azu Hadeja (1925-1955) and Garba Gwandu (1932), illustrate this trend. It is thus in the attractiveness of secular concerns which engaged the attention of the poets and writers that imaginative writing found greater autonomy and variety. Although there were significant developments in imaginative writing especially

in the early 1950s, late 1960s, 1970s an early 1980s as observed by Furniss (1996:33) they were mostly in Hausa.

1.6 DEVELOPMENT OF THE NOVEL IN ENGLISH

However the social transformation of the Northern Nigeria, the advance in and access to Western education, the emergence of a highly mobile elite and the increase in literacy, especially in the 1970s and 80s, created the suitable conditions for the development of the novel in English. In addition, the upsurge of writing clubs, literary societies and writers' associations encourage publication of creative works made up of short stories and novels whose themes revolved around "love, marriage, women's roles, domestic power relations, education, morality and the intergenerational struggle" (Furniss 1996:54). The absence of literary forum like the 'Mbari Writers and Artist's Club' which facilitated the works of writers and critics such as Achebe, Clark, Okigbo, Soyinka at the University College Ibadan led to the realization in the North, particularly from the end of the Nigerian Civil war in 1970, of the need to catch up with changes, including literary development, across the Nigerian state. Indeed, by the end of the civil war, which coincided with the oil boom, there were changes which affected the entire fabric of social life. In this sense, Furniss (1996:41) contends that, "the particular nature of wealth accumulation during that period produced anomalous and contrasting perceptions of opportunity and social status". It therefore became inevitable for its literature to embrace the language which explicates or investigates the changes and alignments within the Nigerian state. In a sudden way, Jibril (1990:9) stress this when he opines that:

> *...Northern Nigeria is a fast – changing society. National integration is progressing at a tremendous speed and not least of its agents are the mass media. This in effect, means*

> *that Northern Nigerians are being brought out of their tiny shells and are having their horizons widened… consequently, we may soon be confronted by a new generation of creative writers from the North who may choose English as their medium of expression.*

In this regard, Labo Yari's novel, the *Climate of Corruption* (1978) paved the way for this brand of imaginative writing in English in which there is a purposive attempt at reflecting the challenges of modernity without recourse to the religious or the fantastic. This development implies that like its counterparts in the South, the Novel in the North articulates the same socio-economic, cultural and political realities that permeate discourse nationwide. Despite its immersion in national discourse however, the Novel also signifies certain phenomena peculiar to the North such as feudal hegemony, unequal power relation, elite formation, and the representations of the 'Northern interest' within the post-independence Nigerian society. This perspective demonstrates a shift from the conception of literature as entainment and neutral rendition of culture initiated by Dr. R.M.East in the 1930s and 1950s. This is because the complex nature of social and political relations has widened the ambit of virtually every 'regional' literature to apprehend the challenges of contemporary Nigeria. In order to fully integrate itself into mainstream literary discourse, Novels in Northern Nigeria finds the use of the English language as inevitable as Jibril (1990:9) argues because:

> *...the utilitarian value that English has as the medium of inter-ethnic communication in Nigerian is daily being appreciated by Northerners and contact with the south at other levels is also forcing a re-evaluation of attitudes and concerns that have always been taken for granted by Northerners. Moreover, many of the elites in the North are aware of the literary vacuum, which exists for Northern Nigerian literature in English.*

In this regard, the 'Northern perspective' had to distance or sever ifself from its exclusivity and draw from other experiences and values in order to negotiate a place for its own values, interest and experiences in national matters. Although literary values can as well be codified in indigenous languages, the shift to English language provides a basis for the integration of the novels into mainstream culture, discourse and history. The novel in Northern Nigeria thus evolved from a complex situation, which it transcends by approximating national and international parameters of literary practice and discourse. Its uniqueness therefore lies in its flexibility and expansiveness. Its signification contains basic human values even where its unique historical background exerts considerable presence in its narrative structure.

Just as such early precursors of Nigerian literature as Achebe, Clark, Okigbo, Soyinka benefited from knowledge of European and Classical literature provided by the University College Ibadan in the 1940s and 1950s, many Northern Nigerian writers of the 1980s, are University educated with varying disciplinary backgrounds as sociology and Economics. Like Ekwensi, Amadi, Olugbile, and a few others from Southern Nigeria, novelist from the North have appropriated the medium of the novel in such a way that their works represent the voice of a people who until now have been ensconced within their tradition and culture. Their works have in the process enriched the larger corpus of the Nigerian novel with new perception, reflection and reconstruction of the historical experiences of the people. In this regard, the various themes explored in the novels cut across different facets of life, from the rural to the urban areas, including the traditional and contemporary segments of social life.

Furthermore, the emergence of several publishing outlets such as the Macmillan Pacesetters Series, Malthouse Publishers and the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) in the 1990s has given many writers avenues for expression and self-projection. This development has also increased the number of writers from the North to include Aliyu Jibia, Abubakar Gimba, Ibrahim Tahir, Labo Yari, Olu Obafemi, Muhammed Sule, Zaynab Alkali, Joseph Mangut, Mohammed Tukur Garba, Hauwa Ali, Moses Abwa, Yahaya Dangana, Ibrahim Sheme, Abdullahi Doki and Helon Habila who won the Caine prize for African writing in 2001. To this, the voices of Cyprian Ekwensi in *Burning Grass* (1962) and Femi Olugbile's in the "Sickness of the New Millet" from his collection of short stories *Lonely Men* (1987). Although both writers are not from Northern Nigeria, they have nonetheless set their stories within the Northern Nigerian cultural milieu. This list is not in any way exhaustive but the writers in it represent a generation determined to re-position the North on the literary platform. They also represent a modest but burgeoning literary renaissance in Northern Nigeria. The influence of these writers on several younger novelists illustrates the different experiences as well as changes in their society.

In general, the emergence of the University College, Ibadan, was a major determinant of the shape and direction of literary creativity and it produced some of the first generation of Nigerian writers whose "undergraduate curriculum was rigidly controlled in the early years… by its founding University:" (Etherton 1982:163). As a result of this rigidity, most of the first generation writers developed a classical orientation modeled on European writers, an attitude which Chinweizu et al (1980) criticize for its eurocentrism.

In spite of this criticism, these early group of writers provided the starting point for the emergent African, nay Nigerian literature. In 'little magazines' like *Black Opheus* edited by the Australian academic, Ulli Beier, *The Horn*, edited by J.P. Clark (Bekederemo), clubs and Associations like the 'Mbari Writers and Artists' Club', a subtle but persistent cultural nationalism was emerging which affected the basic thinking about the possibilities of African literature, particularly in terms of its mission to reclaim African history and identity. As Philip Derby (1998:139) posits, "for reasons both of personal emancipation and social responsibility, African writers took upon themselves the task of undermining European representations of Africa and establishing new ones." Hitherto, most colonial narratives and those they inspired were a major means through which Europeans obsessed by the myth of the Blackman in Africa consciously lied in order to justify their invasion of Africa. Fired by the ideology of racism and sustained by the theories of Charles Darwin, Comte de Gobineau and Levy–Bruhl, most colonial literatures construct the blackman as "an inferior being belonging to an inferior race; this point was a cornerstone in the construction of the colonial novel-because it determined its plot as well as the role played by the black characters and their psychology" (Nwezeh 1978:5). It is in response to this imposed heritage which is exemplified in Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* that Chinua Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. Equally of significance is the Onitsha Market literature whose emergence in about 1974 in pamphlet form drew significant critical attention as pointed out in Emmanuel Obiechina's (1973), *An African Popular Literature: A study of Onisha Market Pamphlets.* However, these literary activities were confined to the Southern axis of Nigeria. Up north, the development was of a different nature and dimension.

1.7 THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE NOVEL IN ENGLISH IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

The novel in English in Northern Nigeria has been nurtured by the history of the region, particularly by the Arab/Islamic influence, the Euro-Christian tradition that came with the contact with the Europeans. As a result of the British colonial policy of 'non-interference', for instance, the education which the Northern Nigerian received, was only "within the context of his own indigenous culture" (Jibril 1990:3). Consequently, the Northern Nigerian novelist in English contends with a complex historical experience in his imaginative reconstruction of this reality, especially in its relationship to the larger Nigerian context. In essence, the novelist in the North is thus preoccupied with signifying an identity through a narrative form circumscribed by two opposing hegemonies: the Arab-Muslim and the Euro-Christian. This is the case because, as Ojo–Ade's (1996:14) agues, "…Islam is not an African religion. It belongs to Arabs, no less colonialist than Christian Europeans. Both have used their religions as means of racist conquest, dehumanization and exploitation". This means is that the Northern Nigerian novelist has had to contend with three different values: the indigenous/traditional, the Arab-Islamic, and the Euro–Christian.

This situation explains why some of the earliest attempts at creative writing drew largely from Islamic ethos, using the *Ajami*. This trend later developed into adaptations and translations of books from Western culture such as *Yawon Duniya Hajji Baba,* a translation of a 19th century Englishman's rendering of the adventures of Hajji Baba of Isfahan, a Persian; *Auren Zobe* which is Abubakar Imam's translation of Sir Bryan Sharwood Smith's *But Always as Friends' Daren sha Biyu,* Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya's translation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night; Gandun Dabbobi, Bala* Fantua's translation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Al'adun Turawa*, Abubakar Imam's account of his

impressions of the customs of the English. These adaptations and translation according to Jibril (1990:4) play a significant role in "projecting aspects of Western culture to the Northerner instead of indulging in exotic displays of Hausa culture for the benefit of the West".

Another significant issue that shaped the novel in Northern Nigeria is the fact that unlike the Arab/Islamic influence, British colonialism did not significantly disrupt the life and culture of Northerners. Although there were changes and transformations, these did not significantly distort existing status quo as was the case in Southern Nigeria. It is in this regard that the Northern Nigerian novelist hardly expresses much concern with the question of culture contact/conflict which is a major thematic preoccupation of most novelists from Southern Nigeria with the possible exception of Elechi Amadi. On the contrary, the Northern Nigerian novelist depict a firmly stable society in which Islam wields an overwhelming influence. As a result of this stability there is little recourse to traditional past characterized by gods, deities and traditional sacrifices or ritual celebrations which are found in such novels from Southern Nigeria such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1965), Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), and Gabriel Okara's *The Voice* (1964).

Although the novel in English in Northern Nigeria deploys traditional motif to depict social experience of its immediate milieu, its overall vision of these experiences is nonetheless related to the Nigerian literary tradition. As Northern Nigeria undergoes social transformations its novel equally grows and new writers are emerging in the major genres of the novel, from popular romance to the highly philosophical and the realistic, employing all manner of devices from allegory through parody and satire in the

recreation of social reality. Although, most creative works from the non-Muslim parts of the North took a longer time to emerge, most of them, as evident in Adah Ugah *Naked Hearts* (1982), *The Ballads of the Unknown Soldier* (*A novel in ballads*), 1989, treat contemporary issues which, while drawing from peculiar antecedents of the environment were not limited by them. In this regard, kris Obodumu's *Die a Little* (1997), Olu Obafemi's *Wheels* (1997) and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), a collection of Short Stories, encapsulate the general concerns and apprehensions of the writers about not only the Northern region but also the general Nigerian society. Obodumu's *Die a Little* (1997), for instance, employs a socialist perspective in its depiction of contemporary Nigerian social reality. In the novel the author explores the graft of the local bureaucrats and officials, as well as the structure which perpetually dehumanize the common man. Obodumu is also critical of electoral fraud, privatization and commercialization of government owned companies, unemployment etc in the country just as he shows concern for the woman whose trepidators and strength he explores though his heroine Enole.

In the same vein Olu Obafemi, noted for the revolutionary fervour of his plays, captures in his novel *Wheels* (1997), the trauma of post-civil war Nigeria, especially in the alienation, depression and frustration experienced by individuals such as Musa 'Sonja' Omo-Ege who were war veterans. The social and economic gulf in the society draws out Obafemi's sarcastic barb as he explores the deep anger, despair and distrust which the people harbour against one another in society. The remarkable thing about the novel, however, is the manner in which the children from different backgrounds break through the social/economic barrier to decide a new future for their society. In depicting

this dimension of the civil war, Obafemi sustains hope for the future and thus encodes faith in the oneness and greatness of the country. These viewpoints gives *wheels* its uniqueness and locates it within those Nigerian novels which explore the civil war outside the single divide of patriots and rebels, victors and victims.

Helon Habila is another young writer from the North who has taken the Nigerian literary scene by storm, becoming the first Nigerian to win the Caine Prize for African writing in 2001. His *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), a collection of Short Stories captures Nigerian in the grip of despotic, corrupt and oppressive rulers and the trauma and frustration of a generation 'daring to speakout'. Taken overall, those writers not only express themselves outside the dominant Islamic ethoes of their counterparts in the region but also address the complex issue of disillusionment after independence and the oil boom. However, these works are also significant because of the way they draw on local motifs and traditions peculiar to their authors' immediate environment while still relating to the general Nigerian context.

This study evaluates of the novels of Ibrahim Tahir, Abubakar Gimba and Zaynab Alkali who share some uniqueness, operating from the same socio-cultural background and milieu. As individuals who have combined the traditional, Islamic and Western education, they represent, through their novels, a people whose traditions and cultures have been significantly affected by diverse influences. Although they are faced with similar challenges, each of them responds to the problems from unique individual perspectives. They are novelists who have been influenced by conflicting cultural and political developments but the ideological purview of which their novels could be conceptualized in the interplay of the forces of history and politics in Northern Nigeria.

These writers demonstrate an acute awareness of their social responsibility as they reconstruct their socio-cultural and political reality from different ideological perspectives. They offer new perspectives on the nature of cultural and political development in their society one of which is their signification of the status and role of traditional/cultural values in the emerging modern society. Implicit in this reconstruction is the novels' attempt to promote a collective northern consciousness which is derived from its historical and cultural backgrounds. As novelists whose attitude to life has been defined by tradition, Islamic religion and Euro/Christian values, their cognitive power has been, to a very high degree, influenced by the nexus of hegemonic relationships. These have in many ways affected their works so that in reconstructing their social reality, these novelists have to create a delicate balance between tradition and the encroaching of secular modernity and globalization.

1.8 RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study uses the creative works of Tahir, Gimba and Alkali to evaluate the relationship between literature and society in Northern Nigeria and the manner in which the novel reflects and reconstructs contemporary issues. The thesis thus contributes to the knowledge and understanding of the factors behind the evolutio and growth of the novel in English in Northern Nigeria. In their creative works, these novelists illustrate the different experiences as well as the changes in their society. Although they are not the only novelists writing in English in Northern Nigeria, their efforts demonstrate the development of the novel in the region through their treatment of a variety of issues with a great sense of balance and realism.

Colonial and Missionary education in Northern Nigeria were anchored on the desire to "collapse" or 'blend' the religious and the aesthetic into a single realm of experience" (Abdalla 2003:38). This led to the introduction of an art variance with the beliefs and the literary tradition of Northern Nigeria and which reconstruct other variables of what constitutes an appropriate work of art in a language unfamiliar to the people. The emergence of the novel in English in Northern Nigeria, is however important because of the way in which the language of the colonizer has been deconstructed to accommodate or incorporate indigenous cultural motifs. In essence, the utilization of a new aesthetic form by the colonized writers entailed the appropriation of the novel genre to script the experiences of the people in a unique and realistic manner.

This is why the study relates Western education to the doctrine which regarded outside influence on 'traditional and customary' Northern Nigeria as a potential threat to the stability and the interest of the region. More importantly, British colonial policy also viewed Christian missionary influence 'as potential threat to its interest' and this led to the policy of excluding Christian missions from Muslim areas. Based on the above, this thesis is anchored on the following prepositions:

- There is a complex relationship between the Arba/Islamic influence, British colonialism, and the Euro/Christian tradition and the emergence of the novel in Northern Nigeria;
- The 'indirect nature' of British colonialism and its tailor-made education gave the novel it's uniqueness and focus in Northern Nigeria;

- Although an essentially Northern character permeates the novel in English, this form of narrativity transcends its regional background and assume a national character;
- The novel in Northern Nigeria participates in national discourse because writers in the region are concerned with the issues of modernity, urbanization, governance, patriarchy, national integration and feminism.

1.9 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study is primarily concerned with how the historical and socio-cultural contexts of Northern Nigeria influenced the emergence and growth of the novel in English. Consequently, this study evaluates not only the factors which led to the relatively late development of creative writing in English, but also incorporation into the canon of Nigeria novel.

This study shall demonstrate that the Nigerian novel is complex and diverse and that it's Northern Nigerian segment has added to it new perspectives which resonate fresh and compelling concerns. The study also establishes the fact that the Northern Nigerian novel shares an affinity with the Nigerian novel and this inspires a deeper probe into wider new perspective, in the process reviewing previous thoughts on or about the Nigerian novel in English in general.

1.10 SCOPE

This study is on the nature and development of the novel in English and it is primarily focused on Northern Nigeria. The study is thus partly historical and because of this, it focuses on the way selected novelists/novels have been influenced by varying

cultural and political factors. An understanding of these factors would thus enhance the ideological perspective from which the novelists worked.

The study covers the work of three prominent novelists, Ibrahim Tahir, Abubakar Gimba and Zaynab Alkali. Although they are not the only novelists in English in Northern Nigeria, they share unique characteristics, operating from the same socio-cultural background and milieu. As individuals their works express a balanced assessment of the complex cultural heritage that defines the identity of contemporary Northern Nigerian.

This is why 1984 represents a unique period in the emergence and development of the novel in English in Northern Nigeria. It is a period in which the novel established itself through Ibrahim Tahir's *The Last Imam* with an aestheticism that was palpable. This period also witnessed the emergence of Zainab Alkali, the only foremost female voice from the North with *The Stillborn* and Abubakar Gimba with *Trail of Sacrifice.* Although these novelists and many more Northern Nigerians are still writing, the study limits itself to these works in order to develop a clearer focus on the trends and tendencies which the novelists have explored.

1.11 LITERATURE REVIEW

The relative paucity of creative works in English in Northern Nigeria is reflected in the limited number of critical responses and reviews on the works. As a result, there are a few works of criticism especially on the novel in English. Added to the novel's problematic form, the paucity of critical works raises question of the fecundity of the novel form in general. Since its emergence in the 16th Century, the novel has been greeted with a wide range of definitions and assumptions which have tended to describe

rather than to define it. The difficulty in the definition has to do with the mutations which the form has been going through.

Although the novel has its own characteristics, it is amenable to various interpretations. This flexibility has therefore led to an argument that the novel neither has the poetics (Stevick, 1967) nor the quality that drew great critics to it verse did from Aristole, Johnson to Coleridge. Rather, the novel drew from a variegated pool of sources such as the essay, romance and history with a fluidity and flexibility which critics of the form argue, undercut its claims to any 'artistic seriousness'

Part of the reasons for this has to do with the varying criticism that the novel has generated particularly in terms of its form, structure and realism. F.R. Leavis posits that "the field is so large and offers such insidious temptations to complacent confusions of judgment and to critical indolence" (Leavis 1948:9). In deed, many critics are of the view that as a literary form, the novel is doubtful when compared with poetry particularly in terms of its aesthetic appeal. Walter Allen (1954:18) quotes Sir Desmond MacCarthy as saying that "it is extremely doubtful whether the aim at the novel it to make an aesthetic appeal. Passages in it may do so; but it aims also at satisfying our curiosity about life as much as satisfying the aesthetic sense…I am inclined myself to regard it as a bastard from of art..." MacCarthy's views may not be unconnected with the prosaic nature of the novel which is derived from its antecedence in the essay, the newspaper and it's capacity for mutation. This problem is related to the changes taking place in the English society between 1580 and 1590, with "the sudden irruption of Elizabethan drama" (Allen 1954:21) and the appearance of the novel in about 1700, with all the complications surrounding it's length, aesthetics and verisimilitude.

Drawing from various sources therefore, the novel approximated a mixed form made up of reportage (newspaper), dialogue (drama) and poetry. Sylvan Barnet, et al (2001:538) argue that "it is no accident that many novelists have been newspapermen: Defoe, Dickens, Crane, Dreiser, Joyce, Hemingway, Camus. And this connection with reportage perhaps helps to account for the relatively low esteem in which the novel is occasionally held.…" For such critics of the novel, the form does not have the discipline or the set rules of poetry and is given to a certain strangeness such as the manipulation of plot, setting and characters. Such manipulations in many respects created reservations about the novel's sense of realism in terms of its depiction of character and its subject-matter. In Gray's view, however, this limitation does not abrade the fecundity of the form since in general,

> *literary fictions can remain well within the bounds of the possible and yet be highly implausible. Critics and readers who reject folktales and myths because of their manifest impossibilities will accept the wildest improbabilities as long as a realistic or naturalistic decorum is maintained (Gray 1975:119).*

In this context, Maurice Z. Shroder regards the novel as a genre which "like any narrative form…has a typical action, with thematic value, which is peculiarly its own" (Shroder 1967: 14). The point therefore is to recognize the uniqueness of the novel form in its capacity for expansiveness and possibilities which no other genre possesses. In this regard, R.P Blackmur's view quoted by Walter Allen (1954:275) is instructive because:

> *...the novel was not a play however dramatic it might be and among the distinctions between the two forms was the possibility, which belonged to the novel alone, of setting up a fine central intelligence in terms of which everything in it might be unified and upon which everything might be made to depend. No other art could do this; no other art could dramatize the individual at this finest…*

More than any other art form, the novel facilitates a greater blending of several forms through which individual and collective experience could be explored for either their philosophical or moral significance, particularly in a changing world. As a result, notable literary historians such as E.M Forster (1927), Sir Ifor Evans (1940), F.R Leavis (1948), Walter Allen (1954), Raymond Williams (1958), Ian Watt (1964), Philip Stevick (1967), Robert Barnard (1984) argue that the novel is a genre whose emergence coincided with the rise of the middle class in Europe. Essentially the novel objectified middle class wishes and fears, especially from the 18th century through the works of such novelists as Daniel Defoe (1660-1731), Samuel Richardson (1689-1761), Henry Fielding (1707 –1754), and in the 19th century Jane Austen (1775-1817), Walter Scott (1771-1832), Charles Dickens (1812-1870) etc. The novel therefore became a genre, which drew from the dominant culture from which it emerged, acquiring a relevance that could be hardly ignored.

1.12 DISCOURSES ON THE NOVEL IN AFRICA

Although the novel is an alien form in Africa, it was an art form appropriated by the Africans and domesticated by the grafting of indigenous traditional motifs into its narrative structure. African and Africanist literary scholars such as O.R. Dathorne (1975); Abiola Irele (1981); Chinua Achebe (1975); Wole Soyinka (1976); Ezekiel Mphahlele(1962); Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981); James Booth (1981); Eustace Palmer (1979); Bernth Lindfors (1982); Albert Gerard (1981); Gareth Griffiths (2000) etc have addressed the issue of the ontological question of the novel in Africa. Although opinions have differed especially at the ideological level, their views show that the emergence of

the novel in Africa was remarkable because it exemplified the "ability of the colonized people to appropriate and subvert even the most alien forms, and the most disruptive of institutions, to their own ends" (Griffiths 2000:74). Pioneering African writers such as Achebe and Tutuola adapted this form to the needs and temperament of their society by "presenting a different consciousness…" (Darby 1988: 168) and deconstructing the European representation of Africa as found in such narratives as Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness.*

In Nigeria, the 1950s is generally regarded as the take off point of the novel with the publication of Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard* in 1952 and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. Although Cyprian Ekwensi had written *When Love Whispers* in 1948, it was not considered profound enough by the literary and intellectual powers that defined the canon of the form such as publishers and critics. Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-wine Drinkard* was therefore more significant due to its status as essentially exotic narrative. It was however Achebe that drew the desired critical response and attention to the African (Nigerian) novel.

This development inspired a number of literary scholars and commentators to evaluate both aesthetic and ideological perspective of the emergent works. Some of these critics include the following: Janheinz Jahn (1962); UlliBeier (1967); G.D Killam (1968); Wilfred Cartey (1969); Charles Larson (1971); Christopher Heywood (1971); Eustace Palmer (1972); Dorothy Blair (1976); Kolawole Ogungbesan (1979); Lewis Nkosi (1981); Albert Gerard (1981); Shatto Arthur Gakwandi (1982); S.E. Ogude, Romanus Egudu, Dan Izevbaye, and others. Most of these early critics of African literature evaluated the concept of the African novel in continental perspective. Therefore,

'regional' literatures were only treated from a peripheral level, without serious analysis of their dynamics and peculiarities.

Christopher Heywood (e.d) 1971) *Perspectives on African literature*, for instance, focuses on the general evaluation of African literature without any discussion of its regional or national specificities. In his introduction to the book, Heywood states that "the purpose of the conference was to place the discussion of African writing on the context of critical discussions of literature in general". In essence, the target of this book is the broad terrain of the African experience in the context of the literary canon in the Western liberal humanist discourse.

In the same light S.E. Ogude's (1983) *Genius in Bondage: A study of the origins of African literature in English* focuses its criticism on the entire African milieu, especially on the literary activities of such black ex-slaves as Phillis Wheatley, Ignatius Sancho and Olaudah Equiano. According to Ogude; "the peculiar significance of Sancho, Phillis Wheatley and Olaudah Equiano lies in their instinctive expression of what has become the African myth of concern. They thus established what has recognizably become the contemporary African worldview: (Ogude 1983: 15/16).

Another renowned critic of African literature, Eustace Palmer, in his *An Introduction to the African Novel* (1972) relates the emergence of the African novel to its role in expressing "the strength, validity, and beauty of African life and culture" (ix). Although he evaluated the novels of three Nigerians – Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi and Gabriel Okara, the book did not interrogate the national or regional experiences, which form the cultural backgrounds of these novels. Palmer justified his study on the need to

concentrate "on the dozen or so novels which seem to be of some importance, and which are gradually finding their way into school and University syllabuses" (xv).

Similarly, Shatto Arthur Gakwandi's (1977) *The Novel and Contemporary Experience in Africa* takes a holistic view of the historical and literary background of modern African literature. He thus encapsulates the wider context of 'African nationalism and Pan-Africanism' both of which have moved in parallel terms with modern African literature. According to Gankwadi, "from its beginnings African nationalism tried to use literature as an instrument of political liberation" (p.5). His major concerns therefore are "first, to provide a critical assessment of twelve major novels; and secondly, through this assessment, to outline the major concerns of African fiction" (11). Although this effort leads to an engaging study, it still ignores the specifics or the development of what might be called 'national literature'.

Albert Gerard's (1981) *African Language Literatures* draws nearer to the specific contexts of literature in various African languages, tracing their beginnings from the earliest contacts between the people of sub-Saharan Africa and the written literature of both the Arabic and Roman script. Gerard comments however that:

> *While the Hausa community of Northern Nigeria has failed thus to make any significant contribution to the English literature of the country, and while the Yorubas have shown an exceptional degree of creativity in both African and European languages, the greater part of the literature produced by the Igbo of south Eastern Nigeria has been in English, beginning with the well known Onisha chapbooks of the 1950s (p.259).*

Despite its concern with the specific, Gerard's views are too glib and thus fail to transcend the broad and the general perspective of criticism of African literature. His criticism of African literature to some extent reproduced the broad parameters of

nationalist or pan-Africanist discourse and thus ignored the incipient tendencies of nationhood which found expression in the oral literature of certain ethic nationalities such as the Sotho, the Zulu, the Yoruba etc.

However, from the mid 1970s, the Nigerian segment of African literature became more prolific because the civil war of 1967-1970 facilitated more literary creativity. Indeed, the Nigerian civil war stimulated a large corpus of what could be called 'the Nigerian war literature'. Both the old and the emergent generation of writers have explored the war phenomenon from different perspectives. While some of the writers are sensational and evoke sentiments, others particularly the younger generation, focused on the general effect of the war on the Nigerian citizens. A few examples of this trend would suffice: S.O Mezu's *Behind The Rising Sun* (1971), John Munonye's *A Wreath for the Maidens* (1973), INC Aniebe's *The Anonymity of Sacrifice* (1974), Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975), Kole Omotoso's *The Combat* (1972), Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1973), Cyprian Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace* (1976), Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* (1976), Festus Iyayi's *Heroes* (1986).

Consequently, critics began to narrow their attention on the specific terrain of Nigerian literature as evident in the critical works of Ulli Beier (1964) Bruce King (ed) (1971), Charles R. Larson (1971), Emmanuel Obiechina (1975), Oladele Taiwo (1976), Chinweizu et al (1980), James Booth (1981), Charles Nnolim (1989), Chidi Amuta (1989), Udenta O. Udenta (1993), Wendy Griswold (2000), Austin Amanze Akpuda (2001) etc.

Ulli Beier (ed) (1964) *Introduction of African literature: An antology of critical writing from "Black Opheus*' shed light on "African writing from many angles" (ix). The

text draws from many critics of divergent cultural background and literary experience. Some of the articles in this book touch on aspects of Nigerian literature as found in Abiola's Irele's "The tragedy conflict in Achebe's Novels" (167), Gerald Moore's "Amos Tutuola: A Nigerian visionary" (179) and Martin Esslin's "Two Nigerian playwrights" (225).

In Bruce King's (1971) *Introduction to Nigerian Literature*, the focus is on the evaluation of Nigerian literature from the oral poetry to drama and prose. In particular, the work evaluates some first generation writers such as Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka and Christopher Okibgo. The book evaluates Nigerian literature as a product of many variables "including tribal poetry and legend, traditional drama and even that unclassified body of pamphlets and short stories printed in Onitsha and other urban centers" (110). However, this work also demonstrates that despite the differences within the body of African literature there is indeed some affinity amongst the 'different political and social histories' of African nations.

In attempts to discuss the specifics of Nigerian literature, the genre of the novel attracted quite a number of enthusiasts who were stimulated by their interest in native folktales and some American and English pulp fiction which were embodied in Amos Tutuola's *The Palm–Wine Drinkard* (1952) and Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of The City* (1954).

Oladele Taiwo's seminal work *Culture and the Nigerian Novel* (1976) foregrounds criticism on the question of what constitutes the Nigerian novel. Arguing from a cultural perspective, he describes the Nigerian novel as an attempt to transliterate traditional customs, beliefs and attitudes into an entirely new context, that of the

twentieth century, employing a language to which the modern reader can respond" (xiii). Consequently, Taiwo examines the blending of indigenous culture with modern experience by Nigerian novelists, especially in his analysis of Tafawa Balewa's *Shaihu Umar*, which, in his view draws from oral tradition just as Amos Tutuola's works do. In his definition of the phenomenon, Soyinka (1976:66) also argues that the Nigerian novel should represent:

> *A creative concern which conceptualizes or extends actuality beyond the pure narrative making it reveal realities beyond the immediately, attainable (a) concern which upsets orthodox acceptance in an effort to free society of historical or other superstitions.*

In a similar vein, Charles Nnolim (1989:54) regards the Nigerian novel as "dynamic rather than static and blends the new with the old". It also has a peculiar tradition which "respects, copies from and makes use of our folk literature and creativity makes use of our local proverbs, legends, customs, rituals, institutions and mythology in giving imaginative expression to our national culture."

However, James Booth's (1981) *Writers and Politics in Nigeria* contextualizes Nigerian writing within the ambience of politics. In spite of this, Booth acknowledges that:

> *One inevitable result of the original diversity of Nigeria has been that literature in English has developed at a different rate in different areas ... not surprisingly therefore, in view of the degree of early missionary penetration and the level of educational development, all the writers of national significance to have emerged so far have been southerners: Yorubas, Ibos or members of the southern minorities (28).*

This is why in considering the concept of the Nigerian novel, Oshita O. Oshita (2002:228) mentions only Achebe, Okara, Amadi, Nwapa, Okpewho etc all from southern region as representative Nigerian novelists. Oshita's view represents the rather

parochial conception of the corpus of the Nigerian novel. His examples ignore novels from other parts of the country, particularly from the Northern Nigeria. In the context of this parochialism, Bernth Lindfors argues that "only by knowing the diachronic development of the individual constituent parts will we be able to approach an understanding of the unfolding of the whole phenomenon" (Lindfors 1982:1). The 'whole phenomenon' here refers to the larger corpus of Nigerian literature. It is imperative therefore that any criticism that focuses on the 'national character' of Nigerian literature must take into cognizance the heterogeneous and variegated nature of the entire Nigerian society. It is only through this kind of discourse that a truly Nigerian literature with "a semblance of national character, reflecting and projecting an identity pluralistic enough to be called distinctively Nigerian" would emerge (Lindfors 1982:2)

Even when literary creativity in Northern Nigeria is discussed, the focus usually is on the works which appear in Arabic or Hausa. For a long time therefore, critical attention was only beamed on the early Hausa composers such as Sa'adu Zungur, Mudi Sipikin, Na'ibi Sulaiman Wali, Mu'azu Hadeja and writers like Malam Bello Kagara, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Muhammadu Gwarzo and the most proficient of them all Abubakar Imam. This trend is typified in the works of many scholars such as Mervyn Hiskett (1975), Nicholas Pweddon (19977), Neil Skinner (1980), Stanislaw Pilaszewicz (1985), David Westley (1986) and Graham Furniss (1996) who extensively explored the nature of literary creativity in Hausa.

This study is necessitated by the need to close the gap in the attention given to vernacular writers in Northern Nigeria by focusing on the writers in English who have a form and identity of their own. The major objective being to recognize the potential of this group whose cultural outputs are gradually integrated into the larger canon of Nigerian literature. In this regard critical attention has more recently been focused on the new trend as evident in Sani Abba Aliyu, Jibrin Ibrahim and Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale (1991), Oba Abdul Raheem (1990), Margeret Hauwa Kassam (1997), Seyifa Koroye (1997), Ezekiel Fajenyo and 'Olu Osunde (1994), Ezekiel Fajenyo and Sina

Oladeinde (2002), Tanimu Abubakar (1998), Ugochukwu Ejinkeonye (1997) as well as in post graduate theses, and comments and reviews in newspapers and journals.

Oba Abdul Raheem's (1990:31) "Ibrahim Tahir's *The Last Imam"* analysis the text in relation to its reflection of the "collective social consciousness and response of a Hausa – Fulani society to the transition from a pre – Islamic, Pagan to an Islamic social other". The analysis ignores the specifics of the intrusion of history and the significant role of Tahir as a major force in the evolution of the novel in English. Similarly, Bangura's (1996:176) "The Quest for Orthodoxy in Ibrahim Tahir's *The Last Imam* deals with establishing the nature of "the intractable conflict between Islam and the pre – Islamic Fulani – Hausa cultures of the Muslim Northern Nigeria" and does not address the position of Tahir's novel even within the context of the Nigerian novel. In a similar way, Aderemi Bamikunle's (2001) "Priest – Heroes in the Nigerian Novel" is a comparative textual analysis of Achebe's *Arrow of God* and Tahir's *The Last Imam* especially in terms of the heroes, their motivations and the context of their existence. Abodunri's (1990) "Literature and culture in Northern Nigeria: The Novels of Ibrahim Tahir and Zaynab Alkali" evaluate both writers from the perspective of the cultural background of these Novelists. The analysis is situated on the heroes and heroines who, in different ways maintain antagonistic attitudes of rebellion and desire to escape" (40)

Similar studies abound especially on Abubakar Gimba such as those by Tanimu Abubakar (1998) and in newspapers such as *New Nigerian*, *Nigerian Tribune, Vanguard* and *Weekend Concord*. Also, Ahmed Kofa Babajo's PhD thesis, "*Postcolonialism and the Novels of Abubakar Gimba as an example of a post – colonial Novelist"*. These

studies on Gimba are essentially celebrative of his personality and resourcefulness as a writer.

Zaynab Alkali also attracts a significant number of critical comments and observations especially in relation to her perspective as a notable female novelist from Northern Nigeria. For instance, Margaret Hauwa Kassam's (1997) "*Behind the veil in the northern Nigeria: the writing of Zaynab Alkali and Hauwa Ali*" and Ibiyemi Mojola's (1997)" *The Onus of womanhood: Mariama Ba and Zaynab Alkali"* focus on the question of African womanhood, and the nature of the patriarchal society which excludes and relegates the woman to secondary positions. In the same vein, Chioma Opara's (1990) "*The Foot as metaphor in female dreams: Analysis of Zaynab Alkali's Novel"* explores the ways in which Alkali articulates the question of African woman's quest for identity as she seeks for self – actualization. There are also a number of postgraduate theses on Zaynab Alkali for instance, Habiba Sabi'u – Baba's (1994) *"A study of the themes of religion and culture: The fiction of Ibrahim Tahir and Zaynab Alkali*". Onyeabo, Gladys Ndidi (2001) *"Feminist perspective of contemporary Female writers: The example of Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali and Akachi Adimora – Ezeigbo"* and Madinatu Shehu's (2004) PhD thesis, *"Women and Islam in African Novels: A Critical Study of Zaynab Alkali; Mariama Ba and Nawal El – Sa'adawi.*" These women locate the impact of feministic writings on women and also articulate the women's position within both traditional and religious contexts.

These attempts are significant in the sense that they encode the Northern literary experience in such a way that it would be impossible to insulate the northern segment from the corpus of the Nigerian Novel. However, these critics have only evaluated the

three novelists in this study, focusing essentially on the interpretation of their works without evaluating the historical processes that midwifed the novels as a mode through which the Northern Nigerian experience is negotiated. This is the gap, which this study intends to fill.

1.13 FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

This thesis is premised on the fact that it is improbable that any literary work which interrogates the existence of a people would ignore history. This is because the literary text does not occupy a 'trans-historical aesthetic realm'. On the contrary, it is subject to the "particular conditions of time and place …" (Abrams 1993:249). The novels in this study are located within the historical matrix of the Northern Nigerian Society, interrogating the conventions, the cultural and political milieus which characterize this society.

Although the novels emphasize the sociological, the historical also resonates in several ways because they interactively contextualize cultural beliefs and values. In his argument on the way literature is inescapably conditioned by history, the Bosnian author Dzevad Karahasan states that "… the past, wherever and whenever it may have occurred, has a potential presence and topicality …" (Karahasan 2003:60). In other words, there is a relationship between history and literature in which the past and the present are reconstructed either in terms of mutual association and fidelity, or in the opposition. In the interpretation of literary works, this dynamics or meaning raises the question of what is "history" and what is literary. As Michael Green (1977:96) argues, it is imperative to grasp the intimacy and interconnectedness between literature and history in a way that "the past then, becomes essentially an issue in the politics of the present".

On the strength of this complex interaction between history and literature this study proceeds from a perspective, which embraces the sociological and historical interpretation of the selected novels. As Jonathan Culler (1997:47) posits,

> *...literary studies itself has never been unified around a single conception of what it was doing, traditional or otherwise, and since the advent of theory, literary studies has been an especially contentious and contested discipline, where all kinds of projects, treating both literary and non-literary works compete for attention.*

Subscribing itself to this view, this study therefore adopts a multidisciplinary approach to evaluate the sociological and aesthetic dimensions of the novel in English in Northern Nigeria. This approach allows for a more flexible but pragmatic evaluation of the degrees to which the novels signify their society. In this pursuit, the study draws from the insights provided by post-colonial discourse on contemporary African literatures. For most African writers, there is

> *the attempt to understand the problems posed by the European colonization and its aftermath. In this legacy, Post-colonial institutions and experiences from the idea of the independent nation to the idea of culture itself, are entangled with the discursive practices of the West (Culler 1997:131)*

The novel is ontologically European. Its appropriation by Africans to capture or represent their experiences thus requires interpolating the African experience within the discursive idiom of the West. This subjection of the cognitive power of the African under the hegemonic discourse of the West in effect meant that response from Africans or the subjected Other, would draw from, make allusions or inference to colonial experience.

Critical works of Post-colonial orientation as found in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1998), Webster (1996), Peter Barry (1995), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985, 1987), Homi Bhabba (1983, 1985), Abdul Jan Mohammed (1983, 1985), Meenakshi Mukherjee (1995) have postulated on the concept of multidimensionality of the discourse. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (1994: 5) for instance, argue that "Post-colonialism is far from being a unified field…." It assumes a diversity, which cuts across both conceptualization and meaning. The term itself draws from the developments, which followed the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which inaugurated 'a new area of academic theory' or 'colonial discourse analysis'. From this point the discourse has undergone several changes, development and expansiveness. According to Ashcroft (1989:2), the term 'post-colonial' covers

> *all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression…it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted… concerned with the world as it exists during and after the period of European domination and the effects of this on contemporary literatures.*

Similarly, Deepika Bahri (1996:4) encapsulates the on-going debates on post-colonialism thus "…even as some deplore its imprecision and lack of historical and material particularity, others argue that most former colonies are far from free of colonial influence of domination and so cannot be post-colonial in a genuine sense". However, Meenakshi Mukherjee (1996:3-4) argues that:

> *Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires. It is ideologically an emancipatory concept particularly for the*

> *students of literature outside the Western world, because it makes us interrogate many aspects of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our terms, but also, to re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location.*

In essence, for most writers coming from the background of being the Other or the colonized, writing has become a way of inferring and reconstructing their culture in response to "a history others have written" (Culler 1997: 131). In essence, what others have written can be reduced to the denigration of others, which the term orientalism embodies. The orientalists are viewed essentially as homogenous and anonymous and without a sense of individuality, a people whose actions are determined by instinctive emotions-lust, terror, fury etc.

In this study, the concept of post-colonial theory is deployed from the views of several scholars who fundamentally regard post-colonial theory as a phenomenon which attempts a deconstruction of Eurocentric bias, especially as regards the question of dominance, identity and culture. The colonizers' concern with institutionalizing their own culture, therefore, necessitated their denigration and control of the colonized and their culture. This is why colonialism justified the 'rescue' and 'civilization' of the 'uncultured' natives. To accomplish this task, the colonialists sought to dominate the native through the most effective means of cultural expression, language. This form of cultural hegemony became profoundly explicit in the way that RS-English (Received Standard English) was expressed as a dominant (cultural) weapon which subordinated other indigenous languages. In essence, in Northern Nigeria, the English language became official language and the language of commerce and administration. It followed

therefore, that even in such instances as R.M. East's efforts at inducing the novel form in the indigenous languages, the attitude and standard of criticism and judgment of these materials were basically eurocentric and had to receive approval from the imperial power in Europe. This imperial tradition of scholarship inevitably found its way into the criticism of modern African literature. As the troika, Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jennie and Ihechukwu Madubuike (1980: 17) put it, "what is important in and common to these various positions adopted by eurocentric critics is the unwarranted presumption that in order to qualify for inclusion in one category or another, an African work must conform to rules or criteria developed within the European tradition. If it does not, it is claimed to be problematic" (p.17).

Consequently, this study is premised on the view that the way in which the selected novelists have explored Northern Nigerian history and tackled the issues of culture and politics can be contextualised within the post-colonial framework. These novels are evaluated under the ambience of post-coloniality because they expand the frontiers of the colonized and bear both direct and indirect imprints of colonial experience. Essentially, the African novel is located within the cultural matrix of the colonial but it differs in its utilization of form, drawing essentially from the oral nature of African tradition. Whether as a response to imperial ideologies or in resistance to colonialism, post-colonial writings aim at reshaping and rehabilitating the colonized. This study therefore apprehends the term 'post-colonial' in relation to how the novelists implicate the colonial or imperial culture in 'retelling' the Nigeria story.

Although post-colonial theory is expansive, diverse and complex it is significant especially in shedding light on the multidimensional trope of the discourse on African

society and colonial experience. Its discursive ramifications derives its essence in privileging particular methods and problematic as a way of subverting some of the assumptions, stereotypes and rationalizations of imperial historiography and epistemology about indigenous societies in Africa.

In the interpretation of texts, post-colonial theory attempts to project them in a manner that they (texts) subvert the project of the colonizer (Centre) by interrogating the hegemonic relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. Broadly therefore, post-colonial theory is primarily directed at reclaiming a past which had been defined by a colonialist ideology. It is in this regard that post-colonial writing concerns itself with the question of representation and identity. The implication of this is the construction and remaking of the image of the colonized in the context which emphasize their distinctiveness. This reconstruction thus takes the form of textual representations, which beyond its semiotic meaning, attempts the 'recovery' of the past in a way that counters the construction of the colonized in European textuality. Representation in a way is thus grounded in the construction of identities that help in understanding the character of colonial experience and the various ways in which the African according to Stuart Hall (1994: 394) is "positioned and subject-ed"

This thesis therefore explores the ways in which the Northern Nigerian, as a colonized, articulates his/her identity in order to reverse the cultural distortions that have defined and realigned his/her past and in the context of the larger Nigerian experience.

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CHAPTER TWO

SOCIAL CHANGE, COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY IN IRAHIM TAHIR'S *THE LAST IMAM*

This chapter analyses*The Last Imam* (1989) in relation to Tahir's handling of the novel form to signify the social formation in the old Bauchi Emirate in the Northern Nigeria. Central to this signification is Tahir's depiction of the conflict between the sacred and the secular and how this generates the several paradoxes and ambivalences in life. In general the subject matter of *The Last Imam* revolves around the contradictions which results from conformity with the tenets of being in the Emirate and the manipulation of religious authority to satisfy the Imam's quest for power. In the process of sublimating this specific experience, Tahir provides a view of man and religion, chequred gender relation, the misconceptions and biases that construct the labrynth that emerges in the fusion of 'Islamic philosophy with patriarchal ideology'. The consequence of Tahir's craftsmanship is the transformation of the novel from a narrative of individual experience to an exploration of wider social ethos and selective predicament which demonstrates the appropriation of novel by the corporate character of Northern Nigeria.

The story in *The Last Imam* is tightly woven around the lives of the people, especially as this relates to their religion, customs and traditions. To a great extent Tahir's, exploration of the intricate pattern of the people's existence reflects his grasp of the interplay between survival and progress in a society undergoing both socio-cultural and religious transformation. Tahir's training as a sociologist is evident in *The Last Imam* and it accounts for his rendition of the extent to which the religion of Islam and the culture of the people had been integrated and syncretized. In this way, the society's

fabric is laid bare while its various contradictions are dramatized. Tahir thus enunciates the predicament of a traditional society encumbered with new values and mores. He explores the roles of these values in the peoples' attitude and reactions to their social reality. In this context, therefore, *The Last Imam* not only explores the plight of an individual vested with certain responsibilities but exposes the underlying conflicts created by the tussle between traditions and religion, individual quest and communal desire. What thus emerges is the dimension these conflicts assume within the context of the politics of the community with its attendant fluctuations. Invariably, Tahir's novel sublimates a human story in which, a community not only grapples with change but also negotiate a place, creates a space for itself within its uncertainties, challenges and possibilities. This concern locates *The Last Imam* within Nigeria's post colonial literary tradition in which Novelists, Dramatists and Poets grapple with the creation of a new society since independence.

The publication of *The Last Imam* further marks the intrusion of imaginative prose which began in the 1930s into social life in Northern Nigerian, and the appropriation of the novel form to explore the fabric of the society. With profound sociological insight, Tahir navigates through the murky terrain of power, politics, religion and tradition, and how the interplay of these forces affect individual and the societal conduct.

Although Tahir wrote from the same Islamic background with the early writers from the region who wrote in the Hausa language, he nonetheless transcends the conventions of the tale in terms of profundity of his thought, his use of verisimilitude, complex pattern, the progression of the plot and the depth of psychoanalytic dimensions

of his characters. Through the detailed exploration of the human psyche, Tahir establishes a link between the consciousness and action of his characters. The dilemma of such characters is thus contextualized within the contradiction of their social reality and the choices which confronts them

Ibrahim Tahir relies heavily on the Islamic religion as the background to his plot and as Ahmed Sheikh Bangura (1996:176) argues, "sub-Saharan African writers of the Muslim tradition, like Camara Laye, Sembene Ousmane, Ahmadou Kourouma, and Ibrahim Tahir have in varying degrees illustrated a consciousness of Islamic orthodoxy in the societies they depict in their novels." In other words, *The Last Imam*, like Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964) and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) deals with the intricate question of the relationship between social conventions, tradition and religion, or the supervening power of God on the lives of the people. Mbye B. Cham (1991) taking his cue from the Senegalese background, describes the two irreconcilable polar extremes that define the attitudes of creative writers to Islamic religion. 'On the right pole', Cham states, is the,

> *ensemble of attitudes shaped by a zealous embrace and vigorous advocacy of Islam as the best, indeed the only legitimate and effective vehicle for the integration of the individual and society; while the left pole posits a fundamentally materialist ideology and artistic creed which portrays Islam as colonial in nature and, therefore, impediment to secular individual and social fulfillment. Between these extremes is a range of artistic responses which share an acceptance of the basic ideals of Islam yet are separated here by less zeal and didactism, there by a constant alternation between reverence and mockery of Islamic holy men, and there again by a strident iconoclasm which indicts religious charlatans and distorters of Islam and its institutions (Harrow, 1991:163-164).*

In the Nigerian context, Tahir belongs to the last category because he constructs the story of *The Last Imam* around the spectrum of religious ethos and the varying ways in which individuals in the garb of clerics manipulates and misinterpret religion for parochial and personal interests. In *The Last Imam*, for instance, Alhaji Usman manipulates his sermons to justify his actions. When his personal crisis overwhelms him and he is torn between his passionate indulgence and his love of God, Alhaji Usman's sermon

> *lacked the passionate indulgence which had characterized him as a man wedded, like the two halves of a groundnut seed, to his calling and belief.…What relief though to reach the end of that beautiful text which he knew he had mutilated and robbed of all form, meaning and relevance and then to incorporate into it the quotation from the Holy Koran, 'Wasbiru Innal Laha ma'as sabirina….Be patient, for surely, the Lord is with the patient' (pp.8-9).*

Furthernmore, when Alhaji Usman is threatened with divorce by his wives at the eve of the *Ramadhan* with its attendant humiliation of being called a *gwauro*, he glibly uses his authority as Imam to not only preach against the practice but also ban it much to the chagrin of the people.

> *He spouted into their besotted brains verses from the Holy Koran, from the Hadith, the teachings of Prophet Mohammed (peace and blessings of God be upon Him) and even from Arab literature and social History. Some of the quotations were ones they themselves had known; many they had only half known and still more, they had never dreamt existed at all. And he was making sense, forcing the least likely verses to fit into the subject of the gwauro ceremony. The most indefatigable perverters of doctrine could not have done better!* (p.108).

Here, Tahir equates the Imam with the most indefatigable perverters and in doing this, *The Last Imam* attains a level of objectivity in its apprehension of the way the people's piety is exploited to entrench attitudes and values which do not conform with the

ethics of the Islamic religion. This is why in spite of its deeply philosophic and mythical nature, the novel veers away from encoding religious bigotry. On the contrary, the novel's concern with material issues reveals that Tahir's interest lies not in "challenging this Islamic religious domination but in reaffirming its legitimacy and potential by thoroughly indicting its profit-minded detractors" (Cham, 1991:71).

The Last Imam profoundly negates the orientalist ideology of Eurocentricism or the misconceptions of the African society by European writers by depicting the comprehensiveness of the African worldview as evident in its Northern Nigerian segment with its own standards of etiquette, morality and a highly structured religious and political system. Tahir presents a society sustained by an organized mode of production and other cultural variables as exemplified in the system of exchange and in the presence of a variety of professionals such as traders like Alhaji Bukar Maigoro and butchers like Musa's father. The Hausa society is depicted as fully conscious of the intricacies of its existence acts on the basis that social cohesion and harmony issue from commonly held values, norms, and cordial human relationship. In this context, the intrigues of power, privileges and influence have implications not only for the Bauchi emirate in *The Last Imam*, but also for the entire Northern Nigeria which is undergoing socio-cultural, religious and political transformation. *The Last Imam* also represents the varying challenges and vagaries of life which characterize the African reality, a reality which through:

> *a series of adaptations…Islam came to occupy increasingly important spaces in the lives of the various people – psychological spaces, governing first the territory of the mind, at times, motivated by economic or other self-interested concerns and then larger external spaces of*

> *increasingly political and social nature* (Harrow, 1991:7-8).

This is why the narrative encompassiveness of this novel opens up a complex core of meanings. While it may read like a love story between the Imam and his wives and concubines, it also accommodates what Kenneth Harrow calls "Islamic philosophy and patriarchal ideology" (Harrow, 1991:59). Through this philosophy and ideology, actions and motivations are legitimized as exemplified in the relationship between the Imam and his wives, and the faithfuls that he leads. By silencing the presence of colonialism in its narrative structure, the novel articulate points of views related to Tahir's exploration of the question of gender and history. Although *The Last Imam* does not offer any view on the questions of colonialism as found in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964), it's concern nevertheless, situates it within the framework of those works on colonization and how most African societies confronted the forces that suppressed their traditions and cultures. Tahir's novel invokes the earlier version of conquest and transformation in Africa

From the early contact between the people of Western Sudan and the Arab Islamic missionaries and merchants who came through North Africa, a gradual process of uprooting the African traditional beliefs and replacing it with a different civilization began. Although the impact of Arab intrusion is often ignored or downplayed, the fact remains that it equally marked a new beginning for the Africans by supplanting their traditional religious practices with a different social order.

In essence, then, whether it is Islamic or Christian oriented, foreign intrusions led to a steady domination. Consequently, it is colonialist, because the traditions, myths and beliefs of the people and the foundations of their moral and spiritual life were traduced to

a level of nothingness. Such African writers as Ayi Kwei Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and Yambo Ouloguem in *Bound to Violence* (1968), Sembene Ousmane in *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) have explored this dimension of African experience with a satirical bent. Tahir however evaluates the permeation of the new system in African society and the reactions it generates as the ideal of the Islamic religion subordinated all other facets of life within society. The recourse to Islamic ethos in *The Last Imam* further advances the course of the religion and its liberating role against certain indigenous cultural practices which were considered 'heathen' in nature. As Bangura (1996:187) argues, "…the enslavement, debauchery and idolatry are also obvious". It is implicit that Tahir defines the historical reality of his society through the conflicts and contradictions that arise from the contact with Islam. In its apprehension and blending of the Islamic ethos, *The Last Imam* stands as a veritable novel that demonstrates how "sub-Saharan African writers of the Muslim tradition textualize varying degrees of consciousness of Islamic orthodoxy in their works" (Bangura, 1966:189).

The central issue around which other concerns revolve in Tahir's *The Last Imam*, is religion, which to a great extent has been integrated into the cultural and social life of the people. In discussing Islam in *Ceddo* (1980) a film by Sembene Ousmane, Edris Makward argues, that there is a concern "…above all, that Islam did not establish itself among his people only so as to save their souls. There always was and there still is the desire to wield more secular power" (Makward, 1991:198). He further argues that Ousmane portrays Islam as a new religion that came from the outside and imposed itself over the traditional religious and political institutions first insidiously, and then very

forcefully and overwhelmingly (196). There is therefore the sense in which Islam is portrayed as a hegemonic religion which permeates all aspects of the life of a Muslim.

This hegemony is anchored on the way Islam accommodated certain levels of interfusion of African practices and beliefs. In this regard, Trimingham argues that "Islam thus does no violent uprooting but offers immediate values without displacement of the old. It is not a question of either or but of both" (Trimingham, 1980:41-42). Despite this, Tahir draws attention to the intricate contradictions between social conventions, tradition and religion and the conflict engendered by the Imam's interpretation and expectations of a true Muslim. In sublimating indigenous African culture within the frame of Islam, the novel uncovers the basis of the crisis in the fictive Bauchi emirate. For apart from the domestic saga between Alhaji Usman and his father, the conflict in the text is further enhanced by "differences between Muslim at different levels of commitments to orthodoxy….Such a conflict between believes is possible precisely because the Imam strategically constructs a definition of the Muslim that is so vigorous that many Muslims lose their credentials as Muslims and became *Kufar* (infidels) at least in the sight of the Imam" (Bangura, 1996:183).

In order to reveal the disparity between Idea and Practice which the Imam's ideosyncracies illustrate, Tahir gives prominence to the arrival of Islam in Bauchi. As Bamikunle states,

> *...the references made to the history of Uthman Dan Fodio's Jihad, which established the Fulani Emirates, give us hints which put the story of Alhaji Usman at the end of the nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth century* (Bamikunle, 2001:326-327).

In *The Last Imam*, the narrator thus provides the background to the history of Islam in Bauchi in these words:

> *Yet only three hundred years ago, and may be less the Word of God and God Himself had not existed for the people who inhabited the land. For Bauchi then was not ore than a rocky trough in the mountainous country of the wild savannah – a no – prophet land of pagan tribes, each with its shrine sheltering behind a rocky grove* (p.122).

In essence, the arrival of Islam brought a number of changes in the religious cum cultural life of the people. Although these changes did not completely destroy the old ways of doing things, they were indeed significant.

> *...the new God arrived, emerged from hiding, banished the idols with their fetish priests and their shrines, and washed clean the souls of the men with the waters of Islam….His being more remote and more mysterious than their stone gods. Indeed, they were more so. He did not call to them in drums and horn but through the voice of the mu'ezzin, which radiated five times daily from the mosques. He did not speak to them through fetish priests but through the innumerable books*...(p.122).

In more ways than one, this revolution laid the foundation for a gradual fusion of traditional beliefs and the emergent religion of Islam, a fusion which has now formed the core of a new culture. Subsequently, this syncretism influence and determine their views, perceptions and actions on issues ranging from rudiments of marriage ceremonies and rituals, the legend of the hyena (p.206) etc., as well as whole network of other relationships. In essence, there was a change even in the conception of culture. As Alan Swingewood argues, the concept of culture is not "…simply 'a whole way of life' but grows out of man's active relationship with nature" (Swingewood, 1977:27). This relationship enables the people to come to terms with their existence, it is the measure of how deeply ingrained the beliefs and practices were not completely abolished from the

daily lives of the people by Islam in the course of history. This explains the presence of such residual cultural practices as the chastity of the bride on the first nuptial night (p.28) and other "diversions like the gwauro ceremony and other rituals whose roots lay deeply buried in the long forgotten history" (p.123). Although these are residual elements of culture they often play active role in moments of conflict.

The people's attachment to their culture is so strong that they are emotionally drawn to its preservation and practice. By preaching against and taking away a major point of their history and tradition, Alhaji Usman inadvertently stirred disaffection, disenchantment and anger amongst the people. By abolishing the gwauro for instance, the people realized the real meaning of Kasim's action. They now see in Kasim the image of a fellow victim not of religion but of Alhaji Usman.

Moreover, as Kenneth Harrow maintains, such customs as the use of amulets, which had existed before the advent of Islam are now intertwined with verses from the Koran. "The use of amulets, for example", Harrow states, had existed before the arrival of Islam in West Africa, now utilized the holy words of the Qur'an believed by Muslims to possess their own unique sacrosanct qualities "(Harrow, 1991:232). This statement demonstrates the compelling manner in which some of the pre-Islamic cultures of the African societies became inextricably fused with the emergent Islamic values, broadening the entire cultural scope of these societies.

Tahir's panoramic view depicts the old Bauchi emirate as it grapples with the problem of existence which challenges individuals and institutions to fashion coping strategies in their bid for survival. Although the implantion of the tenets of Islam was

reinforced by the 19th century Jihad, Islamic consciousness and influence had to contend with a protean tradition. After all, as Crowder argues:

> *...in many respects Islam as it was practiced in Hausa land where it had been established for three hundred years, made concessions to the indigenous religion of the Hausa. Indeed, as far as the Habe monarch were concerned, they practiced a calculated syncretism whereby their authority in Moslem monarchs was boosted by, and to a considerable extent depended on, their respect for religious rites and social practices* (Crowder, 1962:94).

Although the flexibility that Crowder expressed was real, the Jihad entrenched a puritanical rigidity against this rather liberal and adulterated conception of Islam. This is why in *The Last Imam*, the zeal and the puritanical fervour with which the Imam pursues the ideals of the Jihad becomes a fundamental source of conflict in the society, "conflict between the exigencies of politics and the moral and spiritual demands of the rules and regulation of religion…" (Bamikunle, 2001:328). At the centre of the ensuing conflicts, is a strong centraputal force between the spirit of individualism and the forcefulness of the spiritual, which defines the schizophrenic personality of Alhaji Usman. Alhaji Usman is drawn as a man caught within the immanent contradiction of his own individuality and the requirement of religiuns duty, leadership and responsibility. As he struggles to impose an orthodoxy beyond the comprehension of the faithfuls, his personal frustrations influences his attitude.

> *Distrustful of the liberal disposition of his forebears towards the syncretic tendencies of a predominantly pagan society only recently converted to the religion of Islam, intolerant of the ruling class which he perceives to be corrupt and opportunistic but himself largely ruled by narcissistic passion, Usman manages to contrive a clash between the clerical and secular authorities (Abdulraheem,* 1990:36).

This ambivalence and self-centeredness inevitably create the avenue for the conflict between spiritual and secular power. As the Imam is the spiritual head of the people, a mediator between them and Allah, he is an intercessionary medium who leads the people in discharging their religious obligations. This position locates Alhaji Usman in the class of power brokers in the Emirate. It is however in the deployment of this very power that conflicts emerge. Indications of Alhaji Usman obstinacy are given early in the novel when his father muted the idea of marriage and Usman protests thus, '"But father,'…'I have always told you I am married to Allah's work and will marry nobody. That is real for me and I want to remain celibate'" (p.19). The father repudiates this contradiction by showing that Usman's desire appears to be in conflict with the Islamic injunction on alms and marriage: '"there is nothing you can do but accept. This is an alms marriage and unless you have forgotten what that means you cannot do otherwise. A'isha is the bride of Prophet Mohammed, the charity done to him."' In order to substantiate his argument, the father quotes this verse from the Qur'an "*Laa ruhbaniya til'islami*'…'that is what the Prophet said. There is no abstinence from marriage the *Sunna* of Mohammed in Islam,'…'*Man rehiba an sunnati fa lai sa minni* – who ever abstains from my *Sunna* of marriage he is not from amongst my followers'" (p.20).

From this moment, Alhaji Usman's life becomes circumscribed by the contradictions between his passion and his spiritual quest. This eventually leads to the confrontation between him and the status quo, represented by the Emir, the Vizir and other courtiers. In this confrontation, Alhaji Usman uses the advantage of his knowledge and forcefulness of his character. In depicting the experiences of Alhaji Usman, Tahir demonstrated "how personal identity can often disintegrate when a culture is in

transition". The Imam was a renowned scholar who commanded tremendous power and exerted great influence over the people in the Emirate. The aura of mysticism and knowledge which surrounded him transposed him into a cult-figure. However, his dilemma emanates from his failure to balance his ideals of perfection and uprightness with the down-to-earth, routine demands of his society. The Imam's inability to square his conscience and his ideals with the pragmaticism and flexibility of those in power partly accounts for his removal from office. As Abdulraheem states, Alhaji Usman should have been like his father the late Imam who sensibly:

> *...steered his flock in the path of Islam without alienating them; admonishing them in the way of Allah but averting his eyes from those non-Islamic aspects of their traditions which do not contradict or hinder the practice of Islam but constitute, for them, the very breath of life" (Abdulraheem,* 1990:32).

However, having carved a niche for himself, Alhaji Usman's over rates his status and his ego trip distorts his vision of reality to the extent that he regards himself as the unquestionable custodian of Islam whose word is law. He is much more drawn towards a "concern for control over the flock based upon his mastery of the written word, upon his ability to terrify and browbeat the people" (Harrow, 1991:295). As he became dangerously 'omniscient' in his views, he declares that he is afraid of no one. "I fear only God and even Him I do not fear, for I do His work as best as He permits me to do" (p.228). Furthermore, in his sermon on the concept of bastards and the breaking of the nuptial circle, Tahir illustrates the extent to which a bloated ego can generate a blind ambition. At the end, there is little difference between Ezeulu's final tragic moment and Alhaji's.

> *And in his room he stood and stared at the much-thumbed volumes lying on the carpet. These were the books, which his ancestors and their calling had bequeathed to him, the same books, which gave him ht learning he had so selfishly misused; and their holiness, the breath of God in them screamed its protest at him* (p.109-110).

Although Tahir's novel retains a certain distance from European discourse, his depiction of Alhaji Usman's fall can be related to the tenets of Aristotelian tragedy. This specific discourse which is undebated to naturalism binds *The Last Imam* and *Things Fall Apart*. The vision of their novels revolves around the tragic impact of social environment on man's vulnerability. In the same manner that *Arrow of God's* exploration of the intense struggle in an Igbo setting within the garb of a Nigerian novel, so also does Tahir's *The Last Imam* demonstrate its encompassiveness in its dramatization of the struggle between secular and spiritual power. Tahir thus articulates the role of religion in the construction of society. Although the story is derived from an Islamic background, it acts as a paradigm for Nigeria's predicament.

Since the concern of the ruling class is the retention of power and control over the people, it creates a cultural value which emphasized respect for hierarchy and status. It is thus prepared to relate only with individuals that may facilitate the maintenance of the status quo. Essentially, this group comprising the Emir, the Vizir and other court officials is not genuinely interested in the welfare of people but in the protection of its own interests, their "typically base motivations of power and greed betray the absence of any inner strength or outward opposition to evil" (Harrow, 1991:14). It is precisely on this motivation that Malam Shu'aibu was tacitly encouraged to edge out Alhaji Usman as the Imam. Malam Shu'aibu whom Alhaji Usman despised for his inadequate learning turns out to be his elder half-brother, the son of his father through a slave girl whom his

father had raped. This realization further heighten his disgust and disillusionment with his forebears. But the Imam's own inadequacies are also revealed through the expose that he secretly violated the nuptial circle and begotten a bastard Kasim, just like his own father and in a state of frustration, he urinates on the ancestral graveyard (p.169). Although this expose equates them, Malam Shu'aibu becomes the obvious replacement for Alhaji Usman because he would not challenge the establishment or disrupt the status quo.

The ruling class is uncomfortable with Alhaji Usman's sermons especially those on corruption and on bastards, that they take necessary steps to checkmate him. Consequently, Malam Shu'aibu assumes the form of an agent provocateur and becomes the means through which Alhaji Usman would be dispensed of. Although the Emir was aware that the people respected his authority, it was no guarantee that they would not react or even revolt against unfarvourable policies and decisions. Such reactions may endanger the authority of the Emir and the feudal system as the sermons of the Imam was were portending. As the sentiments and social ethos of the people were assaulted daily and the inconveniences occasioned by ecological problems increased, the people became more and more restive. Fear intensified when the people heard the groan of the Bauchi hyena which portends evil. In addition, excessive heat, thunder and lightning, which lasted seven days and caused several deaths points to the unfolding of a major calamity:

> *After only seven days of the cruel heat, the ground was as hard as stone. The rivers were fast drying up, in fact only the very biggest ones had not completely dried up. The grass in the field withered and dried. The birds flew away, leaving their young and eggs. The young died and littered the foot of the trees. The eggs cracked and fell to the ground* (p.231).

This development creates fear and panic and people associate it with a certain curse capable of causing tragedy. When the heat becomes unbearable and the men decide to fan themselves with their books in Alhaji Imam's school, he is infuriated and dismisses them.

> *'The wonders of Allah never ceases…' 'I never thought I would live to see the day when devout men turn away from the work of God for the mortification of the flesh. You know yourselves, there are no half-measures in the work of Allah. And since it seems that you cannot pay adequate attention to the work at hand, I must close the school until Allah in His mercy bring back the conditions which some of us demand before they can do His work'* (p.228).

Convinced of the worthiness of his position, whether through ignorance or plain naivity, Alhaji Usman is oblivious of the restiveness of the people: "I care nothing for what the people feel, say or do," he said. The will of God and the wishes of men must be done and that is what I have done" (p.190). In the context of this anxiety, Alhaji's sermons assume new meaning. His sermon on gwauro ceremony robbed the people of a major recreational activity while the sermon on bastardy question the paternity and legitimacy of most people in the emirate. The Emir addresses him thus:

> *'...Do you not see that your sermon destroyed whatever hope they had? Do you not realize that every man in this land from then on could never neatly be sure what he was, a bastard or legitimate-born? Do you not realize that every man who has inherited his living, his title and even the skill he knows can no longer rest in peace doubting in his mind if he was conceived in sin? Who can be sure, who of us can really say, my father, he never once changed his nuptial circle? Who can make such a claim, prince or pauper?* (p.197).

Here the new and the old class and the passage of time becomes a negligible component of history and change. Although Islamic way of life has been established, its presence

has not yet obliterated the hedonism of the past. The present generation still relates to this past and only pragmatic handling can minimize the friction and doubt that indiscriminate imposition of the present on the past can cause. Despite this, Alhaji Usman remains obdurate in his conviction, driven by a personal obsession with pride and spiritual bigotry. He challenges the status quo further through insubordination when he disobeys the Emir by preaching during the supplication even though he was advised not to do so. He dismisses A'isha's entreaties with a fatalistic response "…I fear only God and even Him I do not fear, for I do His works as best as He permits me to do…" (p.229).

These characteristic outbursts and unguarded remarks have attracted the admonition from the who Emir, who reminds the Imam that although the Emirate was a Muslim Kingdom, it was also a Kingdom of men.

> *...And the people you lead at prayer are not angels but ordinary men. For them you are a need and when you cease to provide for that need they will abandon you and they have begun to do so. And there are others, the Vizir and the other Vassals at my court, they too are men. In the past they accepted the rigid discipline your insistence on doctrine imposed on their conduct of the affairs of the Emirate. But their acceptance was based only on the spirit of the give and take between men who understand the affairs of state and who know that they needed you and you needed them. Now they know that the people are not with you* (p.199).

In the political structure of the Emirate, the Imam was the spiritual leader but he was technically under the political authority of the Emir who was concerned with preserving the stability of his domain by exercising absolute control. This control is not possible in an atmosphere of fear, suspicion and disenchantment. The Emir realizes the implication of this for the survival of his authority and power as he warns Alhaji Usman "I have done what best I can by talking to you before the whole thing becomes a matter for the court.

When it does, I will have to rule and I must rule with the knowledge that I have courtiers, subjects and a kingdom whose needs I must satisfy (p.201).

Although the fall out of this crises rocked first the individual, its impact also affects the larger society and intensifies the intrigues and power play within the class. In the ensuing conflict, the Imam becomes the victim. His impetuous and impudent actions inevitably lead to the misfortune that befalls him. This flaw, as in archetypal Aristotelian tragedy, accentuate the unpleasant dimensions of individual and personal squabbles in his family as well as in his community. Unwittingly, Alhaji Usman plays himself into the whirlpool which consumes him. In the end, he is degraded from the position of a venerated spiritual authority to that of disdainful wretch without a turban. Indeed, this profound reversal of fortune completes the image of a tragic figure.

Tahir possesses the unique capability for delineating the character of Alhaji Usman. Evans' description of Richardson's remarkable individuation can be applied to Tahir who, like Richardson posseses what Evans calls "the knowledge of the human heart, in the delineation of the shades of sentiments, as they shift and change, and the cross purposes which trouble the mind moved by emotion" (Evans, 1940:138). Tahir moulds the Imam in the image of an individual who is in the quest of perfection but always being drawn back by some inexorable oppositional force, thus affirming Webster's argument that "…the individual is not free to determine his or her life but subject to the forces of control which operate in a given society" (Webster, 1996:8). The experiences of Alhaji Usman express the fact that in any human society the quest for individualism goes against the current of interpersonal and communal relationships. The crisis which faced Alhaji Usman was his inability to recognize the temporal nature of his

office which therefore necessitated that his identity and role can only be understood on the basis of his relationship with others and not viewing life in absolutist terms.

Alhaji Usman's predicament imply the fact that religion should encounter people at their point of needs; it should be of service to the people rather than be the source of their problems. However, Alhaji Usman who is relentlessly being haunted by the sense of his own weakness and guilt remains impervious to reason. The struggle for the Imam is thus two-dimensional, one being a function of the other. First is the pull of his passion which conflicts with his quest for piety. Secondly, this first conflict lays the foundation for the larger structural conflict in the society.

Through the Imam's struggle to create a balance between his passion and his devotion to duty, Tahir draws the psychological profile of Alhaji Usman. Psychoanalytically, sex is an important metaphor in understanding the relationship between individual consciousness and social reality. To a great extent, sex becomes a powerful but contradictory instrument of demystifying the contradictions in the life of Alhaji Usman. Although he struggles to keep his spiritual focus, the inexorable human pull of passion becomes irresistible and he succumbs to the overwhelming force of passion expressed in sex. Such phrases as "charging buffalo," the "strength of a bolting horse" (p.25), "powerful like an eagle" (p.29), clearly depict a maniac characterized by the "inability to resist sexual temptation of one kind or another and the inadvertent revelation of sexual misconduct by the holy man in the midst of prayer, meditation or reading the Holy Koran" (B. Cham, 1991:172). The inner turmoil and trials against desires of the flesh which are stirred up in his heart and loins eventually divest the Imam of his mystique. Torn between two extremes, the Imam is spiritually drained and

emotionally traumatized, compromising in the process both his spiritual and secular responsibilities. Often, he "acts in ways which foreclose his own rehabilitation in the hearts of men. Instead, he aggravates their antagonism against himself as much as he undermines their genuine efforts to regain confidence and faith in Allah (Abdulraheem, 1990:36). For the people, the Imam became the source of their problem precisely because of his trenchant sermons and handling of his household, which are indicative of his insensitivity to the plight of the ordinary people. They chant "…Yaa Allah…intercede for us. Ya Mohammed and all the messengers of God, intercede for us, for we are not the Imam. We are not the Imam, and we did not commit his sins'" (p.231).

The people's disenchantment grew in the same proportion with the Imam's predicament. His obstinacy blurs his vision and prevents him from contextualizing his position and role in the social order of the society. He remains isolated from the reality, convinced that his spiritual hold on the people was absolute. Unfortunately, the society "which produced the development of the individual now is developing by alienating and fragmenting this individual. At the same time, the individual, for his part, misconstrues the world, on which he is dependent drawn to his innermost being, mistaking it for his own" (Trsl. Viertel, 1972:48).

The Imam's rise to prominence came in the form of an epiphany, almost divinely ordained, but is also was his fall, which came with a profundity that unveils the shroud of mystery, which surround his personality. For indeed, he possesses an intriguing, almost mystical personality with a powerful will, "some mystical gnosis…(which) enables those so favoured to unveil the secrets of the unseen world of reality and contemplate the mysteries of being" (Trimingham, 1971:140). The kind of mystery which surrounds

Alhaji Usman is described by Malam Shu'aibu: '"…Men like him are born only once in a very long time. They are like God and like Sheidhan. Sometimes they are the one and other times the other, but not always just one of the two…"' (p.137).

Ultimately Tahir explores the importance of politics and power to the social order created by a hegemonic class in Bauchi Emirate determined to protect its interests. The class which Alhaji Usman had challenged was that of the "…men of power, men who want to rule and are born to rule. Such men never forget when they are made to live the shadow and not the substance of what they believe to be their rights. They are men of power…" (242). It is men like the Emir, Waziri and the other court officials who determine the course of the political and social destiny of the people. They are the ones who decide "…what could and could not be done, what should or should not be left to the will of God but to the wisdom of men" (200). Having thus challenged and shocked the status quo by his inflexible determination, Alhaji Usman is edged out, preferring instead, Malam Shu'aibu whose down-to-earth brand of Islam is closer to the needs of 'the Kingdom of men' and as the Emir clearly states "…a man as different from him as life is different from death…it is enough that you know that he will be an agreeable Imam, much better suited for the ways of some of us…(241).

The position and role of the woman in a traditional pre-colonial Hausa society is a prominent component of the narrative in *The Last Imam*. In this novel, Tahir explores women's experiences, consciousness and response to their reality. In spite of the traditions which tend to suppress her, Tahir's woman is imbued with an inner strength and the capacity to understand the dilemma which confronts and threatens her. Aisha, for instance, typifies such women and she remains a prominent figure within the Imam's

household. Apart from Hasana, she is the only woman whose name is mentioned, and who, is significant in the unfolding drama in *The Last Imam*.

Within the Muslim society, like in other cultures in Africa, the woman is not encouraged to challenge the established order of male dominance. According to Fatima Mernissi,

> *In Islamic cosmogony, the sexes play an important role in symbolizing obedience and authority. One sex can be the masters of women and the slaves of God, and that is the male sex; the other can be slaves only, and that is the female sex. In no way can women take the initiative. If they do, the whole order is in jeopardy, since their functions and duty is to obey* (Mernissi, 1996:122).

In such context, the primary duty of the woman, is obedience to the hierarchical order and "submission to God's interpreters here on earth; Caliphs, Imams and their empowered staff in private spheres, i.e. husbands" (Mernissi, 1996:112). In such a rigidly codified setting or society, the woman finds herself wedged between the Islamic culture and the Hausa-Faulani culture, and several respects she has to conform to both. It is within the circumscription of these cultures that Alhaji Usman's relationship with Aisha and his other wives can be appraised and understood.

The practice of alms marriage, the public display of a new wife's chastity on the first nuptial night, the concept of concubinage, the breaking of the nuptial circles and the agony of childlessness are issues which the woman faces, but which she does not possess the voice to challenge. For example,

> *"taking of the wife's chastity on the first nuptial night had been ritualized and had become part of the customs in the lower order of the society. A man went into his wife's chamber on the first nuptial night with a hippo hide whip or a raw stick ready to lay into her if she failed to come up to expectations (p.23).*

Despite the drawback, the Imam's love for Hasana was excessive so that "the others did see a little of his nuptial chamber once in a while, but Hasana was all (p.35), meaning that the Imam himself broke the nuptial circle severally. It is therefore the knowledge of the power which tradition has conferred on the Imam that clearly defines his relationship with his wives. Relying on his superior knowledge of the Holy Koran, he intimidates the women into submission. However, the tradition he imposes is not necessarily derived from the Holy Koran as Sonia Ghattas – Soliman argues:

> *The Qur'an provides the Muslim with a set of laws, values, and principles that constitute a standard of conduct and a way of life. It proclaims the partnership of men and women and their equal rights. It also recognizes the existence of moral, spiritual, human values of each sex. However, local customs and male ascendancy in society have put women under men's control (Ghattas-Soliman,* 1991:91).

The point is that most often, a secular tradition is super-imposed on the society but given a religious colouration to give such a culture some divine authority. After a feeble attempt at rebelling by Alhaji Usman's wives "…the women all fell to their knees and thus reassured him further about his authority over them" (p.82). Earlier, Tahir captures the Imam's household thus:

> *In the household Alhaji Usman occupied a position not so different from that of a god. His authority, capricious and somewhat absolute, was one the women or anybody else for that matter dared not question. When he shouted them down in the kitchen that evening and left for the mosque the very sound of his slippers 'praating' to the mosque was like the god's magic chant condemning them to silence for as long as it persisted* (p.44).

A'isha is the embodiment of the indignities suffered by the woman in this society. Her experiences are metaphors for the predicament of women in a patriarchal setting. Given out in alms marriage as the Imam's first wife, she is joined latter by other wives

and concubines who compete for Alhaji's affection. Her trauma is heightened by her childlessness whose implication is too obvious within the African context. Flora Nwapa elaborately explores this problem in her novel *Efuru* (1966). However, Nwapa deliberately privileges the woman in her relationships and inbues her with the ability to define herself within the structure of patriarchal society. In her protagonists experience with childlessness, Nwapa creates a woman who negotiates her way through the prescriptions of patriarchy and becomes pragmatic enough to realize her limitations and potentials.

Although not operating within a similar cultural terrain, A'isha is aware of her milieu. Despite the constraining nature of the tradition, A'isha comes out as a fully drawn personality who gives expression to the character and person of Alhaji Usman. She comes out as a woman who is challenged by the nature of her existence. The insecurity occasioned by her childlessness, the envy, which she secretly harbour against her co-wives torments her in such profound and fundamental manner. In the drive towards protecting her own interest, she is determined to outwit any challenges, first from Hasana, the other women and even Kasim, who becomes a major source of conflict and a symbol through which most of the characters attempt to define their lives.

For A'isha, Kasim is an epitome of a contradictoriness. At one point she feels a sense of fulfillment in his presence which "gave her some consolation, which although it did not fill her with the same joy she would have felt had Kasim been her natural son, nonetheless gave her the illusion of motherhood" (p.172). At a different point, he is a source of fear and anxiety. In such moments, he becomes something infinitely more dangerous to her, because of Alhaji Usman's feelings for him. She saw it in his eyes

when he looked at the boy, in his mouth when he talked or smiled at him, and in his voice when he spoke of him, so that whether Kasim was with them or not, his shadow lay between her and Alhaji. "Kasim had appeared to her more often than not as a rival, a competitor for the Alhaji's affection…" (p.172). Her quest for Alhaji Usman's affection and love threatened by the presence of the other women who are competitors just as greedy for his affection as she was, women who did not have miscarriages like her but who paraded their children in the house…" (p.51). She thought of treating her co-wives as:

> *comrades, sisters and friends, but she could never do that, and whatever pleasantries she exchanged with them, she hid beneath them secret envies, secret wishes and a sort of childlike hate which wished not for their destruction but that by some magical means they would be made to disappear, to leave her alone with Alhaji, to free her from the slavery of the nights when she woke up soaked in sweat and tormented herself with the thoughts of just what Alhaji Usman was doing with which ever of the women slept with him that night* (pp. 51-52).

Blinded by her own sense of trauma and personal tragedy, she is unable to dispassionately see beyond her obsession. She imagines both she and the Imam as victims driven by some force:

> *Just like two birds with broken wings caught in a storm, I, praying to Allah to bring you to me, and you, time without end praying out your heart among the dead for a salvation and a respite which have never come. Praying to an oracle that has neither tongue nor speech, a god who is absent from your woes!* (p.175).

Many times, Alhaji Usman retreats into the sanctuary of the ancestoral graveyard where he had always gone to revive himself psychologically and spiritually, often intoning verses from the Holy Koran to shield him from the reality of his situation. It is also to

this graveyard that A'isha always and relentlessly pursued him with belligerent eyes. In a sense, they both share in the same fate, the conflicts and contradictions which confronts the Imam as the head of the family cum Imam, as he struggles to correct what his passions had led him to, and also A'isha who has been ravaged by the exigencies of life as a wife. Both of them are locked in a complex struggle for self-realization, a definition of their essence and a desire to create an identity for themselves. A'isha, for instance, seeks recognition and acceptance in Alhaji Usman's heart and household and more importantly as a member of the elders' council by virtue of her husband's position as the religious/spiritual head of the people.

In an ironic way, they both lose in the final battle of wits and guts. A'isha's is depicted thus "Her lips moved in an effort to speak and then she ran out of the room with disjointed awkward strides like a girl humiliated by a parent before the eyes of her suitors" (p132). Through A'isha, Alhaji Usman's transformations are vividly recollected. As the weight of the conflicts increases, he is physically and psychologically shaken. His look bear the marks of humility and submission with a crestfallen mien, "his face looked as it had always looked when he set out for the grave yards, a hint of anxiety in his eyes, a luminous and yet subdued effervescence and an eager if somewhat stricken piety" (p.174). This posture is accompanied by an evident loss of charisma and confidence such that even the *Kandiri* staff, a powerful symbol of confidence and authority, no longer carried his weight, "the subdued gait, the *Kandiri* staff which was dragged and not thrown as sharply and as arrogantly as before, the faltering glide of his slippers and the low arch of his neck (p.174) coupled with "the sight of him lying there like the corpse of an old cow half finished by vultures" (p.174). A'isha therefore assumes a prominence in

the Imam's life. Impossible to ignore, she constantly tugs at his conscience, reminding him of his predicament. When the Imam is depressed by Hasana's death, A'isha

> *...made herself available night and day. In the way she soaked him in her sympathy, her counsel, she was like a mother cow licking the shine and mucus off her calf's back so that he could walk. He was the Imam, she reminded him, and if he could not accept that Allah could take away what He had given him in the first place what good would his leadership be to the people in Bauchi?* (p.37).

Given her versatility, A'isha becomes the only woman who understands the Imam, in fact she understood the Imam so well that "at home he became more and more dependant on A'isha for everything…" (p.38). She thus assumed the role of 'Big Sister' to the extent that the other women threaten the Imam with divorce. In the end, the women are powerful enough to subdue the Imam and make him plead for forgiveness.

> *Stunned, the women gazed at him uncertain if they could believe what they heard, reluctant to accept that the man standing before them, his face crestfallen and yet so warm, was their own Alhaji Usman, their master and tyrant in the household* (p.109).

Having resigned herself to her fate A'isha clearly sees the danger which lies ahead for the Imam whose religious zeal obliterate his vision and make him believe that "…he whom Allah has endowed with certain gifts, with devotion and righteousness, no one in all the world can corrupt" (p.230).

In addition to his rendition of the role of tradition in the lives of individuals and the position of women within a feudal, patriarchal society, Tahir equally draws attention to the question of charlatanism and the exploitation of Islam which Malam Shu'aibu exemplifies. He is an exploitative, shrewd and extortionate person in search of vengeance because it does appear that his grouse with Alhaji Usman is flawed. He himself

acknowledges that it may not even be the nature of the traditional society which is to blame but "…Allah, God of mankind who gave us the system and made it possible for bastards like me to be born, men who have nothing and nobody to give them standard, some idea of their own value…" (p.165). This dependency emanates from the fact that he views Alhaji Usman as a representative of the system and thus an embodiment of the power which controls and decides the fate and destinies of others in the society. Malam Shu'aibu associates his peace and progress in the effacement of such power and this account for his desire to blackmail or destroy Alhaji Usman.

Malam Shu'aibu consequently blackmails the Imam to surrender Kasim to him and subtly attempts to brainwash the boy into hating his father. Through Kasim's experiences in the hands of Mal. Shu'aibu, Tahir exposes the exploitative nature of his itinerant school. He appropriates what the pupil's obtain or possess, especially those of Kasim. As he tells Kasim, the almajiri is *'not simply a student but a humble servant of Allah' who 'wear only the bente and goatskin'. That is the uniform of the humble Almajiri…'* (p.129). Alhaji Usman's school operates on a misconstrued interpretation of the Prophet and experiences of his followers:

> *'You and the other boys are almajiris, following in the footstep of the first 'Muhajirs' who fled with Mohammed from the pagans of Mecca to Medina. They had to beg for their food while in flight and they had to rely on the charity of the people of Medina in order to survive while they carried on with Allah's work'* (p.128).

In this way, the *almajiris*' personal belongings are appropriated by the Malam in the guise of inculcating humility. However, the Malam only "favoured those boys who gave him more than the others from what they had received in their visits to the town…(p.127).

Tahir is critical of this exploitation and distortion of Islamic canon by phony and counterfeit Malams like Shu'iabu whose only method of teaching humility is corporal punishment and the denial of basic necessities of life. The pupils are given the impression that whatever physical pain and denials they experience pave way for the eventual illumination of their graves and earn them easy passage to heaven. This corruption of the pedagogical ideals of Islam enhances Malam Shu'aibu's chances of covering his intellectual deficiency and ignorance of the Holy Koran. John Lye's (1998) description of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, as a "Masterpiece" can be applied to Tahir's *The Last Imam* because it is also a novel characterized by what Lye J. (1998) describes as "an enthralling representation of reality, a rapidly rushing narrative, and an astute treatment of a cultural phenomenon".

In its depth and variety of representation, Tahir's *The Last Imam* provides a deeper understanding of cultural conflict within patriarchal and feudal society. It demonstrates the work of a powerful intellect in its exploration of religion and ethics in a society attempting to adjust to the demands of Islam, especially after the Jihad of Shehu Usman Dan Fodio. Indeed, Tahir presents what Bangura describes as "the conflict between puritanical concerns with orthodoxy and accommodationism" (Bangura, 1996:182). It is a conflict which results from the enforcement of orthodox Islam in a society where existent beliefs adulterated by pagan practices were carried over times. At the individual level, this conflict is demonstrated in the struggle between the pull of passion and spiritual purity. Tahir explores the cultural dynamics around which Islam privileges itself using this conflict motif. There is therefore all through *The Last Imam*, a permeating Islamic ethos from where reality is sublimated. The novel's narrative is

structured on the Qur'an as allusions and drawn from it for reverential purposes (Bangura, 1996:186).

The central concern of Tahir's novel is the post-Jihad northern Nigeria in its strive to cope with crises of adjustments and to create a balance between contending options in its efforts to build an ideal Islamic society. In this sense, Tahir is linked to other Nigerian novelists as Achebe whose works deal with the question of change and adjustment in a world of conquest, control and subjugation.

However, in spite of the orthodox conception of Islam that characterizes *The Last Imam*, Tahir weaves the plot of the novel in such a way that it does not give it a puritanical outlook. In this context, Tahir broadens the novel's perspective, from the sociological to the theological ethos that govern the reality he explores. It is equally significant that the novel's plot and narrative technique shifts from the 'tale' or '*tatsuniya*' tradition due to its adoption of the realist tradition as evident in its characterization and depiction of other actions and events. In its synchronization of the Arabo/Islamic and European narration, therefore, *The Last Imam* illustrates the potentials of the Northern Nigerian experience to signify the broader Nigerian or African perspective in literary discourse.

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CHAPTER THREE

MORAL COURAGE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN GIMBA'S *TRAIL OF SACRIFICE, SUNSET FOR A MANDARIN* AND *FOOTPRINTS*

This study is predicated upon the arguments of this study is that the emergence of the novel in English in Northern Nigeria has expanded the frontiers of the Nigerian Novel. This is because the development introduces issues, themes, and experiences which highlight the commonality of Nigeria's predicament. In addition, such Northern Nigerian writers as Tahir, Gimba, Alkali, Yari, and Giwa have explored the impact of Islam on cultural diversity, thus revealing a variant of social development which the novels from other regions of Nigeria ignored. Although the spread of Islam and the Jihad affect south western and northern fringes as the south eastern fringes of Nigerian, novelists from these areas have not explored the impact of these on social life. In exploring this phenomenon, novelists from Northern Nigeria bring into the Nigerian discourse an aspect of immense importance and spread.

This chapter examines the interplay of power in Abubakar Gimba's *Trail of Sacrifice* (1985), *Sunset for a Mandarin* (1991), and *Footprints* (1998) by evaluating Gimba's handling of the paradoxes of contemporary social and political experience and how individuals negotiate their places within it. Like Tahir, Gimba relates the moral apprehension of his characters and their motivations to the profundity of Islamic ethos. His characters thus act and are located within the tensions and conflicts generated by the contradiction between morality and corruption and the central role of the bureaucratic structure and the civil service. Through characters like Sadiku in *Trail of Sacrifice*, Hamza in *Sunset for a Mandarin*, and Jibran in *Footprints*, Gimba explores the complex

nature of human relationships in a fast-degenerating society in which the political structure is not only weak but the virtues of moderation and good conscience are no longer meaningful. Within this unfolding drama of betrayal and greed, Gimba also creates women characters who are determined and clever enough to negotiate a place in patriarchal society. Thus Gimba's works illustrates the contingence of the novel on noble cause.

According to Walter Allen, "novelists have given many reasons for writing novels: Richardson believed he did so to inculcate right conduct, Fielding to reform the manners of the age, Dickens to expose social evils, Trollope to make money by providing acceptable entertainment…" (Allen, 1954:14-15). In tandem with this view, Gimba expresses his conviction that "literature is sharing with other people ideas about things…make people see themselves, make literature provide some form of mirror in which these people see themselves as they have not seen before" (Fajenyo & Sina Oladeinde, 2002:11). For Gimba therefore, literature in a developing society such as Nigeria, is a weapon of redress. It is on this kind of premise that critics like Wilson Harris regard literature not only as reflection but also as a mode of understanding of the complexities in the society. In this sense literature is a unique force in the process of social change especially in a vast and largely dependent economy like Nigeria's. Harris' schema defines the direction in which the emergent Nigerian novelists are focused.

The older generation novelists such as Cyprian Ekwensi, T.M. Aluko, Elechi Amadi and the budding ones such as Festus Iyayi, Olu Obafemi, Femi Olugbile, Ibrahim Tahir and Abubakar Gimba have immensely enriched the Nigerian literary scene by diversifying the perspectives from which it is signified.

Born on March 10, 1952 in Niger State, Abubakar Gimba attended Government College, Keffi (1965-1969), School of Basic Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, (1970-1971), Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, for his B.Sc. Economics (1971-1974) and University of Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A. (1976-1977), where he obtained a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Economics. He has been a civil servant for most of his life, rising to become a Permanent Secretary in the Economics Planning Department of the Niger State Ministry of Economic Development between 1981 - 1983. Between 1988 and 1993, he was Executive Director of Union Bank of Nigeria plc and United Bank for Africa plc. In 1997, he assumed leadership of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) becoming its National President. Gimba's formative experiences and his maturation in the 1980s and 90s expose him to the complex realities of state formation, national integration, politics and other issues related to modernization in Nigeria. This experience highly influence the subject-matter of his novels.

As a prolific and proficient writer, Gimba had within the span of a decade taken the Nigerian Literary scene by surprise with the following titles: *Trail of Sacrifice* (1985), *Witnesses To Tears* (1986), *Innocent Victims* (1988), *Sunset for a Mandarin* (1991), *Sacred Apples* (1997), *Footprints* (1998), a collection of essays *Once Upon A Reed* (1999), a collection of poetry, *Inner Rumblings* (2000), winner of Delta Poetry Prize for 2000 and *This Land of Ours* (2001). He is a writer who is interested in the world and the people around him, particularly in the intrigues and intricacies of the civil service and the bureaucracy. His works revolve around morality, encoding sympathy for the innocent characters who are usually persecuted and unfairly treated by the system. Gimba's works are intensely concerned with decency, proper use and control of power and the creation

of an egalitarian society.The emergence of Abubakar Gimba in the mid eighties was to further expand the scope of the novel in English in Northern Nigeria beyond the point of Tahir's *The Last Imam.* Beyond the concern with the people's contact with Islam and their ensuing attempts at adjustments, Gimba explores the many vagaries of human experience. The significance of Gimba's works lies in the way that he locates his motifs strictly within the bureaucratic structures of post-colonial Nigeria from where he takes a panoramic view of the entire society.

For Gimba, the intrigues and contestation over power, especially within the civil service, assume a metaphoric significance in unraveling social contradictions in society. Gimba thus, evaluates the various dimensions of power and how it is used to subjugate or oppress people. In most of his works, Gimba pillories the repressive nature of power and the conflicts it engenders are graphically illustrated. In his articulation of this disabling environment, Gimba evokes a consciousness, concerned with Manichaenism and alienation.

Although the plots of his stories do not have the tightness of Tahir's *The Last Imam*, there is a pervading presence of authorial idiosyncrasies which push the stories in a linear manner, suggestive of an epic. In his observations on the plots of George Eliot's works, Lord David Cecil states that "…her plots are too neat and symmetrical to be true. We do not feel them grow naturally from their situation like a flower but to have been put together deliberately and calculatedly like a building" (Lord David Cecil, cited in F.R. Leavies, 1948:15). In a similar way, there is a high level of deliberateness in the plot structure of Gimba's novels, and this is designed to emphasize moral concern as opposed to the idiosyncrasies of the individuals. Invariably, the question of form and technique

seems secondary to Gimba because "moral preoccupations" assume an ever-expanding significance. In other words, there is subtle and intricate connection between thematic concerns and characters' development as found in Sadiku in *Trail of Sacrifice*, Hamza in *Sunset for a Mandarin* and Jibran in *Footprints*. These novels read like trilogy in which Sadiku, the major protagonist, experiences all the phase of growing up from a fresh graduate in *Trail of Sacritice* to life in retirement as Jibran in *Footprints*.

Gimba is sensitive to his characters as they adjust to the uncertainties of a post-colonial society with all the indices of underdevelopment, greed, corruption, bureaucratic tardiness, indiscipline, political instability etc. These characteristics of modern Nigeria form the background from which Gimba's characters are drawn. However, drawing from their Islamic background, the characters in Gimba's works express their morality, conviction and thought through the ideals of the religion. This leads to a remarkable blending of social and moral concerns with the supervening influence of Islam without sermonization. The outcome of this fusion is a balance between aesthetics and spiritual interests in a way that captures the essence of Northern Nigeria with vividness and freshness. Gimba, like Tahir, therefore relates the traditional and cultural values of the people to their response to the dilemma of new experiences and their interpretations of them.

The world of Gimba's fiction thus connects with that captured in Tahir's *The Last Imam*. In all of these, the question of honour and integrity permeate the attitudes and thoughts of the characters in *Trail of Sacrifice*, *Sunset for a Mandarin*, and *Footprints*. In these novels, the impulses for evil are greatly challenged while order, bond, and trust, equity and justice are encouraged. Gimba also demonstrates a keen interest in social and

political transformation and development, especially as these relate to youth advocacy, greed, avarice, corruption and injustice etc. These concerns are depicted through a realist mode of representation. What is important for Gimba is the way in which social change or transformation informs the present, and possibly, the future of the society. His social relevance is evident in the way his novels capture the topical issues in the society. In particular, Gimba explores issues that concern the personal and moral choices, which individuals make within their social and political milieu.

For Gimba, the question of morality and social justice are predicated on religion. Islam assumes an overwhelming inspirational presence in his works, especially for his major characters like Sakiku in *Trail of Sacrifice*, Hamzah in *Sunset for a Mandarin* and Jibran in *Footprints*. This reliance on religion as a guiding philosophy, especially in *Trail of Sacrifice*, has been criticized for the creation of ambiguity which "obliterates Gimba's social vision and renders useless the dialectics of social and economic relationship" (Abubakar, 1992). Although this point is valid, it ignores the fact that Gimba projects his characters' attempt to draw inspiration from and find moral courage in the ethos of Islam. Indeed, like such African writers as Sembene Ousmane, Camara Laye, Nurrudin Farah, Mariama Ba, who have also drawn from Islam in their works, Gimba offers a realistic representation of a society in which there is a steeped tendency in individuals to draw inspiration from religion. What is thus paramount for Gimba is not the pursuit of any ideological vision but the recognition of virtue and moral courage in an individual even if religioun ascriptions define this perception.

Gimba extols virtues which give citizens hope, confidence and sustains their expectations for socio-political development. His constant refrain therefore on the mark

of a truly reliable character is virtue, truth, honesty and fairness. This is why in their confrontation with the repressive status quo, Gimba's characters are mostly shattered, broken and disillusioned. Despite this, the characters rebel against forces that overwhelm them and robbing them of their identity. In other words, the frustrating experiences that these characters undergo are of such magnitude that destroy their personal identities and erode their confidence, thus wakening the human capacity for love, compassion, honesty, and patriotism. In many ways, Gimba experienced the intrigues of the civil service, and this is why he explores the hardship, trauma and depression of the middle-class and the desperate conditions under which they live. The affinity of social and aesthetic issues which define Gimba's works demonstrate that:

> *...the novelist is free to choose his material only in a limited sense, and his choice is governed by the deepest compulsions, of his personality. It is these that dictate both the nature of his novels and the conclusions about life he expresses through them. This is why in judging a novel we are faced with the task of assessing not only the author's ability to create characters, for instance, but also the values inherent in the characters and their behaviour* (Allen, 1954:15).

The implication of this is that characterization is the bedrock of Gimba's reconstruction of his social milieu. Through his characters, Gimba explores the complexities of urbanization with its attendant degeneration and the intensity of its moral decay. Although some of these characters are circumscribed in the moral web, they remain determined and focused.

The focus of Gimba's novels is the choice his protagonists make in the face of challenges or their confrontation with political forces. In sublimating this, Gimba thus depicts the socio-political and economic reality of a society 'caught up in a paradigm

shift' from the traditional values to a new 'order' whose texture is largely defined by the vice, violence and moral degeneration. As evident in *Trail of Sacrifice*, *Sunset for a Mandarin* and *Footprints*, the characters are the vessels for the expression of Gimba's concerns, reinforcing the argument that "every novelist, then, gives us in his novels his own personal idiosyncratic vision of the world. The vision is acted out by images of men and women" (Allen, 1954:17). Invariably, Gimba captures the plight of those who attempt to challenge the status quo by choosing to be honest and virtuous. Men and women of character are juxtaposed with those who have the Machiavellian tendencies and would stop at nothing in the pursuit of their vain desires. In thus excavating these configurations, Gimba expresses a "concern with those sources of ideological power which shape possibilities open to individuals: determinisms, not merely of biology, of course, but of money, class, status, education…" (Greenslade, 1994:10).

Although radical ideology is muted in Gimba's novels, there is an underlining concern with what might be called class difference which is sustained by social status and level of education and economic power that regulate social relations. This concern with difference compels Gimba's virtuous characters to retreat from a degenerate system through their moral courage, their search for truth and personal honour, all of which define a new identity. This is why like other African writers, Gimba's works are informed by social and political transformations of the society. As Femi Ojo-Ade posits, there is a strong bond between a writer and social reality:

> *Writing, of course, comes from within. An individual in isolation reacts to the drumbeat of the muse in his mind. But writing is also conditioned and complemented by the reality from without. The individual is inspired and influenced by the collective consciousness. Life and*

> *literature are inextricably linked together* (Ojo-Ade, 1996:153).

In the context of the above, there is a profound relationship or thematic congruity between Gimba's experience and what the major characters in his novels experienced. His writing deals with the politics and the dilemma of the people who are filled with pessimism and despair. This general feeling of disillusionment with most post-independence African states has been reflected in most literary works as found for instance, in Bernard Dadie in his play *Les Voix Dans le Vent (Voices in the Wind)*; and Gabriel Okara *The Voice*. In a similar way, Ngugi decries ethno-chauvinism in *The Black Hermit* and the oppression of the poor in *Petals of Blood*; Robert Serumaga condemns frequent occurrence of coups d'etat in Africa in *Return to The Shadows*; Oculi Okello uses the symbol of the orphan to depict the abandonment of the people by those in power in *Orphan*, Ayi Kwei Armah depicts Ghana as a land of social and political decay in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Soyinka satirizes the impudence of intellectuals in *The Interpreters*, while Achebe first, in *A Man of The People* and later in *Anthills of The Savannah* questions the efficacy of leadership in Nigeria.

In the same vein, Gimba's fiction contains contestations by characters over power and social challenges at the centre of which is the critique of the leadership and ineptitude which lead to repression and brutality. According to William Greenslade, "power is not to be solely identified with monolithic state apparatus, it is disseminated through many and varied discourses, institutions and institutional contexts" (Greenslade, 1994:3). In this case however, Gimba shows how tyrannical leadership abuse all facets of power.

Gimba contextualizes power in its political and ideological configurations and the ways in which it is appropriated by individuals in position of influence. The manipulation

of power and authority, through the 'myth' of secrecy of the bureaucratic set up, their distortion of policies and the impact of this on the citizenry resonate in Gimba's fiction. As Greenslade posits, "…what a particular writer does with an available discourse can constitute a test, not only of the defining angle of vision, but of its 'truth'" (Greenslade, 1994:10). Gimba certainly defines the angle of his vision in the thematic concerns in his fiction and the concern of his characters with exploitation, deceit, and manipulation. This is defined by two typologies: the first type is made up of the powerful and conservative with all the tendencies of oppressors, while the second is the oppressed but enlightened enough to be conscious of its predicament and its need for justice and equity. Within these groups, the author finds "mere vessels to carry the [his] moralistic and political tenets" (Khamis, 2001:51). That is why characters like Sadiku, Hamzah, and Jibran typify the simplicity and embody the values of honesty and truth, which are the concerns of Gimba. However, Gimba deliberately created the characters to fulfill the author's innate desire to encode the moral dimension of life. Indeed, Gimba's characterization buttresses Shaaban Robert's *Kusadikika* that "…characters are not drawn to actions and interactions that are necessary for textual vigor and verisimilitude…method of character creation is circumstantial, derivable from cause and effect" (Khamis, 2001:51-52). The validity of Khamis statement lies in the utilitarian value of creativite writing which makes contemporary writers manipulate their characters in ways that are favourable to their vision thus, suppressing objectivity. As Baruch Hochman observes,

> *[O]ver the past fifty years, the character of literature have, in the works of our most innovative writers, often been reduced to schematic angularity, rapid ordinariness, or allegorical inanity. The great writers of early modernism fulfilled the Romantic programme of individualism and created a gallery of unprecedented complex characters, but*

> *their heirs deliberately subordinated the role of character in their works* (Hochman 1985:13).

Most critics of Gimba's fiction agree that his personality and perception of social reality are intricately subsumed within the type of characters that he creates. There is a sense in which Gimba's views of existence is intricately bound with the thoughts, view and actions of some of his characters, especially with regards to their strong moral and religious convictions. In his delineation of characters, Gimba provides glimpses of the flux of day-to-day existence which makes these characters' perception of reality illuminate the vagaries of worldly existence. In essence, Gimba's characters operate within a polarity, between a vicious, conservative and exploitative level or the level of morality, patriotism; the level which Darby describes as dealing with the "elaboration of moderate nationalism" (Darby, 1998:89). The characters struggle within this polarity to create an identity for themselves, an identity which projects their individuality. The three major characters in the novels analyzed in this chapter have all experienced some form of humiliation at the hand of those who control state power. However Sadiku in *Trail of Sacrifice*, Hamzah in *Sunset for a Mandarin* and Jibran in *Footprints* emerge as individuals with puritanical ethics, which puts them on collision course with the organs of repression in society. These characters hold convictions at variance with the contradictions of society and this highlights the tussle between religiously inspired philosophy and the schisms of modern society. The vices which these characters challenge include materialism and the disparity in human relationships which lead to the prevalence of alienation in social existence. The overall result of this is the permeation of tyranny, degeneration and exploitation in a society dominated by the military with its looming presence of a ravenous predator.

In a fundamental way, Gimba explores the impact of good conscience on the complexities of life and the decisions which individuals make. In this instance, his novels operate in the tradition of such African novels as Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* (1960) and Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), whose characters admit the influence of the world around them but are also capable of drawing a balance between emotionalism and pragmatism. Gimba's novels are thus no less political than the overtly political novels like Festus Iyayi's *Violence* (1979) or Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* (1986) since he equally deals with the question of political power and hegemony. In this concern, however, Gimba comes across as a visioner, some sort of social reformer in the mould of the great Victorian writer Charles Dickens, who was concern with social life and its bearing on interpersonal relationships.

In *Trail of Sacrifice*, *Sunset for a Mandarin* and *Footprints* Gimba questions political power and authority, especially in its failure to live up to expectation and in the complacency of its citizenry. However, the concern is meant to pillory the leaders who misuse power and trample upon ordinary citizens. In Gimba's view, this is a source of tragedy for the society and as Said A.M. Khamis (2001:153) argues "…societal tragedy is inevitable if leadership serves nothing more than mere consolidation of power." Indeed what Gimbas novels depict is a recurrent picture of the political setting in Nigeria, a legacy inherited from the colonialists and which forms the core of postcolonial experience. As Goran Hyden and Michael Bratton (1992):ix) state:

> *Through reform of the structural legacies inherited from the colonial power, as well as through mobilization of the masses, politics was seen to serve national development. This conceptualization of politics, however, also served as an invitation for leaders to concentrate political power. Development became top-down affair and politics*

> *increasingly an activity confined to a small clique of people. The latter ran away with politics, so to speak, turning public matters into private and making a mockery of political accountability*.

Consolidating the above view, Said A.M. Khamis (2001:57) argues that "the consolidation of 'power' in a few hands and 'the running away with politics' by a clique is achieved by a 'demagoguery' characteristic of the third world but not completely absent in the developed world." In Africa, particularly Nigeria, the over concentration of power in the hands of a few has created an oligarchy "characterized by an absence of justice and the rule of law…the judiciary systems and its institutions are there for the sole purpose of safeguarding the interests of the ruling class and hence work to confuse or coerce the masses" (Khamis, 2001:59). Essentially, this picture is recreated in Gimba's fiction and his cinematic technique allows him to explore the subject with a considerable degree of sensitivity

This study draws attention to the fact that Abubakar Gimba's focus shifts from the traditional theme of cultural conflict, or 'colonial denigration', to the contemporary issues of underdevelopment. Gimba thus comes out as a writer who generates a new consciousness about several concerns ranging from social justice, the relationship between generations, the role of women in contemporary society and the militarization of politics. In his apprehension of these concerns, his vision is national and this provides an added freshness to the corpus of the Nigerian novel. Despite what some critics describe as the 'structural and stylistic flaws' of his works, Gimba is an intensely sensitive writer who is deeply concerned with the reality of post-colonial Nigerian society. It is remarkable that social concerns in Gimba's novels are expressed without recourse to 'trado-mythical' world of the first generation of Nigerian novelists. For Gimba, the

impulse is to apprehend the excesses and failings of contemporary socio-economic and political structures and how this created disillusionment and despair. Furthermore, locating his novels in urban settings has to a great extent enabled Gimba to relate the issues of morality, probity, justice, equity to diversity and multiculturalism, thus showing the universality of these issues.

Although Gimba first emerged in the mid 1980s, the general concern of his first novel, the *Trail of Sacrifice* (1985) is self-criticism and disillusionment due to the failure of the political elite. When Gimba started writing, the military was already well entrenched in the governance of the country. As a result, there is a shift in his novels from mere disillusionment as found in the novels of the 1960s and late 1970s to a projection of autocracy and contestations over power, which has assumed a sense of permanence and gradually pulling Nigeria towards political chaos. Gimba expands the thematic scope of his novels to capture varying concerns such as the question of youth and social revolution as in *Footprints*. This concern is similar to Chukwuemeka Ike's in *Our Children Are Coming* (1990) especially in terms of the legacy which the children would inherit. In essence, these novelists show that an inept political elite would only breed degenerate youths. In addition, the woman question receives some attention and image of the woman as professionals, wives, mothers or daughters is explored in *Trail of Sacrifice*, *Sunset for a Mandarin* and *Footprints*.

Gimba's novels focus on topical issues of varying importance to Nigeria which draw attention to its problems of instability and underdevelopment. There is a sense in which Gimba's novels are engaged in the interrogation, contesting realities through a "narrative that deals with the manifest destiny of its protagonists and or its society"

(Garry Gillard, 1993 SPAN 36, No36). In the novel *Trail of Sacrifice* for instance, Gimba examines the prevalence of social conflicts and the possibility of change and progress as the Songhai, a veiled reference to Nigeria, embraces a new national policy for the youths in order to facilitate greater interaction between its different ethnic formations, especially after the civil war of 1967-70. According to Gimba,

> *The story is about the youth and what his vision about his nation is supposed to be. The story is influenced by my experiences during the National Youth Service programme and what such experiences meant to me. At this time the war had just ended…**Trail of Sacrifice** is a creative attempt at interrogating the futility of the war, which led to the killing of our wives, brothers and fathers. It is meant to teach people to understand the imperativeness of peace and dialogue as fundamental instruments of conflict resolution. These were some of the ideals I had which I felt I would share with my readers…*(*Vanguard* Thursday, May 10, 2001, p.32).

In this novel, the journey motif sustains a linearity through which the central character, Sadiku, operates as a mediating agent between different cultures and traditions. The subject matter of the novel is explored via a journalistic approach of the travelogue in which Sadiku traverses different landscapes and cultures which leave their imprints on him:

> *…absorbs those cultural discoveries which he can accommodate, marvels at those that are at par with his personal cultural experiences, but acknowledges them as significant in the life of those who practice them. In fact, the whole journey is one of cultural discovery. He is influenced and he redefines his new life in relation to the cultures, which he comes across in this soul-searching journey* (Okome 2002:17).

Sadiku is the medium through which Gimba philosophizes on life and human predicament. This is why he pontificates upon the virtues of selflessness and sacrifice

which are necessary for the progress of society as well as on the need to abhor individualism or 'maddening self promotion'. This entails the embrace of what he calls 'collective commitment' in which every individual rises above the 'stench' in a society that is "inexonerably moving towards an abyss of self-destruction" (*TOS*, 147). As Gimba posits, "…I have used these novels to contribute towards the social discourse of re-emphasizing morality" (Okome 2002:18).

The experience of Sadiku in his one year mandatory national service provides the platform through which Gimba portrays the diverse cultures of the country, the need for unity and harmony as well as the rejection of these issues which threaten the corporate existence of Nigeria such as prejudice, fear of the unknown and the apathy towards other cultures. *Trail of Sacrifice* is then preoccupied with attitudes, perceptions and beliefs and what individuals need to do to rescue society from its state of despondency and moral rectitude. As Sadiku posits, "one must transcend individuation in any pursuit of virtuous purity" (*TOS*, 216). This 'transcending individuation' encapsulates self-denial, patriotism, the quest for justice and moral probity. This is the underlying factor for the messiah motif in the novel:

> *...there is a messiah in every person. The problem is the will as well as the courage to play such a role. Our greed and narrow-minded self-interest steal the will from us. We delight and dwell in our selfish individualism, trade our shortsighted procurements for the larger destruction of the society. I believe, I owe myself a duty to play my Messianic role wherever I deem necessary; I still remain to be asphyxiated by the general decadence*...(*TOS*:147).

As the archetypal hero of the novel, Sadiku is molded on this messiah motif and his one year national service acts as the metaphor for rescuing Nigeria from its general state of

despair, uncertainty, suspicion, distrust and ethno-religious conflicts after the civil war. As Sadiku argues,

> *We only had distorted images of our fellow countrymen. We were not very objective about other groups to which we do not belong. We failed to grab the fact that no person or group of persons could lay claim to perfection. We expected from other groups what we did not ourselves possess. We failed to recognize our various differences in nature and…* (*TOS*: 39).

In essence, the one year compulsory national service would further both social and cultural integration. This objective is embedded on Sadiku who, like Pip in Charles Dickens *Great Expectations* develops from naivety to self-discovery and maturity. The theme of growth itself is accentuated by the challenges of a new environment:

> *Sadiku needed no one to tell him that they were now in strange lands. Both the terrain and the vegetation, which they were now passing through were visibly different from those at home. All he had ever known was grassland interspersed by trees of various shapes and sizes. Forests where trees yielded marginal space to grass were known to him only through the pages of his geography books or travelers' accounts. Now he had begun to see the real thing, trees, tall tress, bounded the road on both sides, and the difficult terrain had rendered it virtually impossible to have one hundred meters stretch of straight road without a bend* (*TOS*: 24).

This engaging new environment is a source of knowledge for Sadiku – instills in him a gradual awareness of the import of his journey.

Sadiku's growth takes place within a military dictatorship which is at times hasty, corrupt, unpopular and dependent on the use of force to suppress opposition. Gimba elaborates on corruption in the society especially in the manipulation of the contract system as evident in the building at Mwene Redemption Crusaders' High School. Gimba expresses his disenchantment with the complicity between government officials and the

contractor and the impotence of the school principal whose weak excuses hardly exonerate him from blame:

> *The building went up to roofing level. Then came the rains. And the whole structure crumbled! Surprisingly, the contractor came to ask for payment. I refused. I refused to pay for work not properly done. The man went back to Nayiba. Well, I was directed to pay him. If you have the right connections in the government in this country, your stealing is made easier. Oh yes! Paying that money was as painful to me as if my whole house were burgled without a single needle left behind.* ***Well, it isn't my business, you would say. It's government money*** (*TOS*:107)

The last statements show the principal's weakness, lack of courage and commitment and incapacity to take responsibility. Furthermore, Gimba depicts the gravity of poverty as Sadiku journeys towards his destination. The picture is however more graphic when the members of the Brigade embark on a tour. The effects of poverty and squalor which Sadiku sees registered on the bodies and faces of the men, women and children as the bus speeds past, fills him with pain and anger. Throughout the journey, the setting reveals indices of underdevelopment, instability and disparity in income distribution amongst the citizenry. These signs of chaos disillusioned Sadiku although he assesses them with a perceptiveness and sobriety. In all the major incidences where Sadiku appears, there is an aura of moral apprehension around him. From the students' rally at the University, his experience as a Brigade member, the incidence of the fraud involving Larai the Library Prefect, Sadiku stands as example of modesty, humility, selflessness and sacrifice.

In this sense Sadiku embodies Gimba's concern with the problems of Nigeria. As Fajenyo argues, Gimba is a "contemporary writer; his views are quite modern, as well as his perception and interpretation of the realities around. His works are a collective testimony to his versatility in the study of modern man" (Fajenyo, 2003:103). Sadiku is

thus the archetypal 'everyman' whose "mannerism is indicated in his religious beliefs, which determine the scope of his perception and inform the thematic thrust of his books" (Fajenyo, 2002: 120). Pursuing the same argument, Abdullahi Ismaila states that there is a unique way in which Gimba forges a bond between himself and some of his major characters in a bond which fluidly blends into a sameness. In Ismaila's words, "Gimba forges this relationship (differently) by subtly weaving his own character traits almost like a spindle around the fictional characters in a realistic way…" (Ismaila, 2002:123). His choice of character and setting enhance meaning and the author's perception of the uniqueness of his cultural background.

Gimba recognizes the religious character of his society. Consequently, he regards Islam as a way of life which recognizes the faith of others. In *Trail of Sacrifice*, Sadiku exemplifies this philosophy because he is tolerant and accommodating of other people's beliefs; perhaps in a way echoing Gimba's own philosophy that

> *...anyhow, in true religious practices, you must live with the next person, even if he does not believe in your religion – you must be able to lead your own life, you don't have to step on the other man, especially if the other man is of the other faith* (Okome 2002:17).

It is in the pursuit of this philosophy, Gimba imbues Sadiku with calmness, perceptiveness and the potential for integrating his own cultural cum religious beliefs with those of this host community. The implication of this is that while new discoveries are made about the identities of other people, old prejudices and myths about 'others' are discarded. This kind of synchronization is necessary given the post-colonial reality of Nigeria in which values and attitudes are continuously reconstructed.

Sunset for a Mandarin (1991) embodies the underlying philosophy of Gimba's creative works. In a sense *Sunset for a Mandarin* is a continuation of *Trail of Sacrifice* due its interrogation of the post-colonial condition of African societies as they grapple with the problems of instability, poverty, democratization and economic development. These concerns account for the atmosphere of sobriety and suspense in the novel.

However, the reason for this somber penetrating mood is the grave issues explored in this novel. Of course, the tone shifts from the exuberant expressions of the characters in *Trail of Sacrifice* who are at the verge of maturity. In this novel, the story revolves around Hamzah, a hardworking, loyal and conscientious civil servant who is inadvertently caught in the web of several intrigues and manipulations by friends and associates. Through his experience, Gimba appraises the role of the military in politics and the hypocrisy, ineptitude and injustice which this incursion breeds. The militarization of the political system creates an unstable polity as manifest in the frequent changes in government and policy formulation.

In *Sunset for a Mandarin*, when Commander Sayyid Abbud took over from Major Bello as State Administrator, the water and rural electrification projects which the latter conceived were abandoned. In fact, when Commander Abbud was asked about his programmes for the state, he stated that he had none because he did not come to power though the ballot. "What programme did you vote me into office for?…talking more seriously now…the question of programmes is rather anachronistic and irrelevant: I wasn't elected on a political party ticket, never canvassed for votes on my promises." (*Sunset*…, p.46). These comments demonstrate that the Administrator owes no explanations to anyone and therefore is not accountable to the people.

As in *Innocent Victims* (1988), Gimba again returns to the question of the militarization of the political system in a developing society with all the brashness and despotic tendencies characteristic of such rulership. As a consequence, the political structures as well as the machinery of government and the civil service are weakened while ignorance, apathy sycophancy, god-fatherism and nepotism are entrenched. The workers themselves lack motivation, while their initiatives are misunderstood and unappreciated.

With a long stint with the civil service, especially under the military, it is not surprising that the central concern in this novel is how the system is manipulated and how individuals caught in this reality adjust to it. Although the novel basically explores human relationship, the focus is on Hamzah. As a Director-General in the cabinet of a State Military Administrator, he cuts the image of an ascetic, incorruptible fellow who even Commander Abbud regard as "…quiet, unassuming and humble personality…the possibility of a strong character beneath the outward garment of that cool gentleness. A strong character that is neither easily malleable nor manipulatable" (*Sunset*…, p.100).

In an apparent twist of fate, Hamzah finds himself inexorably drawn into a web of conflicts with the powers that be. In the ensuing dilemma, Gimba details the unpredictability of life, power play and friendship. The entire drama which engulfs Hamzah's life becomes a learning process for him. From his initial naivety, Hamza becomes better informed about the reality of life, after passing through 'the baptism of fire'. The web of intrigues that engulf Hamza reach a crescendo when he is accused of misappropriating about fourteen million Songhaian dollars. This accusation, his arrest and detention by the police become his 'rites of passage' teach him great lesson about

human relationships and the intrigue of power. Consequently, the enthusiasm with which he initially embraced his work and life gradually weakens and he begins to solace in sublime philosophy as well as divine injunctions as he appraises his situation and reconciles himself to an inexplicable fate.

Underlying the basic structure of the story in *Sunset for a Mandarin* is the poignancy of religion an anchor in the lives of his characters. Even in instances where the conduct of the character veers out of the realm of morality and fairness they still retain faith in their religion as evident in Commander Abbud's statement that:

> *'...you see, fanatism and faith, I mean true faith, don't go together. Or they shouldn't. Faith commands action upon deep reflection and understanding, while fanatism commands action upon impulse and emotion. An impulsive and emotional character is very deficient, imperfect…Truth is perfection. Faith gets you to the truth, to be true. And since religions strive for the truth, the fanatic of any religion is not the right person to carry its banner. Fanatism cannot be synonymous with piety'* (*Sunset…*, pp. 199/120).

Ironically, even though the State Military Administrator is a Muslim, he did not treat Hamzah fairly. As Amirah, Hamzah's sister states:

> *No man that professes Islam has a right to treat **anybody**, Muslim or non-Muslim, unjustly. And all men of good faith, be they Muslim, Jews, Christians, Buddhist or whatever, recognize that **just** and **fair** treatment are universal values. And such values aren't exclusively for people with religious badges. Justice is for the man, not for the name – tag of the religion he wears….*(*Sunset…*, p.173).

This statement criticizes the likes of Commander Abbud who use the garb of religion to cover their misdeeds, whose outward appearance exudes piety but whose heart is full of evil. Commander Abbud is thus the opposite of Hamzah who acknowledges and submits

to the will of God and relies on God's intervention "…God has His ways of turning a valley into a mountain, a fall into a flight, punishment into a reward…" (*Sunset*…, p.146). Also when Hamzah decides to tell Commander Abbud of his intention to quite the service, he consults Commander Abbud "…I know things are bad between us, but I want us to part as true Muslims. Without grudges or ill feelings. Honestly, I've come to see you purely *fiy Sabiylil Laahi*...in the name of God…" (p.162). Hamzah of course draws inspiration from deep reflections on Quranic injunctions such as:

a. *Do men imagine that*
They will be left alone (at ease)
Because they say, we believe!
And will not be tested with affliction (*Sunset*…, p.172).

……

b. *And surely we shall try you*
With something of fear and hunger
And loss of wealth and lives and crops
But give glad tidings
To the steadfast...(*Sunset*…, p.196)

These injunctions commands the faithful to regard life as a trial in which God tests the faith, perseverance and the devotion of those who subject themselves to His will. This is why Hamzah is a strong-willed character whose moral strength is derived from his recognition of the supreme nature of God to whom he willingly submits. In his discussion with Hajj Malik, Hamzah says, "yes…and I won't say anything more, except

to leave everything to God…the best judge" (p.178). This is why even at the height of his predicaments, his character remains unshaken; if anything,

> *He was only overwhelmed by a feeling of being cheated, victimized, a feeling of helplessness, of futility of anger, and the imperative of an eventual forgiveness. A feeling of weakness and strength, a feeling of compulsion to capitulate to the commandments of faith* (*Sunset*…, p.293).

It is remarkable that Gimba blends moral cum religious concern with contemporary politics in such a way that the story is not reduced to some tedious treatise on Islamic religion. It is this dexterity that gives *Sunset for a Mandarin* its psychological depth, it's forcefulness in investigating politics.

In *Sunset for a Mandarin*, Gimba examines social reality with the keen eye of a participant observer. As a result, the depiction of the prevailing socio-political problems draws from a perspective which emphasizes the virtues of transparency and moral uprightness. At another level, Gimba examines the violence, greed, dehumanization and other vices prevalent in contemporary society. For instance, security agencies such as the police trample upon the rights of citizens by brutalizing and humiliating them. In *Sunset for a Mandarin*, the arrest of a young man and his wrong detention by the police for breaching curfew (p.77), Hamzah's experiences in the hands of the men of the Internal Security Agency (ISA) and the menace of armed robbers are pointers to the ineptitude and inefficiency of the security agencies.

In terms of addressing the woman question, Gimba shows restraint in the ideal, which he expects. He is not favourably disposed towards a brazen display of radicalism in the pursuit of women's rights. That is why in this novel, 'The Songhaian Women's Front' is of much interest to him because of their objectives which differs from those of

the 'Women's Vanguard Movement' whose "views are outrageous and anti-decent human society, anti-religion…" (p.96). Although Gimba cherishes the ideals of the freedom which these movements represent, he question its scope and objective through Commander Abbud critique: "Freedom? Freedom to push us downhill into the age of permissiveness? Freedom to live the social life of animals...Freedom must have limits…decency" (p.97). As E.M. Forster argues, this kind of narrative shows that the novelist is first of all a human being thus, there is always this "affinity between him and his subject matter which is absent in many art forms" (Forster, 1927:54). This affinity enables Gimba to give women some space rather than confine them to a marginal position, operating behind the scene.

Sunset for a Mandarin operates from a personal level and projects the turbulence in a society undergoing the process of transformation. Working essentially through flashback, the story unfolds through an omniscient voice, interspersed with individual narrative voices of such characters as Hamzah and the State Military Administrator. Here, monologue gives a peep into characters, their perception of social reality as well as self-examination. Also, extensive dialogue provides further details on issues which ordinarily would have been skipped by the omniscient narrator and through which character delineation is enhanced.

Authorial presence is quite profound in *Sunset for a Mandarin*, due to the author's evocative use of language in order to fully penetrate the psyche of the society whose reality he is reflecting. The evocativeness of the language is most realized from the poetic nature of its expression, almost always with a tinge of fatalism around, as these few examples on Hamzah's traumatic experience demonstrate:

(a) *Tears flooded his eyes to blur his vision. And for a fleeting second, he felt like a bridegroom felled by a fatal gunshot whilst the honeymoon with his bride was yet to be over. For him, he knew that it was all over – with the service that he so loved* (p.195).

(b) *A drowning man, his belly heavily laden with seawater, washed ashore unconscious. A desolate beach…deserted by the inhabitants of the area, as sea waves deposited his body on the shore. The body was seen as a ghost, an ill omen* (p.228).

In order to reinforce the effectiveness of the language, allusions are made to some life defining philosophies with a predilection for divine intervention. At this point, there are Islamic undertones especially as the protagonist submits to the will of God by drawing inspiration from the Holy Qur'an. In terms of symbols and images, the sun setting is indicative of Hamzah's descent from grace to grass "…for every sunrise, there must be a sunset. For Hamzah…, the sun seemed definitely to have passed its zenith" (p.294).

Inference could be drawn from Gimba's portrayal of characters as representational and symbolic either of the oppressed and unjustly treated as Hamzah, or as oppressive and ruthless as represented by Commander Sayyid Abbud, the police and all other members of security system. However, almost all the characters speak flawless English probably because they are all drawn from within a particular social class. Although the plot and the characters appear more convincing than in *Trail of Sacrifice*, the characters still lack depth and therefore merely serve the author in balancing his plot without consideration for verisimilitude.

On the whole, *Sunset for a Mandarin* satirizes the unstable political terrain, the administrative and bureaucratic bottlenecks in the civil service, the tardiness in policy formulation and implementation and the question of power, its manipulations and

intrigues. In a sense, the novel's subject-matter can be compared with the depiction of corruption in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease* and the satire of the intellectual in Soyinka's *The Interpreters*.

Footprints (1998) further focuses on contemporary political developments in the fictional/metaphoric setting of Songhai. It unfolds the complexities of a nation in search of leadership and good governance through characters that are significantly articulate and perceptive. This is why the story is transformed from a somewhat personal experience of Jibran to a literary endeavour which addresses the question of political development. Here, Gimba comes out in a forceful manner to evaluate the society through different shades of opinions. Typical of his exposition, Gimba records in a condensed dialogue the minutest detail thus creating an evocative tendency, which transcends the narrative tightness of radical ideology. Gimba concentrates on the delicate nature of Nigerian politics, a concern whose relevance can be related to Roscoe's description of how Alex La guma

> *...addresses his appeal to the collective conscience of the world by way of the particular group his experience has qualified him to speak for. And his awareness of a political bias appears itself to work to his artistic advantage, enabling him to see clearly where the art-politics division lies and hence ensure that neither his aesthetic nor intellectual integrity is sacrificed* (Rosecoe, 1977:234).

Indeed, Gimba's sensibilities and perspective have been influenced by his experience, and this is why the three novels selected for this study are bound in an organic linkage between thought and motif. In this case, the three novels could be regarded as constituting a trilogy in which one reflects and recalls the other in an unbroken sequence. Gimba's trilogy may not be similar to Amadi's trilogy *The Concubine* (1966), *The Great*

Ponds (1969) and *The Slave* (1978) or the sequence in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), and *No Longer At Ease* 1960) but certainly it is still bound by the way issues explored are interconnected and flow in an unending order.

Although the stories are symbiotically related, each novel deals with conflicting realities. In *Footprints* for instance, there is a deep sense of introspection by the characters as they evaluate their society with resoluteness. Their concerns range from the plight of the poor, the degenerate nature of the socio-political system and the need for structural changes within the polity. As in Achebe's *Anthills of The Savannah* (1987), there is an underlying concern with the role of students, and youths in the struggle for political change. Similarly, in the debates between Jibran's family and their friends, Basil, George, Jerry and the mole Haytham, Gimba explores the entire socio-political fabric of the Nigerian society viz: endemic fuel scarcity, incessant strikes by university teachers, the endless and fruitless transition programmes, the dictatorial tendency of military regimes and its civilian cronies and the work of collaborators like Muhtar.

Even Gimba basically focuses on political power and leadership, his story unfolds against the background of interpersonal relationship and the intrigues and betrayals of friendship. Gimba is cynical of the contingence of betrayal, on petty jealousy, envy, greed and ambition. The surreptitious blending of personal dramas with political instability make a profound comment on the connection between these two since there cannot be political development so long as individuals who manage the system are dogged by greed, avarice, envy and jealousy.

That is why Gimba's narrative uses 'footprints' to signify an alternative route or good example for the children and youths in their bid for the regeneration of the society.

In this regards, the students of Azania International School are depicted as the recipients of new ideals. As George, one of the characters argue

> *...But, one has to agree that things are really bad. Painfully bad. With children like Haliyfah, however intelligent and socially conscious even at their young age, I believe the deterioration will abate or even stop…Let's give credit to the boys, the young ones. If half of them are as discerning as he and his friends are, they would not follow the current footprints of our generation that seem to be leading to nowhere* (*FP*:167)

Farah too optimistically adds that, "…the future belongs to the children. And if good traits begin to manifest themselves in the children, then the future looks hopeful…" (*FP*:168). The possibilities of social and political transformations are thus expressed through the actions of children in a way which recalls Chukwuemaka Ike's *Our Children Are Coming!* (1990). Although some characters regard this as utopian, its centrality in the narrative upholds Gimba's belief in youth advocacy and empowerment. In a way, this empowerment becomes a fundamental indictment of the older generation which has failed in its responsibilities, by its ineptitude double standards, fraud and hypocrisy.

There is virtually no segment of the Nigerian society that Gimba has ignored in this novel. Jibran, for instance comes down heavily on the teachers who are primarily responsible for the intellectual and psychological development of the young. In the course of a strike action, Jibran accuses the teachers of "rabble-rousing antics of the market place…and arm twisting agitation clad in a self-righteous garb" (*FP*:208). This criticism implies that the teacher should rise above pecuniary tendencies or materialistic desires and aspire to 'fine values' because '"Teachers are supposed to be the beacon of light for the society…"' (*FP*:209). Therefore, "even in discontent, a teacher should exude a higher degree of refinement. That's what marks him out…. And that's what

gives him a higher moral platform" (*FP*:208). It is obvious from this that Gimba believes that the teacher occupies a revered position and should therefore never abuse this privilege by engaging in unnecessary disputes since "…of all professional groups, it's the teachers that should not go on strike….It's dangerous. Teachers should be teaching against such a behaviour, not indulge in it with relish" (*FP*: 213).

Apart from the teachers, Gimba also comments on the role of the press, especially on private media which provide "views and news coverage quite slanted and offensive" (*FP*:220), and the government owned newspapers which "only specialize in embellishing lies and other propaganda for the government (*FP*:220/221). Even though the press is entitled to the freedom of expression, George, one of the characters argues, such freedom is usually abused because the media "criticizes with arrogant righteousness, and sometimes, with obvious unreasonableness and unrepentant display of ignorance (*FP*:222):

> *...some journalists criticize with a missionary zeal, sometimes with a messianic fervour, with an air of infallibility and quite unrestrained. Where is tolerance on their part? Access to a news media should not be a license to unrestrained, uncensored or even irresponsible conduct. The media is a source of power, and like all power, be it from the barrel of a gun or the ballot box, or…the tip of a pen, must be used responsibly, otherwise it becomes dangerous* (*FP*:222).

This perspective gives Gimba's portrayal of the press a liberalist stint. Although Gimba ideological ouvre is not strong enough to rock the status quo, he is also careful not to show any undue enthusiasm for the idiosyncracies of the ruling class.

Gimba also gives due prominence to the voice of the woman in this novel. In the course of the discourses on the socio-political situation in the country, the perception of

the woman is given an ample space and through this, the innate intellectual potential of the woman is demonstrated. Here, women are presented as intelligent and outspoken without the arrogance or vituperations associated with radical feminism. Such characters as Nashaa, Farah, Zynah and Jameelah assert women identity not as the marginalized voiceless 'other' but as persons who possess enormous capacity to mediate in transformation of society. Farah, for instance, is similar to Achebe's Beatrice in *Anthills of The Savannah* due to her struggle to find a space within and comment on special issues in a male dominated environment. Besides, they are both intelligent, hardworking and highly articulate as a result of which both of them gain respect and prominence.

Although Gimba locates his women against the backdrop of gender related discourse, their personality is defined within their cultural space. The women in Gimba's novel are not radical or effeminate and given to unnecessary emotion as in most of Jane Austen's female characters. Instead, they are emotionally stable and perceptive enough to understand their complementary role in society. In spite of the prevalence of feminist discourses which reconstruct the personality of the African woman, Gimba immerses this new identity in the frame work of the mutual co-existence engendered by the ideals of marriage and motherhood. This perception is similar to Flora Nwapa's depiction of *Efuru* who, in spite of her hard work and economic empowerment is still level headed enough to recognize the limitations within her tradition and culture.

Gimba's representation of women as intelligent and socially active reverses the general belief that Northern Nigerian women are conservative and encaged. This illustrates the fact that as the society changes so also do attitudes, and due to this, Northern Nigerian women, like their counterparts in the South are recovering their voices

and are no longer operating from 'behind the veil'. In this way, Gimba shifts the woman from the periphery of social life where she exists as a 'sub-subject' to the centre. In spite of the women's exposure to western education which has made them socially and politically active, their adherence to the tenets of Islam is not altered neither is their respect for their tradition and culture waned, thus illustrating that self-determination could be achieved without sacrificing cultural identity, decency or respect.

The novels of Abubakar Gimba demonstrate the affinity between social issues and creative activity. However, in doing this, Gimba is not drawn toward unnecessary display of emotions. In this sense, his novels are concerned with what might be termed the "Augustan virtues of moderation, dignity, disciplined emotion and common sense…" (Evans, 1940:104).

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CHAPTER FOUR

RECONSTRUCTING THE WOMAN IN ZAYNAB ALKALI'S *THE STILLBORN* AND *THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN*

4.0 THE CONTEXT OF WOMEN WRITING

This chapter is focused on Zaynab Alkali whose emergence as the female novelist of English expression for Northern Nigeria in 1984 is significant because her work challenge the hegemony of masculinity and patriarchy, offering a feminine or alternative response to them. Alkali fundamentally explores the world of the Muslim woman and her predicament in a patriarchal society. With reference to *The Stillborn* (1984) and *The Virtuous Woman* (1986), this chapter is concerned with the ways in which Alkali negotiates the challenges which confront the Northern Nigeria woman specifically, and by extension, the Nigerian and African woman generally. In essence, the chapter evaluates Alkali's responses to the issues of 'personal emancipation and social responsibility' and the need for self expression and awareness through education. In Alkali's view, education is the means through which a new consciousness and identity could be constructed by the woman for her liberation from a culture of dependence, ignorance and subservience, and for her integration into mainstream society.

If the late start in the writing of the novel in English in Northern Nigeria could be attributed to British colonial policies, intrigues, and the politics of publication etc, the female voice in this form of expression suffered a second degree. This neglect or marginalization of women novelists is also equally rooted in history. As Carolyn Kumah (2000:1) argues,

> *... the marginalization of African women's literature may be clearly linked to the gender specific repercussions of European Colonization. Although regional and cultural specifics affected the demotion, the position of African*

> *women was significantly compromised by the imposition of Colonial institutions.*

In pre-colonial time, African women were not completely marginalized, pushed to the fringes or suffered from fragmented identities because women had an elevated status and both sexes worked together for the survival of their communities. Ifi Amadiume substantiates this point further when she posits that:

> *whereas indigenous concepts linked to flexible gender constructions in terms of access to power and authority mediated dual-sex divisions, the new Western concepts introduced through colonial conquest carried strong sex and class inequalities supported by rigid gender ideology and constructions* (Amadiume 1987 : 119).

The point made here is that foreign ideologies and influences reinforced the marginalization of the African woman through religious and educational institutions. Again, Ifi Amadiume succinctly illustrates this point in these words:

> *As Christianity introduced a male deity, religious beliefs and practices no longer focused on the female deity, but on a male God, his son, his bishops and priests. While women formed the great majority of the congregation - the body of the church, a few men, the clergy, constitute the headship of the church ...* (Amadiume 1987: 134)

The influence of the missionaries and colonial government reinforced the myth of the inferiority of the African woman. In addition, colonial policies and missionary education gave more opportunities to the males. Both Babs Fafunwa (1974) and Ifi Amadiume (1987) demonstrate that the sex imbalance in the access to school education shows wide discrepancies in favour of males:

> *Male bias was therefore a strong feature of government educational programmes as well as mission polices on education. Had the government's attitude to women been more progressive, great possibilities for women might have*

> *been found in government schools, where at least education was not dependent on conversion and religious instruction* (Amadiume 1987:134).

Furthermore, "the content of the education children received was also reflective of the gender ideologies European colonizers imposed" (Carolyn Kumah 2000:2). Indeed, the female students only received what has been termed 'home–oriented instruction' which inevitably imposed a limitation on their ability to fully participate in matters of public concern. This limitation has been transposed even in such matters as access to university education, publishing outlets, and respect and recognition. The implication of this is that African women writers have continued to suffer from undue neglect and until recently, even exclusion from the canon of African creative writing.

The foregoing indicates that the marginalization of the African woman as deriving from her traditional and cultural backgrounds of patriarchy is relative since there were organized systems in which individual rights and contributions were acknowledged and respected irrespective of gender. In addition to these, missionary and colonialist activities further entrenched a patriarchal system in which women were pushed to the fringes and subjected to the 'omni-authority of men'. This is manifested in the creation of gender structured societies in which power belongs and is derived from masculine gender, thus reinforcing a masculine perspective in all spheres. Hitherto, as Amadiume (1987: 185) argues,

> *In the indigenous society, the dual-sex principle behind social organization was mediated by the flexible gender system of the traditional culture and language ... in contrast, Western culture and the Christian religion, brought by colonialism, carried rigid gender ideologies which aided and supported the exclusion of women from*

> *the power hierarchy, whether in government or the church in the modern society.*

However, the question of feminism in the writings of the Northern Nigerian woman should be related the nature of the society, especially in terms of its culture and religion. Quite often, this concern has created the tendency to argue that Islam is significantly responsible for the suppression of woman. Assumptions and positions such as this are today being contested even by women scholars from different perspectives. Maria Degabriele (1993:7) argues that

> *It is not Islam or the Koran which prevents women from being fully engaged in the public spheres of education and paid professional work. The problem is the men who have the power to interpret, to legislate, and to maintain the status quo in their favour. So the problem is not Islam, but patriarchal social and political practice. Islamic feminists are fighting against different forms of essentialism which come from men's interpretation and enforcement of Islam.*

On the other hand, Haideh Moghissi (1999:15) is of the view that most of the negative and stereotypical images of the Muslim woman is actually a construction of European colonialism where "the domesticated, subjugated, unenlightened Other as opposed to the liberated, independent and enlightened Western self was used as a moral prop to legitimize colonial power relations".

In literature, criticism has towed the paths which Western critics have initiated and which African male writers and critics have continued to perpetuate. Inevitably, "the critique of African literature was founded upon the marginalization of women's issues; the characterization of females and the political significance of their portrayals remained unacknowledged" (Carolyn Kumah 2000:2). It is largely on account of this neglect and deliberate marginalization that African women writers and critics such as Adeola James

(1990), Abena Bussia (1990), Irene D'Almeida (1994), If Amadiume (1987), Molara Ogundipe – Leslie (1997), Juliana Makuchi, Nfah – Abbenyi (1997) Fatima Mernissi (1996), Haideh Moghissi (1999) just to mention a few, have challenged what Carolyn Kumah terms "these exclusionary and marginalizing policies".

In restating their case however, these African women writers and critics are cautious in embracing and applying the concept of feminism into the main construct of the African society especially given the wider sociological and cultural implications which the term engenders. More so, Western feminist discourse tends to view gender relations generally from a dichotomous perspective without taking cognizance of geographical or historio – cultural distinctions. Indeed, most critics are agreed that colonialism greatly contributed to the constraints and the weakening of women's status in African societies. In the words of Molara Ogundipe - Leslie (1994: 29) "the British simply swept aside previous female political structure in society, replacing them with completely male structures and positions." In essence, colonization created a situation in which the previous status of the African woman was pushed to the fringe, rendered powerless and completely dependent on men. The argument therefore is that the concept of feminism as a discourse is deeply steeped in Western political thought and set on an agenda which does not take account of cultural specificities and particularities of the African woman. This explains why a number of critics of feminism in Africa are wary of its application to the situation of the African woman. Oshita Oshita (2001: 294) in his postulations on "philosophy and the Nigerian Novel" opines that

> *the material conditions of the feminist novel in Nigeria are unmistakably alien and its ontology wrong – headed to the extent of its negation of time-tested indigenous perceptions of reality of gender relations. Worse still, among the small*

> *literate female population on whom it has impacted, the outcome is a broken home syndrome resulting in the disequilibrium of single parenthood and its social consequences ....”*

Oshita argues further that.

> *it can be pointed that the Nigerian feminist novel is yet to emerge with an authentic philosophy to be signposted on the indigenous literary scene. The definition of being and the essence of being as articulated by feminist literature fall short of the ontological status of these terms as they affect gender in Nigeria. Here lies the crisis of relevance confronting feminism in the home novel in Nigeria (Oshita* 2001:294).

Although the above argument draws specific example from Nigeria, its appropriateness demonstrates that there are contestations over the acceptance or the validity of the concept of feminism in Africa due to its hydra-headed nature. So in negotiating the women's experience, most women writers are caught within an argument which in recent times has assumed a much wider and variegated dimension from its earliest history in Europe and America. Indeed the politics around the terminology is at the moment deeply entrenched and Carolyn Kumah's (2000:6) postulation is instructive in this respect:

> *while the issue of terminology has remained significant to several African women writers, many have objected to the use of labels in the struggle for women's empowerment. Nevertheless, the varying terms that are being created and championed in light of the inefficiencies of Western feminism are bound by a common interest – the complete liberation of Africa's land and peoples; a goal that cannot be achieved without the full political and social agency of African women.*

Kumah's views, strengthens the point that the several mutations which the concept of feminism has undergone, from Alice Walker's 'Womanism' to Catherine Acholonu's 'Motherism' emanate from the differing cultural

peculiarities of Europe and Africa. This is the disparity that Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie quoted in Adebayo (ed) 1996:1), attempts to mediate through the theory of 'stiwanism' which she describes thus:

> *"Stiwa" means "Social Transformation including Women of Africa". I wanted to stress the fact that what we want in Africa is social transformation. It's not about warring with men, the reversal of role, or doing to men whatever women think that men have been doing for centuries, but it is trying to build a harmonious society. The transformation of African society is the responsibility of both men and women and it is also in their interest.*

This approach takes cognizance of the peculiarities and complexities of the African situation which makes it difficult to appropriate whole, the western practice of feminism. In their attempt to privilege the voice of the woman, African women writers are careful to strike a balance between the cultural values of their societies and the exigencies of modernity. Accordingly, Davies and Graves's (1986: 9) aptly encapsulate the essence of African feminism in such a way that it

> *recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yokes of foreign domination and European / American exploitation. It is not antagonistic to African men but it challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation which differ from the generalized oppression of all African peoples.*

In the several ways that African women scholars and writers have expressed their views, there is a paradigmatic projection of a new gender–consciousness which pushes the ideological and philosophical frontiers of the concept of feminism towards flexibility. In this way, the term becomes a useful reference in the construction of the identity and status of the women. In practical terms therefore, such discussion have focused on.

> *denouncing the male scholar's androcentrism, which prevents him from admitting or even recognizing the full*

> *impact of women's participation in the creation of society ...challenging his limited descriptions of social reality by reinterpreting data to redefine power, influence, and status and to demonstrate that only within a male – biased perspective does the subjugation of women take on a universal face* (Trinh T. Minh–ha 1989: 107).

Despite this, there are considerable debates over the 'capacity' or 'ability' of the African woman to speak for herself. In this instance, inference is drawn from Robert Young's (1990:164) view that the problem is not that the "woman cannot speak as such … but that she is assigned no position of enunciation … everyone else speaks for her, so that she is continually rewritten as the object of patriarchy or imperialism." This is the point which most third world and African women scholars and writers make about the way in which Western feminism conceives of their problems. In a fundamental way, Western feminism has privileged itself in such a way that it assumes

> *... the traditional anthropological role of describing other native women and prescribing ways in which they should liberate themselves from the brutalities of family, men, children, religion and the state. The blindness to its own ethnocentrism has led gender politics into crisis* (Degabriele 1993:7).

Most African women writers who subscribe to this view, attempt to redefine the arguments about gender through the creation of a model which takes cognizance of the traditional and cultural peculiarities of the African society. Of course, there are certain cultural and traditional tendencies, which oppress the African woman, but as Degabriele puts it, "… liberation does not mean westernization, as that would be just another form of repression" (Degabriele 1993:7). To further buttress this argument, Trinh T. Minh –ha (1989:106) opines that:

> *... to simply denounce third world women's oppression with notions and terms made to reflect or fit into Euro-*

> *American women's criteria of equality is to abide by ethnographic ideology ... which depends on the representation of a coherent cultural subject as source of scientific knowledge to explain a native culture and reduces every gendered activity to a sex – role stereotype. Feminism in such a context may well mean "westernization"*

However, no matter the dimension and the colouration which women discourse may take, the underlying desire has been to articulate the fragments of their experiences which have been 'silenced in phallocentric discourse'. This is why their works attempt to transcend the biological and social limitations imposed on them as women and which include fulfilling their roles of wives and mothers.

Inevitably, women's writing in Africa generally has tended towards the re-telling and the representation of the woman's predicament within patriarchal systems in which the instruments of culture and religion pull the veil over the woman and stifle her voice. As Aduke Adebayo (1996:39) argues.

> *the metaphor of the veil is very significant in the predominantly patriarchal society in West Africa. The veil, a signifying component of women's attire in many parts of Africa, masks the women's identity muffles her voice and distorts her vision of herself and others. Besides, the veil is symbolic of women's subjugation and reverence to patriarchy.*

What preoccupies African women writers thus is the desire to deconstruct and unveil the myths and the prejudice with which the woman is suppressed and restricted, in the process burying her human and creative potential in the shallow constructions of her sex. Thus, women writers from across the world are uniquely bound by the common desire to reject their subjection and the restriction imposed by the patriarchal hegemonic construction of their gender in society.

So the works of female writers like Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976) and Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1982), Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* (1976), Grace Ogot's *The Promised Land* (1966), Aminata Sow Fall's *The Beggar's Strike* (1981), Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981) and Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* (1984) demonstrate their passion and express common problems. In addition, these writers have focused on the women in relation to the different traditional, pre-colonial life and contemporary contexts of her existence. According to Griffiths (2000: 281), "They also construct a single interest, both among themselves, and in opposition to the texts of the dominant male literary establishment." Most importantly, some of these novelists equally indict those women who ironically tend to "construct and perpetuate hegemonic discourses of feminity which value women only in terms of their productivity as child – bearers and as help mates to men" (Griffiths 2000: 182). In Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) for instance, such women as Omirima, the old gossip are singled out as the agents of patriarchal hegemony. As Griffith states, "their presentation is a superb example of how hegemony works to support dominant discourses, by persuading the subjected group that the values which oppress them are coterminous with their identity as women" (Griffiths 2000:282). What is fundamental in these works is the interrogation of not only patriarchal consciousness engendered by masculinist assumptions but also, the role of some women in supporting this kind of hegemonic tendencies.

This complex and contradictory experience of the women necessitates the metaphor of unveiling which Aduke Adebayo (1996:53) explains thus:

> *unveiling oneself is invariably unveiling a unique vision of the complexity of the African woman's experiences and expectations. Using various artistic devices like stock characters, drawing upon archetypes, as well as narrative*

> *irony and introspection, the writer has resurrected with empathy insight and sensitivity, not only the hidden lives of African women but has also envisioned alternative futures.*

The 'alternative future' lies in the reconstruction of an affirmative and positive image of the women and the reclaiming or recovering of her voice. This then involves not only the transcendence of their predicament but also the vigorous "use of their writing as a weapon that (re)inscribes African women in such ways that transgress and shatter hegemonic (male) representations while infusing these same discourses with more realistic representations" (Nfah – Abbenyi 1997 : 148). Some of these 'realistic representations' include the deconstruction of the negative characterization of women by creating female characters who in spite of the limitations of their society, create spaces for themselves by striving to empower themselves. Such female characters are elaborately drawn in the works of several African women writers such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Zaynab Alkali. According to Nfah – Abbenyi (1997:151), "female characters in these women's writing, therefore, are portrayed not in stereotypical subservient, unchanging roles, or in roles that are deliberately limiting. Instead, they come alive as speaking subjects and agents of change." In Alkali's Li in *The Stillborn* (1984) and Nana Ai in *The Virtuous Woman* (1986) these attributes come alive in their portrait as prominent women who understood the peculiarities of their situation and were ready for the challenges ahead. Moghissi draws the argument further that Islam existed differently and is adaptive to local customs and practices within territorial borders:

> *... Islam traditions and values could be accommodating and mouldable in proportion to the strength of local customs and cultural practices and to the processes of social and economic development ... Hence Islam cannot be taken perhaps as the sole signifier of the situation of women in Islamic societies. Even under Islamic rule class*

> *and wealth, to a great extent, define women's life options and gender experience* (Moghissi 1999: 18).

These postulations demonstrate that the manipulations which are deeply ingrained within patriarchal hegemony create the conditions for the suppression of women. However, in societies where '*Quranic*' injunctions and The *Sharia* define the rules that govern general conduct, both socially and politically, there is the tendency for the confinement of women. As has been argued "… despite the capacity of Islam to adapt and to change face and force under the influence of various social, political and economic stimuli, the systemic, vigorous and often violent opposition to change is a grim reality in many Islamic societies" (Moghissi 1997:19).

Taking off from the above views the role and rights of the Muslim woman in Northern Nigeria can be contextualized along the lines which are derived from both a traditional and Islamic framework, and the manipulation of gender politics which relies on the ideology and ideals of Western values. This is the context in which Zaynab Alkali's works operate by tacitly questioning the multiple oppressive conditions and challenges which challenges the Northern Nigerian woman.

4.1 ALKALI'S PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN

Since her emergence as a writer in the literary scene in Northern Nigeria, Zaynab Alkali has dedicated her creative works to the exploration of the realms of women experiences. As a consequence of this multiple perspective, Alkali creates a 'flexible gender ideology' which responds to changing social relationships and redefines the woman's essence. In this context, Alkali writers within the tradition of women writing in Northern Nigeria which had long been established by the likes of Asma'u (Nana) Bint

Shehu (1794 – 1863) (Dan Fodio's daughter) who composed in the 19th Century '*Wakar gewaye*' (song of the wandering) in Fulani, recounting her father's life in exile (Gerard 1981:58/19), and Abba et al (1997:1).

In Zaynab Alkali's works, the setting is a significant site for the enactment of the complexities of religious and cultural values. This is because Alkali's stories derive their impetus from her multi-cultural and religious background. According to Sabiu-Baba Habiba (1994:12), the former Biu Division of Borno State from where Alkali originates is

> *peopled largely by the Bura, Babur and Tera. In addition to the animist populations, predominantly Muslim Bura live side by side with the predominantly Christian Babur. The conflicting religious and cultural presence in Biu further to the East, while the ancient Christian missionary establishment at Waka and Garkida are the focus for Christian activities.*

It is against the background of this contradictory setting that Alkali locates and contrextualizes the experiences of her characters. Ironically, in spite of the vitality of their functions as mothers through whom cultural mores and value are passed to future generations, "…through the use of folklores, proverbs riddles and songs, which convey moral lessons to the younger generation" (Adeghe 1993:118), Northern Nigerian women have suffered undue neglect and relegation. This denigration is further reinforced by men's dominance over women even in literary creativity. As Carolyn Kumah (2000:12) argues, "as a consequence of the male dominated literary tradition, many of the depictions of African women are reductive perpetuating popular myths of female subordination…" The patriarchal nature of the Northern Nigerian society coupled with strong Islamic bias makes the above assertion plausible. The confinement of women in *purdah* while encouraging the largely uneducated women in the rural areas "to perfect

their oral artistry in weaving entertaining episodes around serious moral lessons…" (Abba 1997:150) also shut them away from engaging in literary endeavour. However, in the urban areas, "an upsurge in the provision of education since the late 1970s has provided literacy for many married women. Increasing number of Hausa women are beneficiaries of Western education, moving through primary schools to universities; and they are now taking up careers in teaching, the civil service and the mass media (Abba 1997:149-150). Zaynab Alkali thus belongs to this category of women who have benefited from Western education and have in essence recognized their potential in creative writing and deployed it to the re-definition of the Northern Nigerian woman.

Today, Zaynab Alkali is not only a pioneering voice but also a formidable figure in female writing in English in Northern Nigeria. There are however a few others such as Esther Bali, Hauwa Ali and Stella Oyedepo, the playwright, in addition to the genre of popular romance in Hausa known as '*soyayya*' which began to flourish from the early nineties. Drawing a semblance with the Onitsha market fiction, this genre has quite popular following in Kano market because it essentially

> *portrays a fictional world dominated by what the writers have internalized from adapted sentimental Indian movies, Euro-American soap operas, local television programmes in English and Hausa, programmes on Radio Kaduna and Radio in Hausa and from reading the English language popular romance series of the Mills and Boon variety* (Abba *et al* 1997:2).

In these attempts however, not much has emerged in terms of profundity in the development of the novel in English by women in Northern Nigeria. Such women writers as Hauwa Ali, Hauwa Gwaram, Talatu Wada Ahmed, Hadiza Sidi Aliyu and Karima

Abdu Dawakin Tofa just to mention a few, are yet to make their mark in Nigerian mainstream of literary discourse because their works are predominantly in Hausa.

This is why Zaynab Alkali's emergence in 1984 marks a significant entry into the literary history of Nigeria. Her prominence is derived from her aptness in redefining the female essence in Northern Nigeria by breaking through the bounds of marginalization and restriction. In the short span within which Alkali has written, literary commentators and critics recognized her creative power; which derives from the directness of her writing. However, this unobtrusive appearance of her work gave way to an impassioned, engaging and provocative exploration of new concerns which had previously been highlighted only by male writers in Northern Nigeria. Today she is discussed alongside older African women writers as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Catherine Acholonu, Mariama Ba, Grace Ogot and Nawal El Saadawi.

Although her writing, like those of other African women writers, signify the intricacies of a trado-religious and patriarchal society, it nonetheless illuminates the predicament of women in such a way that meaning is drawn in a society undergoing major transformations to modernity. Like Jane Austen, Alkali draws from the world around her, and her settings and characters revolve around familiar milieu. She does not create any elaborate or complex character but concentrates on mundane prejudices of men and women, the decision they have to make, and how these affect social relationships in the society. Indeed, Alkali adopts a realistic approach in her depiction of society especially because she narrows her focus on women and their experiences. For sure, Alkali focuses on women but it is difficult to exclusively read her as a feminist in the make of Western feminists or such African women writers as Nawal El Saadawi in

Woman At Point Zero (1983), Buchi Emecheta in *Destination Biafra* (1981) or Mariama Ba in *So long A Letter* (1981) who in one way or the other express a radical feminist tendency.

Although she expresses the ideal that … "signify self-reliance, economic independence, healthy ambition, positive aggression and moral upliftment" (Theodora A. Ezeigho 1990: 144), her perception of the woman's quest for progress operates at a different level. Unlike feminist propagandists, she believes in what she calls 'self – actualization' which she explains in these words:

> *...some women will take self-actualization to mean equality with men. I am always fighting against that. When you say men and women are equal, what do you mean by equality? We are not the same. The man and the woman are two different entities and if you are talking equality what is the basis for comparison....?* (Alkali, Interview: *Leadership* 2004:39).

In an interview with *Quality* Magazine of August 25th, 1988 Alkali states that many women "use the feminist movement to get back at men. So you have this feminist thing which is one big cover where people give their own interpretations to what it is. Up till now, nobody has come up with a definite definition of what feminist movement is. So they are all deceptive". These views indicate the thrust of her works but not with the feminist radicalism that abhors marriage and strives for equality in gender status by usurping the role of men. She argues that

> *... I don't want to be a man. I don't want to take up the role of a man and I wouldn't want a man to take up my role because I am a woman but I want my rights to be granted to me in the sense that there are certain rights that are derived women, and the right to live as a human being* ...(Alkali, Interview: *Leadership* 2004:39).

Alkali is therefore an African feminist who accommodates the complementarity between men and the women within society. This is why she advocates for women's empowerment through education. Although she sees education as a major source of uplifting the woman, Alkali does not reject the values of heterosexual relationship established in marriage and the fulfillment derived from motherhood.

Central to the works of Zaynab Alkali therefore is the African woman, particularly the Northern Nigerian woman whose experiences she attempts to re-inscribe and construct in a more positive manner. Alkali demonstrates an astuteness in the delineation of her cultural space from within which she creates her female characters. In other words, her delicate balancing of options is so effective that cultural and traditional values are not negated. Rather than portray characters who are deeply submerged in the radical feminist tendency, they are drawn

> *as having substantially moved beyond 'consciousness' – raising. These characters therefore seek to occupy shifting subjects positions that do/would enable them to (re) construct subjectivity through intersecting discourses of identity, sexuality and difference* (Nfah–Abbenyi: 1997: 151).

The essence of this is the erasure of the stereotypical inscriptive construction of women as mistresses, wives, mothers or slaves. Alkali's women are imbued with strong determination to contest these roles which defines them as 'Others'. It is to Alkali's credit that in her treatment of female characters like Li in *The Stillborn* and Nana Ai in The *Virtuous woman* she exhibits a naturalness which portrays them without abnormal beauty, virtue, or feminine accomplishment. They are however, like Jane Austin's female characters, imbued with what Christopher Gillie (1974: 95) calls "candour of heart",

"balance of judgment" and "sensibility to truthfulness of feeling." Gillie's comments define the underlying vision of Alkali's *The stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman.*

Published in 1984, *The Stillborn* marked a major turning point in the area of female writing in English in Northern Nigeria. Much more than being a major precursor in the genre of the novel, Alkali's major significance is in her projection of the female character in search of liberty and recognition but accommodating of the other sex. In this way, she creates the image of a woman who, in spite of the ascribed stereotypical role imposed on her by patriarchal and religious system, works towards self-development and fulfillment. In molding this kind of womanhood, Alkali steers a middle course between the demands of tradition and the exigencies of modernity. While presenting the woman's world of entrapment, unhappiness and restrictions, she adopts an 'accommodationist' position in portraying gender relations. Within these restrictive pattern of life, Alkali creates characters who dream and struggle to find fulfillment, a fulfillment which is never fully satisfying without the marriage component of life.

In *The Stillborn*, the central character Li, struggles to shrug off the constraints of traditional and patriarchal hegemony. In this way, Li acquires prominence and her life – story "acts as a gravitational force pulling the complex threads of the societal relationships together" (Kassam 1979:120). Indeed, Li's actions and experiences flesh out meaning in the story, revolving as they do, around the question of love, hope, betrayal, disillusionment, generational conflict and moral degeneration.

Central to *The Stillborn* then is the experience of a woman whose aspirations remain unfulfilled but who, within the changes in her life redefines her priorities. The experiences of the woman in this story thus give meaning and significance to the title of

the story. All the female characters, Li Awa and Faku around whom Alkali weaves the story are drawn to their individual dreams of marrying men of their choices and living wonderful lives. Li dreams of a perfect marriage with Habu Adams in the city after both of them would have qualified as a medical doctor and a grade one teacher respectively. Faku dreams of happiness as Garba's wife in the city while Awa is inspired by the prospects of good life with Dan Fiama. In the end, however, betrayals, frustrations and despair become the reality. As Li tells Shuwa her daughter in a dream, "'it is well to dream, child'…. But it is also important to remember that like babies, dreams are conceived but not all dreams are born alive. Some are aborted others are stillborn'" (*TSB*, p.104). In other words the dreams of these three women hung delicately, like the life of a foetus, on the threats of abortion or stillbirth. Kassam, (1997:120) argues that "in spite of having different personalities, lifestyles and ambitions, all three young women have their dreams shattered by the restrictive gender codes permeating society."

The vortex of the unfulfilled dreams led to a major transformation in the women. Of course earlier, traces of this change had begun to manifest in the heroine, Li, who on completion of her primary education at thirteen comes back to the village with a new consciousness of things which tended to repress her:

> *After a few weeks at home, Li began to find the atmosphere in her father's compound* ***suffocating****. She felt* ***trapped*** *and* ***unhappy****. Already, she missed the kind of life she had lived at the primary boarding school,* ***free*** *and* ***gay****. At home the little ones were too young to understand the* ***restrictions*** *and the older ones too dull to react* (*TSB*, p.3)

From the onset, therefore, Li provides a lead to what to expect as she tells Awa her sister, when the latter challenges her of talking like a heathen. "I'd be much happier. At least I could go ease myself without having someone breathing down my neck demanding to

know where I have been to" (*TSB*, p.3). At this point Li appears as a sharp contrast to her sister, Awa, who does not possess the same boisterous spirit and who lacks the courage to defy some of their father's repressiveness. Unlike Awa, Li is not prepared to be 'caged' or confined within a patriarchal structure that would inhibit her quest for freedom. This is the area of potential confrontation between Baba and his children. After all, the restiveness of Baba alienates him from his children. Here lies the difference between Kaka and Baba. Although Kaka the grandfather represents a fading generation and tradition, he connects more with Li than Baba. This relationship demonstrates that there is a certain level of generational conflict which Alkali subtly hints at, first, between Kaka and Baba and then between Baba and his children especially Sule and Li.

In Li, Bamikunle (1986:12) sees "the latest generation of Africans eager for a measure of social freedom", especially in her struggles to reconstruct an affirmative image by questioning some of the presumptions which silence the voice of the women. This is why in spite of Baba's overbearing and high-handed nature,

> *Li had the power to stir such emotions in him. He thought she was impudent, but it wasn't just this that worried him. It was something else. He hated to admit it even to himself, but there it was, those piercing eyes that stripped him naked and saw through his soul; assessing, judging and condemning him, weighing his strength against his weakness.* (*TSB*, p.9)

Imbued with this 'power' Li desires to express herself, but within the walls of tradition and patriarchy this was virtually impossible. In Li's thinking, the city with its liberal and cosmopolitan nature, would provide a better opportunity for self-expression.

However, within the village setting the search for this freedom takes Li to the dance. The dance thus assumes a metaphoric dimension as it becomes the avenue for

uninhibited self-expression. Through the dance, personal feelings are expressed and for Li, it becomes the means through which the path to her dreams would emerge, for it is here she meets Habu Adams, the man who was to alter the course of her life. The dance provides an escape for Li from a circumscribed life. As her relationship with Habu Adams grows and the prospect of living a life of fulfillment increases,

> *Li walked happily, her feet barely touching the ground .... She sang quietly to herself. Life was much more resting now. At least she could tolerate the situation at home better than before. The stolen moments with Habu made up for what she suffered at home* (*TSB* p.34).

The alluring pull of the city and the desire to experience its life by especially the women characters were so irresistible that they never thought about their implications. Much later betrayals and disillusionment reinvoke Garba's cryptic warning back in the village and how prophetic and instructive it was:

> *... there are a lot of things about the city I cannot talk about, simply because such things have no place in the village. But you are young and will soon go out into the world. Only then would you learn from time and experience. Right now you do not believe me, but it does not matter. Some day you will find out I was telling the truth* (*TSB* p.45).

Li, Faku and even Awa realized that the glitter of the city robs people of moral values, any sense of propriety and inhibits personal relationships. Li, for instance, suffers four years of an unconsummated marriage, her husband Habu Adams having gone to the city and lost in the ways of the world, an indication of what life in the city offers. Joining him later, she discovers there is another woman in his life because of which he maltreats her. Also, Faku's marriage to Garba turns out to be a nightmare. Initially, she never

really bothered or concerned herself about love or being Garba's only wife for as she thought:

> *'what was this love the rest were cracking their heads about? When a man cared for his family, fed and clothed them properly, what was it if it wasn't love? She would like to be Garba's only wife. What woman wouldn't? But if a man could afford to feed a dozen other wives, who was she to object? For her, polygamy wasn't the point at all. The point was that once she married, living alone with her mother was over. They would no longer have to work their fingers sore to feed themselves or mend the leaking roof, because someone else would be responsible.* (*TSB* p.46)

For Faku therefore, marriage was an escape route from poverty, insecurity and despair. As a result, she refuses to see beyond her wishes. Li had "… wished Faku would have nothing to do with this man with the shady background … perhaps … 'this is what Faku really wants, and as our people would say, "The body grows fat on what the heart desires" so may it be with her" (*TSB* pp.46-7). The ironic part of Faku's reality is that she conspicuously looses weight instead of gaining same in marriage, misery and trauma consumes her. As Li again observes "you used to be the fat one and I, the thin one' … what has happened? Are you happy, Faku? …. 'our people believe happiness shows itself in the flesh and the face of a person tells the story of their soul …'" (*TSB* p.79).

In Faku's misery, Alkali explores the intrigues and depravity of polygamous marriage and the fact that a woman who is unable to give birth to more children becomes an object of torment and humiliation by her husband and co-wife. In the end she opts out of the marriage and takes up the difficult option of prostitution, may be as a protest, but in the end redeems herself by training to become a social welfare worker in the city through the benevolence of a kind hearted woman.

Awa who is drawn towards tradition also suffers an equal degree of shattered dreams and hopes in the hands of Dan Fiama her husband. Not given to a boisterous and rebellious conduct like Li, she nevertheless experiences trauma and despair as "her husband has lost his head in the bottles" (*TSB* p.82). Dan Fiama, the once good natured fellow much loved by the village, abdicates his responsibilities and takes to drinking when his dream of becoming the village school principal fails to materialize and he is instead, made a classroom teacher. In spite of her pains, Awa struggles through the pain, she assumes the challenging role in the house, taking responsibility for "… the children and the old people at home…." (*TSB* p.87).

Having explored these predicaments of the women, Alkali depicts their quest for self-reliance and economic independence through education. Li, the pivotal force in this struggle, leads the way by standing against those things which have frustrated her in the society. According to Femi Abodunrin (1990:46), "Li represents the self-assertiveness of a neo-feminist consciousness in flagrant rebellion against the oppressive society which has nurtured and betrayed her". In an ironic twist, the betrayal becomes the major catalyst which propels Li, and transforms her perception about life generally, making her to no longer wait "for a man who cared nothing about her". (*TSB*, p.85). Rhetorically, Li poses the question "who says a husband makes for a guardian or a father" (p.85). Having convinced herself, of the falsity of this claim,

> *She had then vowed to go back into the world and make an independent life for herself. Dusting her class seven certificate, she had fled from the village, leaving her daughter behind ... she intended to be the most educated woman in the village and for miles around. Only then would she assume the role of the 'man of the house' in her father's compound.* (*TSB,* p.85).

Armed with determination, Li struggles to educate herself; refuses Habu's fresh pleas and wards off other suitors until she emerges as a successful teacher. At the funeral of their grandfather, Awa tells Li, "The mourners are outside waiting for you. You are the man of the house now" (*TSB*, p.101).

In spite of the success and accomplishments, Li still feels unfulfilled and empty; a feeling which induces a reverie in which she finds herself in conversation with her great granddaughter who is getting married. It is in this dream that she comes to terms with her life. In the end she makes the ultimate decision of joining her husband who is in the hospital with crushed legs and who seems to have "lost the will to live "(TSB/p.92). It is a mark of maturity and understanding on the part of Li. Earlier on, she argues that

> *'true, I lost my man to her and at first I was bitter, but gradually I learnt to accept my fate. She wasn't to blame. This is a game of life and we are all struggling to survive. The woman from the south is no exception'* (*TSB*, p.93).

It is this realization which prompts Awa to observe that "Li had no doubt, matured and in the process of maturing had become a better person with a finer soul" (p.94). This maturity which is the result of her experiences and struggles which informs Li's ultimate decision, a decision which critics like Omolola Ladele (1988:330) find discomfiting describing it as

> *an unfortunate twist of irony….at that point of emotional liberation, at the moment of triumph, Li prevaricates out of mere sentimentality and all her achievements indeed become STILLBORN! In the painful choice she makes, Li throws everything she had going for her away and in the ensuing penumbra she destroys the future of the unformed baby. Thus Li fails herself as well as the spirit of the future by* ***not pressing her positive potentials to materialization.***

Ladele's concern with Li's "not pressing her positive potentials to materialization" ignores the cultural context of the story and more fundamentally, its accommodationist ideological thrust. Reading *The Stillborn* from a radical feminist perspective leads to a misunderstanding of Alkali's 'accommodationist' philosophy in which heterosexual relationship built on marriage and complementary gender roles are central.

Although women experience one form of rejection and maltreatment or the other in the hands of their men, Alkali relates the plight to the poor socio-economic conditions in the village which pushes able-bodied young men and women into an alluring tempting life in the city. It is therefore in the context of this rural–urban drift that the effects of modernization and urbanization become significant factors in the collapse of hopes and dreams. As William Greenslade (1994:41) argues,

> *From the late 1870s the city was depicted as a 'vortex', a whirlpool' which remorsely sucked in the 'fresh – bodied' from the country. Using up their 'infusion of healthy life,' and inducing in them progressive and inevitable deterioration.*

Alkali's portrait subscribes to the views expressed above in the way her stories demonstrate the city's negative affect on her major characters. The city, with its own set of values, operates at a level totally at variance with the ways of the village. The glitter of the city and its pretentiousness robs people of their natural human essence because it is the site for the survival of the fittest. Herein lies the importance of Garba's initial comments about the city and his insistence that "Right now you do not believe me, but it does not matter. Someday you will find out I was telling the truth". Painfully Li realizes that the city "…destroys dreams" (*TSB*, p.94). Even Awa, the conservative one who waited in the village, "the village itself changed" (*TSB*, p.87). These changes were too

fast for people like Dan Fiama whose dreams were shattered and due to which he takes consolation in alcoholism.

Beyond locating the problems of the woman in terms of the unequal relationship between her and the man, Alkali probes deeper into the salient issues that rub off on these relationships. In the context of these problems and the effects of the city on individuals, Li realizes the futility of living without her husband. This realization is expressed in the metaphor of "another baby forming" which Li was determined "would not be stillborn" (*TSB*, p.105). This metaphor thus expresses the view that no person or individual is perfect "we are all lame'" (*TSB*, p.105). In essence, two imperfect individuals would have to learn to walk together side by side. This is the spirit that permeates the world of Alkali's creative works.

The stillborn revolves around both the journey and the dream motif. Almost all the characters are involved in one form of movement or dream. The movements and dreams are significant factors because they explain the concentration of Alkali's narrative on character portrayal at the expense of the landscape, the environment and the setting. Essentially the plot revolves around a series of movements. At the beginning Li, for instance, is depicted as coming back from school full of hopes but a little apprehensive of the restrictions at home. At the end, she resolves to return to her husband, this time much more experienced and conscious of the world around her. In a similar way, at the level of narration, Alkali offers glib glimpse of the experiences of the characters. The movements of the scenes are so sudden that time lapse between experiences is erased in such a way that the characters' experiences do not generate empathy. The experiences of characters

like Li, Awa, Faku and Sule come through a narrative which denies the reader the opportunity of involvement.

In a similar way, the dreams provide the structural foundations of the story as each of the prominent characters is engaged in one form of dream or another. The dreams assume a major significance in the understanding of the experiences of the characters and their attempts to readjust to new demands and challenges. Alkali's bid to explore various dimensions of the woman's problem in *The Stillborn* accounts for her reliance on the use of too many episodic scenes; the characters are equally too many and easily dispensable, and some like Mariama, the village gossip, hardly rise above the stock role. Like Omirima in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), Mariama tends to support the passive status of the woman as she says "… today's men have no pride. Sometimes I think our sons are just men for what they have got between their legs" (*TSB*, p.61)

Also, Alkali's presentation of characters is subjective in the sense that while she projects the female characters as mature, hard-working though neglected and suffering lot, the men are portrayed as spineless, cruel, unreliable and visionless. The only male character who narrowly rises above this categorization is the ancient one, Kaka. The rest from Baba, to Habu Adams, Garba, Dan Fiama and Sule, have hardly any credibility. Even Dan Fiama, the much loved fellow, suffers an enormous decline into a drunk. The men are hardly able to rise above their predicaments which Alkali tends to suggest as largely self – imposed.

In spite of these, *The Stillborn* explores the relationship between change and tradition against the background of urban encroachment. Within this contest between traditional and modernity, Alkali enunciates the choices and preferences that individual

make. Writing within a cultural environment dominated by stringent traditional mores, Tahir, Gimba and Alkali face the difficult tasks of challenging the status quo. All that has been done according to Abodunrin (1990:47) was to "have merely reproduced their own ideas, or even plain rationalizations, of a definite historical and cultural environment which brooks no kind of dissent against established feudal or petty-bourgeons values." The concern of Alkali or any northern Nigerian novelist however is not the outright rigidity of the establishments but the resilience and creativity of individuals as they negotiate a place within it and the encroachment of modernity.

The Virtuous Woman (1986), Alkali's second novel, broadens the perspective of her characters and the scope of their experiences in order to comment on socio-economic and political conditions in the Nigerian society. While still concerning itself with the predicaments of the woman, Alkali's novel exhudes a more confident and mature narrative competence. As in *The Stillborn* the interest is still on female education as a way of lifting-off the veil of suppression on woman. The deep moral seriousness which underlies *The Virtuous Woman*, accounts for Alkali's creation of a female character, Nana Ai with a great sense of maturity but without the cockiness or boisterousness of Li in *The Stillborn*. Through the experiences of Nana Ai, Alkali draws attention to the traditional cum patriarchal milieu which forms the background against which the world of the woman is defined.

Indeed, the image of the woman in this story is explored in metaphorical terms as embodying both psychological and physical disability. Nana Ai, illustrates these two levels of disability. In this traditional patriarchal society, female children already have a defined place beyond which they could not aspire. Being born female is therefore a major

disability which robs the woman of certain rights and privileges. Nana Ai muses after watching her grandfather, "'perhaps',...if I were a male, I would be a doctor also" (*TVW*, p.10). In essence the fact of being born a girl indicates that there are certain things which cannot be attempted.

At another level, Nana Ai's disability is expressed in her physical deformity "… caused by a paralysis in the left leg the result of polio at the age of six" (*TVW*, p.11). In spite of this apparent limitation, she still carries a cheerful disposition and maturity not found in her able bodied age-mates. It is from Nana Ai's gender and physique that Alkali explores the issues which affect the woman in a traditional society, and by extension provide an insight into other aspects of socio-political nature. For instance, there is a hint of the neglect which rural dwellers suffer due to government failure to provide social amenities such as good roads or portable water. "… Zuma, however, felt no impact of the government except when taxes were due "(*TVW*, p.2). Not only is the community neglected in terms of water supply, even the roads are in terrible conditions "… The roads were bad. A narrow dusty track was a common sight in those days; or where the roads were supposed to have been tarred, potholes and sharp edges made them more dangerous than the laterite ones" (*TVW*, p.39). These statements embody a subtle indictment of government whose failure to discharge its responsibilities to the people has been a source of deprivation, despair and sorrow.

Alkali also hints at the question of nepotism as shown in the action of the village chief who cannot understand why, even as a chief his daughters were not offered places in the famous Girls' college. He argues "… What business have the children of a common man like Boni (the father of the two privileged girls) in the college of the chief

where only the children of the rich, those of the royal blood, high ranking officials and politicians are taken?" (*TVW*, p.3). Today, this reality is replayed even more increasingly as the children and wards of the less privileged lose out in terms of access to education and job opportunities. All these are signs of the disequilibrium which creates inequality in the distribution of wealth, social status and privileges. Similar concerns have been explored by many African writers who are disillusioned with the political elite for failing to live up to the dreams of independence. Such work as Achebe's *A Man of the people* (1966), Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1965), Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), provide succinct details of the decay and corruption that characterize the newly independent African states. In *The Virtuous Woman*, this kind of satire is remarkable because it concerns characters who already suffer discrimination because of their gender. In this way, Alkali emphasizes the deeply rooted antagonism against the woman.

Another thorny issue explored in the novel, is the social cum cultural perceptions against children begotten outside wedlock and the stigmatization such children suffer. In Tahir's *The Last Imam* for instance, the Imam's sermon on bastards creates an intense conflict between the Imam and the establishment. In *The Virtuous Woman*, a little girl, Hajjo, is always the recipient of 'vulgar abuses' and is derogatively referred to as a product of a 'street affair' and therefore denied the warmth of a comfortable home. She lives in perpetual trauma and agony. In spite of her sensitiveness and 'sharp intellect' she was a lonely child, and like Margaret Cadmore in Bessie Head's *Maru* (1971) "no one ever embraced her for anything, …" (*TVW*, p.7). Hajjo was always treated unfairly since she never belonged to the class of the socially and culturally acceptable. To worsen

matters, her gender already condemns her to a lower strata of the society. If she were male, probably the level of 'acceptance' or 'accommodation' would have been different. Hajio grows through this pain and she comes to understand the meaning of the icy stares from her grandmother and the predicaments of her existence "…now she was almost sure she hadn't a home at all…" (*TVW*, p. 8).

Apart from depicting the negative impact of the 'bastard' on a child, Alkali also examines its trauma on the woman as the most affected recipient of this malady. Alkali suggests, it is often the woman who is at the receiving end. Added to this is the moral corruption perpetuated by men, especially in enticing and luring young school girls. However, in the character of Nana Ai, Alkali redefines the attitude of the woman by suggesting that self–worth and integrity are more important than any disabilities whether natural or man-made. Alkali therefore imbues Nana Ai with a great mind, candour, sensibility and a high degree of perceptiveness which attracts and dwarfs her other limitations. These qualities mark her out as a great personality and a truly virtuous woman on whom Alkali invests her dreams of an ideal woman a traditional society.

Both *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman* are connected in their portrayal of the woman struggle. In *The stillborn* Alkali works through the terrain of marriage. In *The Virtuous Woman* however, Alkali leaves the orbit of marriage and concentrates on the travails of young adolescent girls who equally experience many of the woman's woes. The two novels are similarly connected by the dream motif which provides the platform from which the worlds of both Li and Nana Ai are illuminated and reconstructed. At the beginning they both live in a world of dreams, each drawn to her individual expectations. Although their dreams are punctuated by the vagaries of their experiences, they are

actualized at the end. For Li, the act of reconciliation with her husband Habu Adams, actualizes her basic philosophy of harmony and interdependence. In Nana Ai's case, the essence of the woman is defined by virtues and self-pride. Although both of them experience drawbacks, their resilience underscores the centrality of respect and self-development through education. What emerges, as a final product of Alkali's reconstruction of the feminine gender is thus a woman whose power and liberation lies in the will to act and struggle.

Therefore, there is a sense in which Alkali's works demonstrate an ability to create a balance between culture and tradition while at the same time redefining the stereotypical image of the woman. The female characters in this text "come alive as speaking subjects and agents of change" (Nfah–Abbenyi, 1997:151). The positive direction of this change shows that women no longer plays subservient roles but are themselves prime actors who can take certain responsibilities without thinking of 'gender'. In this context, Kassam's (1997:118) summation on women writing in northern Nigeria is instructive. According to her,

> *The gender problematic in northern Nigeria revolves around the combination of physical seclusion and psychological marginalization, a situation made worse where the women are not educated. To an extent, this culturally specific double bind of patriarchy explains the dearth of written works from the northern areas. Behind the veil, however, lies an untapped source of female creativity.*

Indeed Alkali's works illustrate that the veil behind which the northern Nigerian woman's creative talent laid hidden has been lifted.

Alkalis ability to break through the bounds of traditional and religious barriers and to construct women who shake off these constraints makes her an invaluable referent in literary discourse in and outside Nigeria. Alkali offers a remarkable perspective in understanding the complexities of the role and position of the woman in an Islamic society. The women in Alkali's works are brought out in a much more forceful and pragmatic way than in Tahir's and Gimba's where women are depicted or circumscribed within stereotypical roles. On the contrary, Alkali projects them in an engaging manner as individuals with a capacity to determine the course of their own lives.

Although Alkali does not operate within the radical feminist ideology of such women writers as Mariama Ba or Nawal El Saadawi, she nonetheless creates women characters who posses the power to redefine their roles in society. She achieves this objective by blending the traditional values of respect and morality with the challenges of modernization.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study examines the historical factors and processes that have contributed to the late evolution of the novel in English in Northern Nigeria and thus accounts for its paucity within the larger corpus of the Nigerian novel. In this context, the study also evaluated the paradoxical role of Arab/Islamic or Euro/Christian influences in the formulation and enforcement of policies which denuded and suppressed the indigenous languages, cultures, values and creative potentials of the people in Northern Nigeria. However, the study demonstrates that this suppression privileged both the Arabic and English which became dominant languages of expression and communication over the indigenous languages. In other words, these two languages became major ideological weapons used by the invading forces to assert and maintain control over the natives by converting them from their traditional beliefs.

The development of this form of cultural domination went hand-in-hand with the power of the scripted word through which such indigenous languages as the Hausa had to be reduced to *Ajami*, a version of the Arabic script. Consequently, the oral tradition of the people such as the *tatsuniya* (tale), became increasingly neglected because the Malams who were the custodian of writing held the *tatsuniya* in contempt and strongly opposed it due to what they considered as its 'falsehood', 'untruth' and travesty. In the same breadth the invading Arab/British forces created the opportunities which encourage expression through the concepts, practice and literary traditions of Arabic or English. Contradictory as this may seem, the new culture of literacy expanded the scope of knowledge, offering in the process the opportunity for the development of literary

creativity and much later, the rise of nationalist consciousness. The evolution of the novel in English in Northern Nigeria is therefore contingent upon the influences and impact of these two major developments.

Although this study highlights the historical forces that contributed to the slow entrance of Northern Nigerian novelists of English expression into the mainstream tradition of the Nigerian novel, it also reveals that indeed, Northern Nigeria did produce quite a number of scholarly and literary materials written by some elites and Malams in Arabic before the emergence of Western education. To this extent, Northern Nigeria was already, a society with significant literate cum literary tradition before the development of these in other parts of Nigeria.

It is with regards to the attitude of Northern Nigerians towards Western education that contestations arise, especially over its nature, influence and essence. It has been argued that the resistance to Western education and its literary tradition emanate from the apathy and unwillingness of Northern establishment to accept Western education. However, this study discovered that the introduction of Western education in Northern Nigeria is much more complex phenomenon. This complexity is essentially derived from the attitude and policies of the British colonial administration. As revealed by such researchers as Tibendarana and Tukur, contrary to the taunted notion of resistance, Northern Nigerians were enthusiastic about Western education but were opposed to the monopoly of schools by Christian missionaries. In addition, the colonial leaders did not respond positively by opening more government-controlled schools which were requested for by the Northern establishment.

It should be noted that the initial head start which Arab/Islamic tradition had in the Northern part of Nigeria led to significant developments in terms of the entrenchment of Islam and its literary tradition. This entailed the integration of the culture and religion of the people into the Arabo-Islamic hegemony. Coupled with this, the ambiguity of Euro/Christian Western education and its concern with getting converts not only gave the Islamic tradition an additional boost but also accounted for the initial distrust and suspicion of the Euro/Christian tradition. However, these suspicion and initial hesitations could not have in any significant way prevented the British colonial office from introducing and sustaining an appropriate educational policy if it had so desired.

In essence, this study demonstrates that beyond the common assumption about the apathy of the North towards Western education, a combination of factors are responsible for the the late integration of Northern Nigerian into the mainstream of Western education and for the consequent paucity of the novel in English expression. Some of these factors include the overriding influence of Islam, the role of some Christian missionaries, the British colonial policy on education, the politics of publication etc. Given the distorted background of Western education in Northern Nigeria, the rise of the novel in English was also affected by the vexatious politics of publishing. Interestingly, from the inception of Heinemann African Writers series in the 1950's to date, no Northern Nigerian novelist has appeared under the title. It may never be known, what possibilities would have been opened for potential Northern Nigerian novelists if publishers like Heinemann had extended their commitment in promoting African writing to Northern Nigeria in the way it was done in the South. However, with the emergence of other publishing outlets owned by individuals and corporate bodies, both locally and

internationally, willing to publish many eager and younger writers, the story is today changing, as indicated by the number of new titles in circulation.

Despite the rather late start of the novel in English Northern Nigeria, the diverse influences of both the Arab/Islamic and Euro/Christian traditions have produced in the emergent novels, a multi-dimensional thematic thrust which cuts across political, socio-cultural and religious realms. In this regard, the novels that have been evaluated in this study have attempted to reconstruct the peculiar traditional and cultural influences which define the identity of Northern Nigeria as reflected in Ibrahim Tahir's *The Last Imam*, Abubakar Gimba's *Trail of Sacrifice*, *Sunset for a Mandnarin* and *Footprints*; and Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* and *The Virtuous Woman*.

Also, these novelists have significantly evaluated varying factors which have characterized the transformations of their societies. These changes have in the main, fragmented personal relationships and social cohesion, created generational crisis, and complicated the women question. Although these authors are primarily drawn to their immediate socio-cultural environment, their novels however transcend the narrow confines of Northern Nigeria because their thematic thrust and subject matter accommodated the wider socio-cultural and political situation of post-colonial Nigeria. The range and depth of their works are expansive enough to utilize both traditional and contemporary experiences in the signification of Nigeria's journey towards nationhood, its negotiation of space within a uni-polar world of knowledge, science, technology, democracy and globalization. In this respect, the Novel in English from Northern Nigeria has walked its way into the mainstream of Nigeria's literary discourse.

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