THE THEME OF HONOUR IN THE NOVELS OF ABUBAKAR GIMBA

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CERTIFICATION

This project titled **"The Theme of Honour in the Novels of Abubakar Gimba"** meets the regulations governing the award of Master of Arts degree of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project has been written by me and it is a record of my research work. To the best of my knowledge, it has not been presented in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated by quotation marks or indention and sources of information are specifically acknowledged.



Sept, 2000

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to God and to the evergreen memory of Joshua Tswanya, Nnabukka Tswanya, Joseph Tswanya, Rhoda Tswanya and Mamud Baba Kutigi, May your gentle souls rest in perfect peace, Amen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Abubakar Gimba is a novelist who through his writing seeks to re-invent the Nigerian dream. In each of his novel, he delves into the complex socio-political problems confronting Nigeria and blames the country's general state of underdevelopment on the moral weaknesses of its citizens. It is implied in Gimba's novels that if Nigerians want to actualize the dream of the founding fathers of their nation they must trod the path of Honour and morality in everything they do. This is theonly way they can build a prosperous, united and democratic Nigeria. This project is a critical appraisal of Gimba's passionate search for Honour and Morality in Nigeria as enunciated in his novels.

Chapter 1

1:00 Introdution

Abubakar Gimba, the current National President of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) is a man who has achieved very much within a relatively short period of time. He is a writer, novelist, banker and for thirteen (13) years, a career civil servant. He was at different periods, an executive director to the United Bank for Africa (UBA) and Union Bank (Nigeria) Plc. He was first person to be appointed Permanent Secretary to the Niger State Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning.

A popular philanthropist and co-founder of the "Concerned Foundation" (a philanthropic organisation) Gimba is gentle, shy and a soft-spoken person. He was born in 1952 at Nassarawa, a village located in the present Lapai Local Government area of Niger State. The village is not far from Gulu-Vatsa, the birth-place of Nigeria's foremost soldier-poet, the late General Mamman Jiya Vatsa.

Abubakar Gimba began his educational career at Nassarawa Junior Primary School in 1959. In 1963, he gained admission into the then Lapai Senior Primary School. Between 1965 and 1969, he was at the Government College Keffi. In 1970, Gimba joined the

pioneering students of the school of Basic Studies, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. After completing the one-year programme, he enrolled for a B.A. degree in economics. He completed the course in 1974. On completing the one-year compulsory National Youth Service Scheme, he joined the then Northwestern State Civil Service. In 1975, he transferred his service to the newly created Niger State. He was among the pioneering staff of the Niger State Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. In 1981, he was appointed its Permanent Secretary, a position he held until his disengagement in 1987.

1.2 His Mission as A Novelist

In Once Upon a Reed, a collection of essays, Gimba describes writing as advocacy. He compares the writer to an advocate. For a writer to be relevant, he or she must advocate for the promotion of the positive values in his society. A good writer should appreciate the weaknesses of his society, particularly, the leadership, as well as his own weaknesses.

> "The writer must hold the mirror to the larger society to take a more sobering look at itself. The writer must make the society acknowledge and appreciate that for every thieving, oppressive, arrogant, deceitful, visionless, pretentious, parochial, selfish and colorless leadership we ever had, we each have them in ourselves This the writer must do to be more relevant..."[1]

As a novelist with a serious mission, Gimba also sees himself as a teacher. He wants to teach and educate his people through his novels. The desire to teach, he tells Okome (1992:16[2] is his primary motivation as a writer. This too has influenced his language and style. His language is deliberately made simple so that he can get across to as many people as possible. As he puts it:

> I want to teach. I want a situation where somebody who has just graduated from the SS class, for instance, can pick my novel, read and understand. This informs, to a great extent, what I write and how I write...[3]

His target audience, according to him is not the intellectual community, particularly, the university. This is because people in the university, he feels, relish 'difficult' literature, the Soyinka type. As a writer, he is more concerned with content than with style. He is therefore, not happy with the general tendency in academic circles for people to go for works that are complex and difficult to comprehend. As he puts it:

> I do not write for those in University. I mean not the generality of those in the university. There is the tendency for instance for university people to think that literature ought to be difficult... perhaps, they think it is worthwhile looking closely at the style and they seem to think the more obscure a work is, the better it is...[4]

Literature, he feels is sharing with people one's feelings, and observations. His primary audience is the common man and the lowly. If the ordinary man about whom he writes could read and understand his novel(s), he would be quite satisfied.

Gimba's novels are his contribution to the on-going social discourse in Nigeria. Their primary concern is the moral conduct of Nigerians. In the process of appraising the moral conduct of Nigerians, he often takes a critical look at their social and political institutions. According to him:

> In order to bring out the level of morality in society, you have to take critical swipe at some political and social institutions. Morality is understood from such practical terms...[5]

Gimba's novels are mainly on contemporary Nigeria. He writes about events as they happen. His novels examine critically the social fabric of a nation in transition. The transition has been painful and full of many pitfalls. The worst casualty is the moral and spiritual conduct of Nigerians. Gimba captures vividly the near total and absolute moral degeneracy of the present day Nigeria. He deplores with bitter sarcasm, Nigerians lack of vision and sense of direction. He satirizes both the leadership and the followership. The recurring message in all his novels is simple and

clear: Nigerians' insatiable quest for material wealth is creating an undesirable and a questionable new Nigerian culture.

Gimba abhors the religious pretension and exhibitionism of many Nigerians. Many Nigerians, he posits, have reduced religion to a mere ritual. They go to the church and the mosque everyday only to fall back on those things the two religions have prohibited. This hypocritical attitude of many Nigerians to their nation's complex socio-political problems. As he tells Okome (1992:21):

> ... Religion as a way of life is a very total thing. Everything is governed by it, but religion as a ritual, the way I see it is habitual as the worshipper goes to a church or mosque, comes out hours later and falls back to doing those things prohibited by the religion which he pretends to follow. This is the cause of most of the conflagration that has beset us for a long time and this is likely to continue as long as we fail to realize the differences between religion as ritualized practice and as a way of life.[6]

1.3 The Influence of Islam on Gimba's Novels or Artistic Discourse

Religion occupies a prominent position in Gimba's artistic discourse. He is a writer who is obsessed with morality. The world according to him "ought to be governed by some morals - no matter what you call it.

Without it, I think a chaotic state will ensue. This may be in the form of religion or some accepted norms".[7]

This statement of Gimba is a pointer to the influence of religion, particularly, the Islamic religion on his worldview, his vision of man and his society. Although a Nupe man, Gimba's worldview as enunciated in his novels, is more influenced by Islam than by his native Nupe culture. This influence of Islam on his writing could be seen in his preoccupation with the theme of individual moral and spiritual conduct and its likely impact on the society.

The ideal Islamic community, the 'Ummah', is communal in nature. It is a society in which every believer is expected to be his brother's keeper. Every Muslim is also expected to submit himself to his creator and to be guided by the injunctions of Islam. These injunctions and other ethical codes are contained in the Hadith and the Quran. A good Muslim is also enjoined to do good deeds on earth.

Islam is both a religion and a way of life. The religion recognises certain things in the life of man. A good Muslim is expected to believe in God, His prophet and the transition from this physical/temporal world to the hereafter. The physical world is seen as an extension of the spiritual world. Man's duty on

earth is to secure for himself a place in paradise. This he could do by keeping to the tenets of his religion and devoting himself to God. Devotion implies personal piety and morality in the private and official conduct of man. Saddiqui (1977:2) puts it in this manner:

> Obedience to God is not confined to personal piety alone but extends to all spheres of personal, social, economic and international affairs. Each individual Muslim as well as the entire community of Muslims has the obligation to strive for the establishment of the moral laws of God on earth.[8]

In Islam, one is either for God or for the world. One is either morally good or morally bad. The profound impact of this worldview on Gimba's artistic works is easily visible. In his novels, there are essentially two types of characters: the just and the unjust, the morally good and the morally bad.

Gimba's pre-occupation with morality and other issues related to virtues, has been recognised by many of his critics. According to Abubakar in Okome (1992: 106):

> The creative works of Gimba are in general influenced by a powerful moral force which is subsumed in a worldview that is dominated by a powerful spiritual paradigm...[9]

Gimba is an advocate of moral transformation and positive change. Socio-political development, he

feels, can only take place in an environment with good moral conduct. He therefore expects every writer to be concerned with the moral behaviour of his people and to propagate positive moral values. As he puts it in Once Upon a Reed:

> Only good ideas, redeeming values and principles can guarantee for us a national development that will lift us to greatness. And only writers as teachers are best placed to propagate such ideas and values..[10]

In each of his novels, Gimba uses the moral conduct of his characters to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their socio-political institutions.

1.4 Gimba as a Novelist with a Liberal - Humanist Artistic Vision

As a novelist, Gimba claims not to subscribe to any ideology. Problems, he posits, cut across classes. He is concerned about the general welfare of man, his moral conduct, his attitude to religion, his relationship with others and how this could have impact positively or negatively on the general wellbeing of the society. According to him:

> I don't have a specific ideology. I admire a humane society, a just society, whatever ideological garb that one wears, problems cut across all classes.[11]

Despite this declaration, Gimba's quest in his novels for a humane, egalitarian and just society places him among writers with a liberal - humanist artistic vision. Like most liberal writers, Gimba is concerned with morality, justice, honour, peace, equity and equality. He is also concerned about the steady decline of those values, which he thinks are necessary if Nigeria is to become a developed nation. His primary goal is to rehumanise a dehumanised society through attitudinal change.

As a novelist, Gimba is convinced that the problems of Nigeria are due largely to the attitude of Nigerians to their work, to their religion and to their responsibilities. His pre-occupation with the moral attitude and the metaphysical aspect of his people's existence places him among writers with a liberal - humanist vision.

In the opinion of Ngugi (1981:75) most liberal writers are more concerned about the moral conduct of their characters than in the class composition of their society. Other visible features of liberal - humanism are the search for a humane society, a sympathetic portrayal of the ordinary man, the condemnation of social vices etc all these are easily visible in Gimba's novels.

1.5 The Marxist Literary Theory

Although as a novelist, Gimba is more inclined towards the liberal - humanist ideological paradigm, his novels shall be discussed in this thesis using the Marxist literary theory as an analytical method. The choice of Marxism as an analytical method is informed by two factors. There is a broad similarity between Gimba's search for a humane, egalitarian society and the objectives of Marxism. Like Marxism, Gimba is highly interested in the general wellbeing of every member of his society. This is the crucial point of convergence between the thematic focus of his novels and Marxism as an ideology. Furthermore, the peculiar historical experience of Nigeria, her integration into the world capitalist economic system and her division or stratification along class line suggest Marxism as a viable analytical tool for appraising creative works emanating from the country.

Marxism or dialectical materialism is a social theory, which seeks to study every human society by analysing its economic organisation. The theory was first propounded by Karl Marx, a German Philosopher. From the perspective of Marxism, the political, economic, social and religious outlook of any human society is determined by the nature of its economic organisation.

In dialectical materialism, the emphasis is on the way and manner the available human and non-human resources in a given society are harnessed, produced and distributed.

A society in which the means of production - capital and labour - are in the hands of a few people is called a capitalist society. In this type of society, private ownership of the means of production is encouraged. The primary motive of those who control the means of production is profit maximization.

Capitalist societies are structured in the form of a pyramid. At the apex of the pyramid are the capitalists, those, who control the productive resources of the society and by extension, the socio-political and economic institutions of the society. They also determine the ideological outlook of these institutions.

At the centre of the pyramid are the bureaucrats and technocrats. These are well-trained and skilled manpower. They are either self-employed or in the employment of those at the apex of the pyramid - the capitalists.

At the base of the pyramid are the urban poor, casual workers and labourers. People in this category are generally without any formal training. The conflict of interest between those who control the productive forces of the society and those in their

employment is usually the source of social discord and conflict in a capitalist society. The three classes have different goals. While those at the apex of the pyramid will always strive to maintain their privileged position the other two classes will likely struggle to improve their economic position. They can do this by struggling for salary/wage increase, upward mobility or by repudiating the existing economic arrangement.

The way these three classes will perceive their society and interpret its interest will also differ. Their perception of the society is largely conditioned by their economic interest. The privileged few, those at the apex of the pyramid will always emphasise honour, morality, law and order because this will guarantee their economic interest. While the majority who will see the economic order as oppressive and exploitative will always struggle for a change.

The worldview of a literary work is a reflection of its author's worldview. This in turn is conditioned by the author's economic position in his/her society. Marxist literary theor is an attempt to analyse a literary work from the economic organisation of its society vis-a-vis its author's economic or class position and his cognition and sympathy to one of the contending social groups in the society.

However, it should be noted that until he died,

Karl Marx never made any systematic inquiry into literature or what should be its role in a given human society. According to Amuta (1989:53) what is today considered as Marxist aesthetics is derived largely from a combination of the random jottings and observations of Marx and Engels on specific aspects of artistic creativity and extrapolations of thoughts from their key philosophical writings into matters of literature and art.

The central goal of socialist realism or Marxist aesthetics is to expose the contradictions in a given society by showing the defects in its economic organisation. Amuta (1989:53)[12] identifies the following as the broad features of socialist realism:

(a) A definite relationship (even if ambiguous) between literature/art and the material base defined in terms of the totality of the relations of production.

(b) The class basis of art and the progressive basis of proletariat art.

(c) Dialectical relationship between content and form.

(d) A glorification of realism as the most progressive form of artistic representation.

(e) A sympathetic portrayal of characters from among the oppressed.

(f) A sense of patriotism defined in terms of concern with the struggle for socialism.

(g) The use of simple language.

Ngugi in the preface of his book Writers in Politics (1981)[13] succintly articulates these features in the following manner:

> Literature cannot escape from the class power structures that shape our everyday life. Here a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it, his works reflect one or more aspects of the intense economic, political, cultural and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one or the other side in the battlefield: the side of the people or the side of those social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he or she cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics?

Attempt shall be made to answer Ngugi's question vis-a-vis the thematic focus of Gimba (i.e. his politics, if any) in the final chapter of this project.

1.6 Literature Review

This review shall begin by looking at some of the things Gimba says about his novels. The Trail of Sacrifice, his first published novel, according to him:

> Centred on the national service, which the Nigerian youth render their nation. I use that as the basis to say that there is a need for Nigerians to cultivate the habit of living together.[14]

His second (published) novel, Witnesses to Tears, is in his opinion:

> A tragic story that captures what happen (sic) almost on a daily basis in our lives. We make what we perceive to be right decisions, we misjudge people, thinking that we are judging them correctly.[15]

His third published novel, Innocent Victims, according to him:

> Focuses on the retirement of civil servant. It shows a lot of inter-play of politics in the service.[16]

Although Gimba's comments on his novels are useful guides as to his motivation as a novelist, there are other insightful comments on his novels by critics. The most in-depth review of Gimba's novels to date is contained in Ase, a journal of the University of Calabar Poetry club.[16] Apart from Okome's stimulating interview with Gimba, the journal also contains six informative articles on different aspects of Gimba's writing.

In his article titled: "That dangerous supplement: reading Abubakar Gimba's Witness (sic) to Tears[17] Harry Garuba draws attention to Gimba's use of contrast, similarity and dissimilarity between his characters in order to create meaning. Using the theory of deconstruction, Garuba points out how Gimba is able to create meaning by juxtaposing characters with different and conflicting qualities. For example:

Hussaina - Serah Bello

Anas - Lahab

Saahir - Sagiir

Although an interesting article on a crucial aspect of Gimba's discourse, the article is nearly marred by the wrong title ascribed to Witnesses to Tears and the wrong names ascribed to its characters. Hussaina is wrongly identified as Hussaini, Saahir as Sagiir.

Zafar Khan's "sensibility, rhetoric and the voice of vision in Abubakar Gimba's Trail of Sacrifice and Herman Melville's Moby Dick" is a comparative study of the two novels. In Khan's opinion, the two novels are products of similar artistic vision. They are both about man and his society. Khan describes the two novelists as "social critics".

Beyond the two novels, the article also gives an insight into the social background of Gimba and Melville. Both according to Khan, have a simple and humble background. Both of them at different periods worked for their respective governments. Khan concludes his article by asserting that:

> - although Gimba and Melville belong to two different continents, they dream of a tolerant, secular and peaceful society. both have a tragic and yet highly positive attitude to life and its problems.[18]

Closely following Khan's article is Okome's "the

monologic imagination of Abubakar Gimba's literature".[19] In this article, Okome posits that Gimba is a novelist who subordinates characterization to themes. Gimba, in his opinion, is 'more concerned with themes rather than characterization'. Although a scholarly piece, attributing Hussaina's unpleasant experiences to 'pure naivete' is to misread Gimba. Hussaina's unpleasant experiences (she lost her son, her husband and her sanity) cannot be attributed to her naivety. She and other innocent people like her could have been saved from their agonizing experiences if people like Lahab, her thieving husband, and his friend, Dr Sahiir, are morally upright like herself or her father, Mr Anas. Put in another form, an unjust and morally bankrupt society can only bring destruction to both the just and the unjust. Trust (naivete) cannot destroy a society, but corruption and greed can destroy any society, no matter how strong. This is the central theme of Gimba's Witnesses to Tears.

The fear of the unknown, its debilitating physical and psychological effect on man is the focus of Mowah's "The Dimension of Sacrifice: Abubakar Gimba's vision of order and dislocation". In this article, attempt is made to show the impact of fear on Gimba's characters. The article demonstrates how the fear of the unknown in Trail of Sacrifice and the known in

Innocent Victims is having negative impact on man's understanding of his social and physical environment. Whether man will take up the challenge to confront the socio-political problems of his society depends on his capacity to overcome fear in both its tangible and intangible form. Unfortunately, Gimba's characters tend to resign themselves to fate. This in Mowah's opinion is a serious flaw in Gimba's discourse. As he puts it:

> - the tragic flaw of characters is both psychological and physical. Psychological because characters' uncertainties result from their lack of control over the invisible forces which are unleashed upon them. And physical because the smiling faces of neigbors naturalises into unseen forces which wreck havoc on the innocent victims who expect direct intervention from Allah.[20]

In the opinion of Mowah, Gimba's characters should face the challenges of life instead of waiting for divine intervention. Austin Amaze Akpudu's "The Kinesthetic Imagination and the unpredictable thread in Gimba's Trail of Sacrifice and Witness (sic) to Tears.[21] is an incisive discourse on a common feature of Gimba's style - the use of sudden detour in the course of narrating an event. In the opinion of Akpudu, Gimba often succeeds in changing the course of narration because he adopts psychological sequencing instead of chronological sequencing.

The influence of religion, particularly, the Islamic religion is the major focus of Tanimu Abubakar's "The religious Paradigm in Gimba's Trail of Sacrifice".[22] According to Abubakar, Gimba's view of man and his social conduct is deeply rooted in religion. However, Abubakar cautions that Gimba should not be seen as a religious fundamentalist in the garb of an artist. Gimba's attitude to religion, according to him, is both liberal and moderate.

1.7 The Socio-Political Background to Gimba's Novels

The relationship (if any) between a literary text and its socio-political environment has always been a contentious issue. Members of the formalist school of literary criticism are of the opinion that a literary text should be studied as an independent entity without any undue recourse to what exists outside it. To the formalists, what is paramount is the content of the text - its style, form and other literary devices. They are more interested in the aesthetics of a text, the beauty of its language and how its author uses language (aptly) to 'defamiliarise' the 'familiar'.

However, there is another school of literary criticism, which opines that a work of art cannot be easily divorced from its immediate socio-political environment. It is the opinion of Marxist aesthetics

that a creative artist lives in a particular society at a particular point in time and is therefore likely to be influenced by the events happening around him. When a creative artist writes about 'daffodils' it is because they exist in his/her society and he or she could recognize them as flowers.

Marxist aesthetics therefore submits that one of the best ways to understand a literary text is to probe into the socio-political environment, which gives birth to it. The writer, through his text, is only a mediating agent between his novel(s) and an already existing social experience. What he or she does is to interpret or give cognition to the events happening in the society from his own perspective understanding of them.

In Africa, for example, there is a close affinity between literature and some crucial events that took place on the continent. During the colonial period, written African literature was effectively used in the fight against colonialism. It was also effectively used to counter the negative impressions created about Africa by the agents of colonialism. The poetry of Negritude is an attempt to debunk the image of Africa as a Dark Continent, a continent of an uncivilised people and Idol worshipers.

The renowned Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, for instance sees himself as a teacher. His primary

goal/aim of writing novels, particularly, the initial ones, Things Fall Apart and Arrow of God, according to him is to:

> ...teach my readers that their past - with all its imperfections - was not one long night of savagery from which the Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.[23]

After independence, the betrayal of the continent by its sons and daughters (the new messenger class as Ngugi describes them) became the main thematic focus of written African literature. In Africa, there is a visible linke between literature and the events happening on the continent. Written African literature often reflects the shifts and transformations taking place on the continent. As Ngugi in the preface to his book Homecoming (1972:xv) rightly observes: "Literature does not grow in a vacuum, it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by the social, political and economic forces in a particular society".[24]

Gimba's novels are about contemporary Nigeria. A brief history of Nigeria is therefore necessary for a proper grasp of the issues enunciated in them.

The country that is today known as Nigeria formally came into existence on 1st January,1914 when Sir Federick Lord Lugard signed into law the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern (British) colonial

protectorates into one administrative unit. The signing was done at Zungeru in present day Niger State.

By that single legal/administrative act, Lord Lugard lumped together many distinct ethnic groups and formerly autonomous nation states. The three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria are the Hausa in the North, the Yoruba in the southwest and the Igbo in the East. Other ethnic groups with a substantial number of people are the Nupe, the Ijaw, the Tiv, the Fulani and Kanuri.

Before their colonization, the Hausa and the Yoruba used to have a centralized and unified political system with the Sarki/Emir (in Hausa land) and the Oba (in Yoruba land) as the head of the political structure. The Ibo, prior to their colonization, never had a centralized political system like the Hausa or the Yoruba. Among the Ibo, the oldest man (Patriarch) in the society was usually recognised as the defacto head of the community.

Agriculture was the main occupation and vocation of many parts of Nigeria before their contact with the west. In addition to farming, people used to rear animals for domestic consumption. Trade, buying and selling was mostly through simple barter.

Social activities were more common during the dry seasons when there was less work on the farm. Formal

education, as it is known today hardly existed, except for a few Qur'anic schools. The young members of the community were made to imbibe the values, norms, customs, traditions and culture of their society through imitation, initiation and induction ceremonies.

The various nation-states were fairly self-sufficient. Inter-group marriages were rare. Contacts between the various ethnic groups were mostly through trade and occasional warfare.-

The colonization of these nation-states radically changed their socio-political, judicial and economic institutions. The institutions were modified to suit the economic interest(s) of imperial Britain.

For administrative convenience, the country was divided into districts and provinces. Political power was removed from the emirs/Obas (though they were allowed to exercise little power in their respective areas) to the provincial and district officers. The provicial/district officers were responsible for the maintenance of law and order in their district/province. They also collect taxes, levies and fines on behalf of the colonial government. Both the district officer and the provincial officer were directly responsible to the Governor-General, the symbolic representative of the Queen of England, in whose name/authority Nigeria was colonized.

The colonial period marked the gradual introduction of the public service into Nigeria. Government gradually assumed an impersonal form. Policies were carefully articulated, analyzed and processed in the form of memoranda. A hierarchical chain of command was introduced. Policies were articulated from the Governor-General to the District/Provincial officers and from them to the chiefs and their subjects.

Although disguised as a civilizing mission, the colonization of Nigeria (by Britain) was essentially an economic enterprise.

The economic interest(s) of Britain was made paramount over and above any other consideration. The economy became monetized and the pound sterling was introduced as the sole legal tender of the colony. People were forced to grow cash crops and big multinational companies such as the United Africa Company (UAC) were encouraged to carry out trading activities in the newly created colony. Roads and Railways were constructed to facilitate the evacuation of cash crops from the hinterland to the ports.

A crop of indigenous civil servants was trained through the various mission schools. The polarization of Nigeria along class lines also began during this period. At the apex of the society was the Governor-General, his district/provincial officers, the

missionaries and other white-men in the colony. Next to them were the Obas, Emirs, and other senior civil servants. At the bottom of the society, were people without any formal education. This polarization of Nigeria along class lines still exists today. At the top, controlling the political, judicial, religious and economic institutions are the senior military and civilian elite. Next to them are the bureaucrats and technocrats. At the bottom of the society are the peasants, the rural and urban poor.

Christianity and Islam are the two dominant religions in Nigeria. A large percentage of Nigerians are either Christians or Muslims. Islam and Christianity are the popular religions among the Nupes, Gimba's ethnic group. The Nupes are predominantly in Niger State. However, they could be found in states like Kwara, Kogi, Benue, and Kaduna. Many of them are occupying important political and administrative positions in Nigeria today because of their early contact with western education through missionary schools. Agriculture and animal husbandry, are the main occupations of the Nupe people. The Etsu (Emir) of Bida is the leader of the Nupe.

Like many ethnic groups, the Nupes have a rich tradition of oral literature. Story telling is a popular past time among the Nupe people. Most of the

stories are satirical and are usually aimed at correcting some perceived ills in the society. Story telling still exists in the rural parts of Nupe land. Story telling 'echi' in Nupe language is a sophisticated and complex art. The storyteller is free to criticise or satirise without mentioning directly the objective of his criticism. However, he should also have the craftsmanship to let the audience know the object of his satirical attack.

Among the Nupe people, story telling is both a past time and a socialisation process. Through the various stories being told, the young members of the society are gradually introducede to tradition, norms, values, customs and tradition of the society. The storyteller occupies a prominent position in the society. He is feared because he coulc satirize/criticize any person in the society and respected because he is a powerful moral force in the society. On the other hand, if the storyteller too is found wanting, the young girls of the village will ridicule him in their song(s) at the village square. As a Nupe man, the art of story telling is not something new to Gimba.

Furthermore, since Nigeria's independence from Britain in 1960, many writers from the Northern part of the country, (Shehu Shagari, Sokoto) Sa'adu Zungur (Bauchi), Abubakar Imam (Katsina) had at different

periods discussed in their poems, prose fictions and short stories (mostly in the Hausa language) the problems of a nation in transition. Sa'adu Zungur, poet - politician criticises in his poems, the moral conduct of many Nigerians, their intolerance and bigotry, while extolling virtues such as honour, piety and honesty. As a writer from the north, Gimba may be building on the tradition which gave birth to the Sokoto Jihad, the poetry of Sa'adu Zungur or the prose fictions of Dr Abubakar Imam.

Chapter 2

The struggle for honour in Gimba's novels echoes the enshrinement of honesty, morality and justice in man's private and official life. Gimba's novels delve into the complex problems of Nigeria in order to juxtapose the oppressive reality with the paradigm of an ideal and egalitarian society - a society that is devoid of corruption and other negative national attributes which are militating against the socio-political development of Nigeria.

In Gimba's novels, the search for the solution(s) to Nigeria's seemingly intractable socio-political problems is woven around the actions and utterances of his protagonists. There exist in each of his novels, a morally outstanding character whose personal conduct both in private and in public, is worth emulating. His heroes and heroines are men and women of transparent honesty and good character traits.

Notable among his central characters are Sadiku, (Trail of Sacrifice) Zahrah (Sacred Apples), Hamzah (Sunset for a Mandarin), Hajj Faruk Kolo (Innocent Victims), Hussaina and Jibran (Foot Prints). These are Gimba's protagonists. It is through their individual experiences that he mirrors his country/ Nigeria, and comments on its complex socio-political problems.

The socio-political problems, which equip the individual character blossom in an environment dominated by greed, injustice, falsehood and above all, man's abandonment of those social values that could have impact positively on him and his society.

This explains why the reactions of the characters to the predicament of their society are also similar. The philosophical outlook of Sadiku in Trail of Sacrifice is not radically different from that of Hussaina or Jibran in Footprints.

Religion plays an important role in the life of Gimba's protagonists. Their private and official conduct is often guided by the moral/ethical code of their religion - Islam. Each of them adheres strictly to the basic tenets of Islam. Each lives a frugal and Spartan life - a life that is devoid of extreme materialism, greed and avarice.

But most importantly, each of them attaches great importance to the way and manner the society (in which he or she lives) perceives him or her. Individually, they will go to any extent to protect their personal image and reputation before the society. None of them will like his or her reputation to be tarnished by any act of commission or omission. Hence each of them avoids doing anything that may be considered detrimental

to the general well being of his society.

However, there are variations in the way and manner Gimba depicts his society in his novels. The fictional world of Trail of Sacrifice and Footprints is dominated by youths that are mostly students, undergraduates and teachers. Witnesses to Tears and Sacred Apples concentrate mostly on the experiences of women in contemporary Nigeria, while the civil service and its weaknesses take the centre stage in Innocent Victims and Sunset for a Mandarin.

Gimba's first published novel, Trail of Sacrifice, (1985)[25] is set in Kokania, a fictional country, whose horrifying images of corruption and destitution is comparable to nigeria of the 20th century. Like Nigeria, Kokania is a richly endowed country. The country's potential for development are unlimited. It has a large expanse of fertile land, abundant mineral resources and a regular rainfall. The population of Kokania is also fairly large.

However, the commonest features of Kokania are hunger, poverty and frustration. Like most countries of Africa, centrifugal forces are very active in Kokania. It is a country in which man has abandoned his responsibility to himself and to his society.

Gimba mirrors the Kokania society through Sadiku, his alter ego. The novel begins with the preparation

of Sadiku a graduate of the University of Pondo, preparing for the one-year compulsory National Youth Service. The National objectives fulfilment brigade (N.F.U.B) is a fictional version of Nigeria's N.Y.S.C. which was introduced by the Gowon regime in 1973 amidst protests by university students.

Through Sadiku's voyage, Gimba reveals the rotten nature of the Kokania society. Corruption is the most pervasive feature of Kokania. In this country, people do things in anticipation of favour. According to Sadiku:

> ... In this country today, nobody does anything that will not be of direct gains to him ... sacrifice is dying. People are selling their entire manhood in pursuit of self. Honour for the larger society is dead... p.193

Selfishness and extreme materialism are very common in Kokania. The collective interest of the society is often subordinated to the interest of the few powerful members of the society. In the 'rat race' to become rich no body cares about the collective interest of the society. Sadiku laments this in the following manner:

> ... our commitment to self is taking a dangerous direction. Self adoration is on the ascent everybody want to make it to the top, no matter how, societal interest is very secondary, if at all considered. p.193

Sadiku could as well be talking about contemporary

Nigeria. In Kokania, as in many neo-colonial countries of Africa, primitive accumulation of wealth through outright stealing or misappropriation of public resources is the vogue. The embezzlement of public funds is tacitly encouraged by both the judicial, religious and political institutions. From the top to the bottom, the desire to become rich (by any means) dominates the life of an average Kokanian citizen. Positive values, which could galvanise the society to greater heights are either undermined or discouraged. Speaking further, Sadiku says:

> Every day, one sees movement towards the hardening of conscience, with respect to values that make society human and humane. Gradual death of conscience. Only money matters. Callous materialism from the bottom to the top. p.193-4

Disappointed by the behaviour of his people, Sadiku compares them to animals. Through their individual and collective greed, Sadiku suddenly discovers that Man:

> Could be so despicable
> displaying such baseness
> that could send the animal
> Kingdom agape with surprise. p.204

The abuse of position is more common among the elite. The swearing-in-ceremony of the National objectives fulfilment Brigade (N.O.F.B) is postponed because it coincides with the birthday of the military administrator of Kumaga State. The next day, when he

turns-up for the ceremony, his Excellency arrives fifteen minutes behind schedule. This subordination of official responsibility to personal interest is very common to Kokania.

The swearing-in-ceremony is reduced to a hollow ritual, a mere formality that is devoid of any meaning. The chief judge of Kumaga state who administers the oath, the special guest of honour (the military administrator of Kumaga State) those taking the oath (members of the National objectives fulfilment brigade) never paid any attention to its import or significance. The oath taking is viewed as another meaningless ritual, a formality that must be performed.

In spite of the oaths they take, Kokania citizens often use their official position to defraud the state. Stealing from the public treasury, according to Dan Sepopa, the principal of Mwene Redemption High School, is made easier if one is properly 'connected'. Dan Sepopa is alluding to the arrangement whereby junior clerks will steal from the state, share the proceeds with a senior officer and in return, get protection. This is the genesis of god-fatherism in the Kokania society. This negative development is in the opinion of Sadiku, a direct threat to the survival of the country. The few people, who are willing to remain upright, often lose their lives in questionable

circumstances. For example, the determination of Dan Sepopa not to pay a contractor who did a poor job while constructing the science laboratory for his school, is reversed by the officials of the state ministry of education at Nayiba, the capital city of Kumaya State.

Although they pretend to be religious or God-fearing, the citizens of Kokania hardly adhere to the tenets of their religion. They live a life that is radically different from the injunctions of their religion.

However, in Sadiku's opinion, all is not lost. Even if Kokania is moving in the wrong direction, it can still be rescued from total destruction. He anchors his hope on the existence of people like Makanjira, graduate of the University of Dualcity.

Sadiku sees Makanjira as one of those who are conscious of the decaying nature of the Kokania society and are willing to play the role of 'messiahs'. He is convinced that there is a messianic trait in every one. What is lacking is the courage and the determination to face the challenges of life. As he puts it:

> 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. p.147

Sadiku's optimism in individuals as messiahs

reflects Gimba's belief in the concept of 'individual heroism'. Makanjira could be speaking for Gimba when he tells Sadiku that the Kokania society needs people like him:

> we need people with your type of interest. This country certainly does. People who do things for honour and glory. Not for greed and promotion of self. p.192.

Sadiku, compared to others, is the only beacon of hope in the corruption-ridden society of Kokania. Sadiku's puritanical attitude to life is influenced by his religion, Islam. Under its influence, Sadiku adopts a strict moral code in his private and official life. Like most Muslims, Sadiku is convinced that every human sould shall account for its deeds in this temporal world on the last day of judgement. Those who are found wanting will be sent to Hell, while those who are morally good will inherit paradise. The fear of disappointing his creator and the subsequent damnation in hell informs Sadiku's populist approach to issues.

He attributes the weaknesses of his society to the moral weakness of his people. He is also convinced that only a moral reformation of its citizens can save Kokania from its present aimless drift.

Trail of Sacrifice is a social commentary on 20th century Nigeria by a writer who, despite his privileged

position, is conscious of the social deprivations existing in his country. It is also an indictment of Nigerians for failing to challenge their exploitation and oppression.

Footprints (1998)[26] Gimba's sixth (published) novel is dedicated to "those who have the courage and calmness to live with contrary view points, the humility and honesty to admit that their cherished point of view doesn't necessarily represent an absolute truth and the wisdom to defer to reason". This dedication captures the mood of the novel and the circumstances that gave birth to it.

Footprints is about conflict of ideas, the evils of dictatorship, the weaknesses of third world Democracies and the consequences of irresponsible leadership at both micro and macro levels. It is also an indictment of Nigerians' seeming indifference to the plight of their country.

The novel is dominated by stock phrases or expressions in contemporary Nigeria's political discourse. Phrases such as hidden agenda (p.92), corruption (p.169) accountability (p.186) strike (p.210) permeate the entire novel. The novel is a depiction of the social dislocations, which are becoming the permanent features of contemporary Nigeria. The novel depicts the painful failure of Nigeria in social and political engineering.

The role of each sub-sector in causing this painful failure is assessed.

The novel is set in a fictional country called Songhai. The image of Songhai in this novel is that of a country in perpetual quest - a quest for an elusive stable socio-political order. Like Kokania, Songhai is bedevilled by social dislocations manifested in strikes, boycotts, military coups, detention without trial, armed robbery, shortage of essential commodities, frequent power failure, riots, individual and collective frustration.

Through the debates between Jibran a retired trade unionist, his wife, Nashaa, their daughter, Farah, her husband, Basil, his friends, George, Imaad and Haytham, Gimba gives an insight into the social composition of Songhai and its intractable socio-problems.

The novel begins with the contest for supremacy between members of the National house of assembly and the president. The house requests the president to present a balanced (National) budget within one year. The president in return accuses the house of acting in bad faith and beyond its constitutional powers. The face-off between the two political institutions exacerbates the already existing tension in the country. The country becomes polarised. People go on strike

either in support of the President or the National Assembly. There is a complete break down of law and order. As should be expected, the military exploits this situation and dissolves the entire cabinet.

The return of the military to the centre stage of their nation's politics occasioned by the failure of the civilian regike is the starting point of Jibran's debates with his daughter and her friends. As trade unionists, Teachers, students and civil servants, they belong to the enlightened segments of the Songhai society. They are in a position to give an honest appraisal of the country and its problems.

In the opinion of Jibran the current military intervention is caused by politicians, who engage in election rigging and electoral malpractice. The sins of the politicians in his opinion include "dirty campaign utterances, corruption, physical attack on opponents and threats of assassinations". p. 99.

His daughter, Farah, concurs with him. The politicians, she argues, have reduced politics to a commercial venture. They see it as an investment from which they must re-coup huge profit. She describes politics as a veritable goldmine. No aspect of life in Songhai is free from the corruptive influence of the politicians. Corruption is not restricted to the political arena alone. It pervades every strata of

the society. Jibran painfully admits this when he proclaims that he could not think of "any place in this country where corruption in one form or another has not taken over like a stubborn octopus" (p.169).

In Songhai, corruption has become a hydra-headed monster. The more efforts are made to minimize or eliminate it, the stronger it becomes. Even the ordinary traders in the market, simple folks from whom one would expect a minimum degree of honesty are corrupt. They swear on the Bible and the Quran to justify the inflated prices they put on their wares.

Haliyfah, Jibran's youngest son, is disgusted by the behaviour of the traders who use God to justify the inflated prices of their goods. He is amazed by the way they invoke "Allah's" name even when they are lying.

In some (human) societies, there are institutions, which usually serve as the conscience of the society. Among them are the critical press, the military, youths (students) and the vocal intellectual/academic community. Unfortunately, these institutions are also found wanting in Footprints. They are as corrupt as the other segments of the Songhai society.

The educational system, particularly, the schools, which could have equipped the young for a nobler role in the future, are corrupt. The academic calendar is often disrupted through strikes and riots. The on-going demonstration by the entire students of Songhai and the

lecture boycott by their lecturers (over wage increases and poor working conditions) is reminiscent of Nigeria's experience in the recent past.

On the other hand, the male teachers often intimidate and coerce their female students to have sexual relationship with them. Those who refuse to cooperate are failed and frustrated out of the system. This is the shocking picture of the academic community Haliyfah receives on reporting to his new school. The teachers, he is told, fight their male students over girl friends. Their teacher - boy friends, reward cooperative female students with inflated marks. There are even instances where cooperative female students pass examinations they never sat for or attempted. p.87.

The press, usually considered as the watchdog of the society, is in the opinion of Nashaa, a mere propaganda tool in the hands of their proprietors. She condemns the Songhai press for kow-towing to their owners and for publishing jaundiced news.

Although, the most selfless and honest individuals are in the civil service. Jibran still considers the institution as corrupt. The few honest ones still in the service are rendered voiceless by the corrupt majority. Civil servants in Songhai no longer consider their work as a sacred responsibility. Rather, they see their positions as opportunities for them to plunder

the state. Thus, the civil service, instead of being a facilitator of development, has become an albatross around the neck of the society.

Jibran dismisses the ongoing students' strike as misguided and ill-motivated. The students, in his opinion are misled by die-hard ideologues and extremists. He opines that if every segment of Songhai-butchers, traders - were to go on strike, the entire country would become chaotic.

George indicts every citizen on Songhai for the painful political failure of his country. The leadership and the followership are in his opinion equally guilty. He criticizes the general tendency to look for scapegoats - the general feeling that the leaders are solely responsible for the socio-political problems of Songhai. Each citizen, he feels, should accept his own little contribution(s) to the complex social problems facing the country.

Footprints is about post second republic Nigeria. It depicts the general feeling of despondency, frustration and disillusionment, which characterizes Nigeria from 1983 to 1993. The political landscape of Footprints is very similar to that of Nigeria after the collapse of its second republic. There are striking similarities between the events in this novel and some of the crucial events that took place in Nigeria since the military seized power in 1983.

The novel depicts vividly Nigeria's recent political rigmarole in the name of transition to civil rule, the failure of the military to mid-wife a democratic system of government and the frustrating search for an alternative in diarchy. The novel also highlights the inherent defects of dictatorship. People are arrested and detained without trial, the leadership is not accountable to anyone and the country is left drift aimlessly.

In Fpotprints, Gimba gives a clear image of Songhai. Songhai, like Nigeria, is a nation with conflicting and contending interests. Most of these interests are self-serving and parochial. The country is highly divided along ethnic, tribal and religious lines. National interests are often subordinated to group interest. Songhai and by extension, Nigeria, is in dire need of change. A change in the attitude of the citizens to their country. A change in their moral, spiritual, personal and official conduct, such a change could be championed by a visionary leader, an individual of good social standing. As in Trail of Sacrifice, Gimba reechoes the idea of individual "messiah" in this novel. According to Farah:

> Some one has to have the moral courage to check the excesses of little tyrants. And there are too many of them around. p.145.

Every citizen of Songhai has a role to play in salvaging

the country. Each is expected to discharge his or her responsibility with honesty and sincerity:

> As a husband as a wife, a big brother, a teacher, we do exercise (sic) some control on the lives of others. If in our little ways, we are bound by honesty, sacrifice, truth, justice and patience, critics won't have to shout themselves hoarse over leadership inadequacies. p.285.

The novel begins as an inquiry into the type of legacies, "footprints", the present generation of Songhai citizens intend to bequeath future generations and expectedly ends on a strong moral note. The metaphor of the shepherd sums up Gimba's moral thesis in this novel:

> Everyone of you is a Shepherd and each of you shall be asked about his flock... no one is left out: the farmer, the trader, the telephone operator, the electricity meter reader, the labour leader, the doctor, the soldier, the police officer, the politician, the trader, the student, the father, the contractor all... p.285

The setting of the novel in Songhai has a serious artistic and thematic import. Songhai in the past was a popular African Kingdom. It was a Kingdom that was ruled by great leaders such as Askia Mohammed, the great. Its fame and popularity went far and wide. But due to some internal problems, the kingdom declined into oblivion. Contemporary Nigeria is comparable to Songhai. It is a great country whose fame is gradually declining. Gimba's challenge to every Nigerian is not to allow Nigeria become another Songhai. Nigerians should not

bequeath to their future generations, the "footprints" of social crises, ethnic mistrust, religious intolerance, corruption, erratic electricity supply, empty gas stations, shortages of essential commodities, etc. They should leave behind the "footprints" of a democratic society, peaceful coexistence, and respect for each other, trust and honesty.

In Witnesses to Tears (1986)[27] Gimba mirrors his society through the marital experience of Hussaina. The novel is a tragic account of the total destruction of a pious and honest family - the family of Mr Al-Amin Anas. The death of Hussaina, the heroine of the novel and her only son, little Sagiir, is both painful and tragic.

To date, Witnesses to Tears, is Gimba's most emotion-evoking novel. The novel is an account of the consequences of man's greed and insatiable crave for wealth.

In his quest to become rich, Lahab unconsciously destroys himself and his family. The wages of man's abandonment of his responsibility to himself, his family and the larger society is, in this novel, death. Death in both its physical and metaphorical sense dominates this novel.

Witnesses to Tears is about the death of man, the death of his positive values, the death os his society, the death of his future generation, the death of his

conscience and above all, the death of all the regulatory institutions in his society. The atmosphere of this novel is grim, cheerless and gloomy. It has not happiness, and where it occurs, it is usually temporary and ephemeral.

Apart from the physical death of honest people like Mr Al-Amin Anas, his daughter, Hussaina and grandchild, Sagiir, the socio-political institutions, which should have served, as checks on man's excesses are dead. The religious institutions, which should regulate his moral/ spiritual conduct, are also dead. They have become part of the corrupt organs of the society.

In Witnesses to Tears, Gimba uses the contrast between his characters to create the image of an ideal citizen. The ideal citizen should be a person of outstanding moral character. He or she must be honest, pious and God-fearing. One example of such a character is Mr Anas. Contrasted with him are Lahab, the physically bewitching (but morally corrupt) Vice-Principal of Cabral High School and his friend, Dr Shril Saahir, an expert in occultism and voodooism.

Except for differences in the names of the characters and setting, the fictional world of Witnesses to Tears is very similar to that of Gimba's other novels. Greed, avarice and man's inhumanity to man are the easily identifiable features of Witnesses to Tears.

The image of man in this novel is morally disgusting. Using Dr Saahir, Gimba depicts man as a greedy being, a clallous killer and an efficient murderer. The struggle for the enthronement of peace, justice and other positive values in this novel is at two levels: the personal level and the institutional level.

At the personal level, the aim is to ensure man's good social conduct as exemplified by the family of Mr Al-Amin Anas. It is a family that attaches great importance to its name and social standing in the society. A good name according to Hussaina is:

> Identity, honour earned and therefore a deserved pride. A whole personality that is greater than you. This is what you have in a name. p.23.

In social disposition, Hussaina is like her father. Throughout her three-year training program at the famous Albert Lithuli Memorial College, no one, including her teachers, could accuse her of any act of impropriety.

At his working place, Mr Anas is an exemplary character. He is among the few reliable staff of his department. The messages of condolence received after his death are testimonies to his good social standing. Although he works with the ministry of finance (a veritable gold mine in Africa) Mr Anas died a poor man. He is a man who dislikes corruption or the falsification of official records. His refusal to bribe his way out

of a fabricated traffic offence is a demonstration of his high moral principle. When he discovers that his future-in-law, Mr Lahab bribes the police to secure his release, he feels greatly disappointed. The act is offensive to his ethical and moral philosophy. Mr Anas would rather be "a virtuous fool" than to be "Satan's high priest". When he dies tragically in a motor accident, his daughter and colleagues are proud of his moral conduct. According to his daughter, Hussaina, "Daddy lived a simple life, a perfect gentlemen and died in honour, full of praises". p.90. This is a befitting epitaph to a man of high moral standing. Hussaina's greatest aspiration is to leave behind a good name like her father. She lives a life of high moral rectitude, a life devoid of excessive materialism and greed. But unfortunately, she marries the wong person. Her husband, lahab, is her anti-thesis. He is one of the most morally reprehensible characters in the fictional world of Witnesses to Tears.

As an individual, Lahab gives little consideration to the way the society perceives him. What matters to him most is money. How he makes the money hardly bothers him. Manipulating the food delivery system of Cabral High School is his greatest source of wealth.

The sudden transformation of Lahab from a simple class room teacher to a top-flight, super executive

business man is a good example of how the social system can corrupt an otherwise honest citizen.

Lahab's ascent to the top begins with his appointment as the acting Vice-Principal of Cabral Higher School. In this capacity, he receives the weekly suspply of food to his school from accredited contractors. At the on set, he refuses to demand for bribes or tips from the contractors. However, he receives anything "voluntarily" given to him.

Gradually, he starts demanding for bribe from the contractors. He designs a system whereby each contractor will supply less than the stipulated quantity of food. The difference is then shared between him and the contractor. A contractor who protested against this open fraud is discovered murdered the next day.

Lahab's godfather is Dr Saahir, a dismissed medical student of an unnamed university. The circumstances leading to his rustication is a pointer to his capacity for mischief. As a hypnotist, he one day hypnotized his psychology lecturer and made him to unconsciously reveal his examination questions to the class. The senate of the university considers his action as an "unprecedented act of coercion, intimidation and cheating". It expels him from the university. After his expulsion, he puts his knowledge of occultism at

at the disposal of any one who needs his services. Lahab is one of his special clients.

With his vast connections in the civil service, military and para-military institutions, Saahir provides Lahab the protection he needs in order to defraud his school. Within a short period of time, the two of them develope a symbiotic relationship; a relationship based on the mutual exchange of favors.

Anytime Lahab is in trouble, he runs to Saahir for protection. It is Saahir who prevents the transfer of Lahab to another school when the substantive vice principal of Cabral High School returns from his study leave. It is also Saahir who arranges the arrest of Lahab's messenger for the school fees misappropriated by Lahab. Through the powerful influence of Dr Saahir, many bogus loans are advanced to Lahab by commercial banks.

Ironically, Saahir is a well-respected member of his society. The psychological trait of the corrupt in Witnesses to Tears is similar to that of some corrupt in characters in Footprints andTrail of Sacrifice. They manipulate religion in cheating and exploiting their society:

"They cheat, but they also pray. The first to be in Churches and Mosques never missed the publicity to donate to charity organization, give to the poor or build houses of worship." p. 127.

In fact, Lahab is away to Mecca for (the Muslim) pilgrimage when Saahir mistakenly kills his only son, Sagiir in the process of fortifying Lahab's business empire.

At the institutional level, the civil and the judicial institutions are corrupt. The legal system is perverted and its concept of justice questionable. In Witnesses to Tears, a man who steals a goat is sentenced to "fifteen (15) years imprisonment with hard labour, while a senior civil servant that steals huge sums of money from the public treasury is given a three week suspended punishment". p.60.

Like in the other novels, Gimba posses the challenge of reforming the society to its individual members. According to Hussaina, his heroine and alter ego, man must imbibe values such as honesty and sincerity. These values, in her opinion, transcend any time and space:

> And for the question of time, I think certain human qualities transcend time, like honesty and humility. Teach a man these qualities, he can live in any age past, present and future. p.132.

The novel which begins with the admission of a mysterious lady in the trauma ward of Albert Lithuli Memorial Hospital, ends with the arrest of Dr Saahir and Mr (now Hajj) Lahab. They are under arrest for the multiple death(s) of Serah Bello, Hussaina and Sagiir. Even though nemesis seems to be catching up with Saahir and

and Lahab, the possibility of their being left off the hook is very high. They could bribe their way out of the police net.

Witnesses to Tears is a graphic and apt description of contemporary Nigeria. Nigerians are witnesses to the death of many innocent people under questionable and suspicious circumstances in recent times. They are also witnesses to the tears, sorrows and anguish visited on many innocent families by the state. Their only offence was speaking for truth and standing for justice.

One distinctive feature of this novel is the use of the names of popular figures in the history of Africa. Nkrumah, Lithuli, Cabral and Mandela are great historical figures in Africa. The continent will become a more humane place, if Africans can emulate the exemplary lives of these great personalities.

Sacred Apples (1994) as was published eight years after Witnesses to Tears. But depite the time gap between them, the two novels share the same thematic focus and artistic vision. They are products of the same creative inspiration. In fact, the relationship between them goes beyond sharing the same artistic vision or concern. In both novels, Gimba appraises his society through the eyes of the woman. Coincidentally, Hussaina the protagonist of Witnesses ti Tears us tge great grandmother of Zahrah the

protagonist of Sacred Apples. Like her great grandmother, Zahrah's marriage to Yazid Awwal and later to Nousah, her office boss, ends in frustration and disappointment. In both cases her husbands are directly responsible for the collapse of the marriage.

Yazid Awwal, her first (Casanova) husband sends her packing from their matrimonial home on the strength of a forged letter. The letter threatens Yazid's life.

However, before the letter episode, there is a little rift between Zahrah and her husband, Yazid. The rift is over Yazid's marital infidelity, his dating of another woman which is reported to Zahrah by a concerned neighbour. Zahrah confronts her husband with her suspicions, but instead of explaining things to his wife, "the mother of his three children"; Yazid storms out of the house. A few days later, he receives a letter threatening his life unless he stops dating the other woman. The letter is written in a handwriting that is very similar to that of Zahrah and is signed in her name. This provokes Yazid and without any due consideration for his three children (Bilgees, Umaymah and Mustapha) or the long period they had stayed together with his wife, he made the three irrevocable divorce pronouncements on her. This brings to a painful end, their union of over a decade. She packs out of their matrimonial home to stay with her brother, Shareef, at Rabbah.

The novel, which begins on a highly charged and suspenseful atmosphere, is an exploration into man - woman relationship, marriage as an institution and the infusion of culture and tradition into religion. The novel is an inquiry into the gender-related problems of 20th century Nigeria, from purely an Islamic perspective.

In this novel, Gimba touches on one of the most sensitive and topical issues of discourse in contemporary Nigeria. The novel articulates the right of the woman to (western) education, fair treatment, access to the resources of the society, representation in every aspect of life and above all, the right to be consulted before her husband could contract any new marriage.

The no vel is a denunciation of the current practice of isolating women from active politics, "arranged marriages" exploitative and exorbitant bride price and the denial of the girl-child the right to education. The novel reaffirms the unique position of women in every human society.

Gimba depicts marriage in this novel as a "sacred apple" which is constantly defiled and profaned by men. Women too are "sacred apples" created by God to complement man's existence on this earth. However, through his attitude or behaviour towards the woman, man has reduced her to an endangered "apple".

Unable to find fulfilment in her two marriages, Zahrah joins the feminist movement in Rabbah. Here too, she could not find any happiness. Her detractors always attribute her 'progress' in life to her position in the feminist movement. In addition to this, she discovers the intricacies, conspiracies and group in-fighting of her female colleagues similar to that of her (previous) polygamous home. Confused, Zahrah meets her brother, Yashareef,

for advice. Shareef directs her to her religion (Islam) which he describes as the 'blueprint' of life.

Sacred Apples is challenging, stimulating and revealing. In this novel, Gimba gives a clear picture of the position of Islam on marriage. Polygamy, which is the nightmare of many women in Nigeria today, is only encouraged on one condition - if the man could love or treat his wives equally. In Islam it is more preferable for a man to keep to one woman instead of keeping many women and treating them unfairly:

> If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with them - women, than marry one that will be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice. P.85.

Furthermore, in Islam, a woman is permitted to retain her to substitute her father's name with that of her husband.

She could opt to stay in a separate house from that of her co-wives. The lumping of women together under one roof is usually the source of friction and social discord in many polygamous homes.

But most importantly, it is improper or not Islamic for a Muslim man to repudiate his marriage by making the three divorce proclamations under the slightest provocation. He is initially expected to issue only one divorce notification. This is to give room for (possible) reconciliation.

It should be noted that Islam detests divorce and it is only permitted if the union becomes a threat to the good (moral) conduct of the two parties or a threat to their personal safety. Even in divorce, it is the responsibility of the man to take care of his ex-wife and her children for a specified period. She has a right to the property acquired by her husband during the period of their marriage. Unfortunately, these rights are not

taken into cognizance any time a marriage is repudiated. This is what disturbs Gimba. He is not totally opposed to polygamy. In once upon a reed, a collection of essays, Gimba once again raises some of these issues. According to him:

> "Quite a number of men are not only selfishly unreasonable, but also quite ignorant about their roles in the family and the responsibilities of both husband and wife. Most of us have used, abused and misused religion to maltreat our wives. We, the Muslim families are guilty of this. The men are ignorant of the Islamic teachings on the roles and responsibilities of each member of the family. The holy Quran says that men and women are equal, yet many Muslim husbands treat their women as if Allah has decreed men superior to women. Indeed, some men have gone as far as using religion to deny their daughters the basic right to education even through the prophet (PBUH) said no present or gift of a parent, out of all the gifts and presents to a child, is superior to a good education". PP. 104 - 105.

Her brother, Shareef, her grandmother, Zubayadah and her friend, Miriam, often mellow the critical resolve of Zahrah not to enter into any form of relationship with men. They always refer her to certain verses in the Quran, which forbid a woman to stay alone without a husband. Her brother, Shareef, often reminds her that:

> The moral health of the society at large is more important than the physical health of the individual. P.54.

Juxtaposed with Zahrah's failed marriages is her friend's successful marital life. Miriam's happiness in marriage is because she is not financially dependent on her husband. She is educated and gainfully employed. Gimba's message through Miriam's successful marital life is simple and clear: Nigerian women should be empowered through education and the provision of gainful employment. It is then that they can make meaningful contributions to the development of their country. Gimba re-echoes this view in a letter to his daughter in Once upon a reed. In the letter, Gimba draws her attention to the social and economic deprivations women are subjected to in contemporary

Nigeria. Her future happiness, he tells her, can only be guaranteed through the acquisition of a sound education. He admonishes the daughter to prepare for the future in the following manner:

> Through your own efforts, you can be your own future savior and liberator from the harsh life of the village, the indecent life of the city and the frustration as well as possible enslavement of a married life. P.105

Sacred Apples is a Gimba's contribution to the on-going feminist discourse in contemporary Nigeria. It is also his response to wester feminism, which in recent times is gaining wide acceptability. In this novel, Gimba shows that the unjust treatment women are subjected to is largely out of ignorance of their exalted position in Islam. He calls for a reexamination of men's interpretation of religion (Islam) vis-a-vis their relationship with women.

Meanwhile, Zahrah his protagonist is receding into the cocoon of her religion. But will she find any happiness there? No one can tell, until we meet her in Gimba's future publications. However, it should be noted that by breaking his marital Oath, by repudiating his marriage, by rejecting the injunctions of his religion, man has abandoned his responsibility to himself, his family his God and the larger society.

The civil service is crucial towards the actualization of the policies of any government. It is vital to the concretization of every developmental plan. Without an efficient civil service, a government (no matter how determined) can hardly make any positive impact on its society. Gimba's last two novels to be discussed in this thesis, Innocent Victims and Sunset for a Mandarin are on the Nigerian civil service and its weaknesses.

Innocent Victims (1988)[29] captures vividly events that took place in Nigeria after the collapse of the second republic. The novel depicts the corruption, greed, abuse of power, which are permanent features of 20th century Nigeria.

The novel is another tale of Nigeria's painful failure to put in place an efficient, resourceful and result oriented civil service since the country's "independence" in 1960. The civil service has become corrupt, perverted, distorted and counter-productive. Instead of providing Nigerians with social amenities - schools, functional medical centres, portable drinking water - the service has become an arena for setting personal scores, ethnic competitions, petty jealousy, rumour mongering, unfounded allegations, witch-hunting and personal humiliation.

In Innocent Victims, innocent civil servants are subjected to mental and psychological torture. Honest and hardworking staff are physically, humiliated and disgraced in public.

The beating of a Bala Bakatsoro by the orderly of Solomon Santali is unnecessary. Bakatsoro's five minutes' lateness to the office does not merit his physical humiliation in the present of his subordinates. His experience with the overzealous, power drunk, semi-literate military overseer of the Department of Animal and Crop Production is symbolic of the frequent (physical) humiliations Nigerians are subjected to by military and para-military personnel since the end of Nigeria's civil war. It is a typical display of the "kill and go" syndrome often associated with many security outfits in Nigeria.

The novel explores the consequences of military incursion into politics. The inherent defects of dictatorship and the grave implications of investing judicial, legislative and executive

powers in one source - more so, when the source already controls the legitimate means of coercion in the society. The maxim that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely is fully depicted in this novel.

The novel is characterised by flagrant abuse of power, the due process of law and the intimidation of defenceless and innocent civilians by soldiers. The militarization of the civil service, through coups, brings along with it, physical and mental discomfort to many people.

As the civl service is transformed into one giant military camp, orders are given without due regard to their practicability. Those who resist such orders are either beaten or dismissed (for insubordination) from service.

Innocent Victims, a novel Gimba dedicats to men with conscience to stand by friendship, begins with the suspension and trial of Hajj Faruk Kolo, the pious, honest, simple, easy-going Director-General of the Department of Animal and Crop Production. Through Faruk's experiences, Gimba depicts how horrifying and psychologically intimidating Nigeria has become since the collapse of the second Republic.

With the military fully back into (political) power, the average Nigerian is reduced to a prisoner, in his own country. His basic and universally guaranteed rights - such as freedom of expression, association or the right to elect leaders are denied him. Time tested values like personal integrity, honesty, sincerity are undermined and discouraged.In their place, sycophancy is encouraged and promoted.

Apart from characters like Hajj Faruk Kolo, Bala Bakatsoro, Binta, Mamman, most of the characters such as Zaalim are sycophants. These sycophants often encourage the military to bend service rules in their favour. They are usually promoted and granted favours without due consideration to service regulations or procedures. They exploit the ignorance of the military in the art of governance to their advantage. Job placements and promotions depend on one's 'connections' with the military. Subordinate staff are promoted over their superiors because of their links with the military. As should be expected, this breeds frustration, personal conflicts, inefficiency and a crippled public service.

In Innocent Victims, the civil service is a caricature of what it is in other parts of the world. Military tribunals and court-martials replace civil - judicial institutions. The presiding judge is always a favourites of the military - people who could be bent and manipulated to deliver preconceived judgements.

The justice Nura Alfa's Panel in this novel is symbolic of the various probe panels the military created in Nigeria immediately it took over power in 1983. The performance of some of these panel is so appalling that a re-known Nigerian journalist once described them as "Kangaroo courts". People who contributed glaringly to the Economic adversity of Nigeria are not only discharged and acquitted but congratulated for meritorious services to the nation.

The police who are charged with the constitutional responsibility of arresting and prosecuting criminals are also corrupt. They extort money from people. Those without the money to bribe them are tortured and clamped into cells as suspects. Suspects are usually kept in sub-human conditions. They are often compelled

to give self-incriminating evidence. In Faruk's opinion, there is nothing more nauseating than seeing a police officer brutalising the very people he is paid to protect.

At individual level, Hajj Zalim is the only character in this novel who combines the guile, cunning, deceit, wickedness and religious pretensions of Dr. Saahir. Like Saahir, Zaalim is extremely callous, selfish and brutal. He is directly responsible for the second death recorded in Innocent Victims. He is also responsible for the burning down of annex three and the disappearance of some files relevant to Faruk's case.

Although the events in this novel revolve around the experiences and trial of Hajj Faruk Kolo, Bala Bakatsoro is the obvious hero of Innocent Victims. His bravery and courage marks him out as a potential revolutionary. Bravery and courage as displayed by Baka Bakatsoro is what Gimba expects from every Nigerian. Bakatsoro's death is tragic and painful, but it is better to die a dignified death than to live a life of misery and slavery.

Sunset for a Mandarin (1991)[30] is dedicated by Gimba to all his friends "who were around during the darkness that followed the sunset". Like Gimba's sixth novel, Footprints, Sunset for a Mandarin is set in Songhai. The novel is a further enunciation of the issues already raised in Innocent Victims. Hajj Faruk Kolo of Innocent Victims re-appears in Sunset for a Mandarin as Hamzah, the hypocritical Zaalim as Waleeefa, Binta as Amirah, Ben Ali the lawyer as Nouhou, Squadron Leader Santali as Sayyid Abbud.

The novel dramatises the personal conflict between Hamzah and his military boss, Commander Sayyid Abbud. The conflict is over the disappearance of some monies from the state treasury. An estimated 10.3million sedees is stolen from the state treasury while Hamzah, the Director-General of the Ministry of Finance is in a sick leave. Despite this, his boss Commander Sayyid Abbud summons him to account for the missing money.Before Hamzah could put his financial records in order, his boss fires him. Hamzah's compulsory retirement from the state civil service is announced over the state radio.

When the novel finanlly comes to an end, the sun has set not only for the 'Mandarin' (Hamzah) but also for truth, justice, law and order, accountability, honesty and probity.

Apart from the differences in the names of the characters and setting Sunset for a Mandarin is not radically different from Innocent Victims. Like Innocent Victims, graft and corruption, the abuse of power are the dominant features of Sunset for a Mandarin. Like Squadron leader Solomon Santali, commander Sayyid Abbud, assumes the role of a complainant, prosecutor and judge.

One distinctive feature of this novel is the constant reference to the Quran by Hamzah. Hamzah's constant recourse to religion is a direct appeal to every Nigerian to live his life according to the dictates of his religion. Hamzah blames/attributes the socio-political problems of his society to the absence of morality in the conduct of his fellow citizens. According to him:

> No man that professes
> Islam has a right to
> treat anybody, Muslim or
> non-Muslim unjustly. And
> all man of good faith, be
> they Muslims, Jews, Christians,
> Buddhist or whatever,
> recognise that just and fair
> treatment are universal values...p.173.

This statement of Hamzah sums up Gimba's vision of man and his society. It reflects his aspiration as a writer. Gimba aspires for a society where religious values such as justice, equity, law and order (not might) will be the guiding principles. This is possible, if man (whether a Muslim, Christian, Jew, etc) will take his morality and spirituality with the required seriousness. This is the recurrent message in every novel of Gimba.

CHAPTER THREE

According to Boulton (1975:5) 31, a good novel is true in the sense that it gives sincere, well observed enlightening picture of a portion of human life". Boulton compares the novelist to a scientist whose main objective according to her, is to "present at least some fragments of truth by applying imagination, insight and organisation to observation". Here Boulton is more concerned with the content of a novel and how it presents human life. But imaginative literature, both the content and the form are equally important.

The "Message" contained in a novel is very important. But of equal importance is how the "message" is put across. The novelist may pick a topical issue but may fail to make the required impact on his reader(s) if he lacks the appropriate language to support his theme. Literature is a social discourse, a discourse about man and his society between the creative artist and his audience.

The most important tool in any discourse is language because it is the medium through which ideas are articulated and expressed. The creative artist articulates and projects his vision of man through a specific language.

Without language, artistic expression, particularly, in its written form would be impossible. In the opinion of Herold Whiteall in Boulton (1975) no criticism can go beyond linguistics. And according to Lodge in Boulton (1975) "the novelist's medium is language. Whatever he does as a novelist, he does in and through language".

What distinguishes literature from ordinary everyday discourse, is the imaginative manner the artist is expected to use language. The artist's main purpose of writing is to communicate with his audience. Language is necessary for effective communication. The novelist may like to persuade his reader(s) towards a specific viewpoint. He can successfully do this by adopting an appropriate linguistic medium. A good work of Art could be elevated or destroyed by its chosen (linguistic) medium.

In the opinion of Taiwo (1986:154)[32] language is the mirror to a writer's personality and to his peculiar circumstances. As he puts it:

> "A writer's language
> is a mirror held up
> to his personality
> and his particular circumstances.
> It is through the use of
> language he reflects his
> individual awareness of a
> given situation"

The novelist in contemporary Africa faces the challenge of writing in a language that is foreign both to him and his audience. Some of them like Achebe, Ngugi, Ken Saro Wiwa, Ousmane, Mariam Ba' have succeeded in adopting the English and the French language to suit their artistic purposes. In this chapter, Gimba's use of language and other literary devices shall be examine.

No novel, Boulton (1975:28) opines

> "can give total truth, more than any man devised religion, philosophy or political theory can do so, but a good novel can give us a very complex, very multiple impression of a portion of life and its problems, communicating many diverse insight explicitly, some by implications",

Boulton's assertion that a good novel should reflect the complexities of life is further corroborated by Zang Xialing (1986:52)[33]. In Xialing's opinion "a good piece of prose is a three dimensional world. The characters and the plot should be multi-coloured, polyphonic, many layered and multi-faceted".

Gimba's novels are chose to Boulton's and Xialing's description of a good prose. They have all the above features. They depict human experience in all its perplexities and ramifications. They give diverse insights into the various aspects of man. Gimba's novels are multi-coloured, multi-layered and multi-faceted.

In his review of Footprints, Gimba's sixth published novel, Abubakar (1998:3)[33] describes it as a mega narratives into a multiplicity of contending views" Abubakar's description of Footprints is equally applicable to all of Gimba's published novels. Each of them has several layers of narration. As a novelist, Gimba is gradually perfecting the art of telling several stories within one central plot.

In his novels, Gimba usually brings together the different and contending views in his society. In his discourse, there is always more than one way of looking at any issue. The diverse views are articulated and presented through the dialogue/conversation between his characters.

Boulton (1975:109) gives a concise view of the role of conversation in prose fiction. According to her,

> Since novels are
> largely about human relationships,
> which depend largely on
> communication, which takes place
> chiefly through speech,
> conversation naturally,
> plays a major part in the
> main steam.

This is very true of Gimba's novels. They are mostly in the form of conversation(s). Through the conversation between his characters, the problems confronting their fictional world are x-rayed and analysed. In Trail of Sacrifice, the discourse is between Sadiku and Makanjira, in Witnesses to Tears it is between Hussaina, her father, Mr. Al-Amin Anas and her husband, Mr. Lahab, in Footprints, six characters, each from a different social background, are brought together. They usually meet at the House of Mr. Jibran. Their meeting, through informal, approximates what obtains in modern Democracies. Jibran's House is comparable to a modern parliament where the elected representatives of the people formally meet to deliberate on crucial state matters.

Through their animated debates, the reader is given an insight into the general picture of their society, particularly, its complex socio-political problems. The reader is also made an active participant in their discourse because at the end, he is compelled to be sympathetic to one view or another. Below is an example of the discourse between some of the characters in Footprints. The discussion is about the conflict of face-off between the president and members of the National Assembly.

As should be expected, they are divided over who is right or wrong between the executive and legislative arm of Government:

> Year; said Haytham
> to convince him that
> they weren't planning a
> vulture's feast on
> the Budget. But it is
> a trap continued Basil and
> it's cheap, mean and
> down-right dishonest.
> Our law-makers should be above
> that, call it what you may,
> its politics said Haytham.
> And if the president is naive
> enough not to recognised that,
> then he's not fit to be our
> nation's number one citizen.
> There was silence. Then
> George Imaad shaking his head
> I don't think the president is
> naive rather our law makers
> are playing infantile politics P.36.

In this situation, the reader is totally involved and made an active participant in the discussion between Haytham, Basil and George. At times the reader is absorbed into the moral crises facing the characters. A good example, is Sacred Apples. Zahrah, the heroine of the novel is faced with a difficult (moral) situation; should she stay alone or get involved with another marriage despite the failure of her two previous marriages? Her difficult moral situation becomes that of the reader. Should marriage be encouraged, despite the problems associated with it or women should be encouraged to practice single parenthood?

In the discourse between Gemba's characters, it is difficult for the reader to remain not affected. This because the issue of discourse is topical, true to life and could affect any member of the society. In some instances, the reader is deliberately persuaded to support a specific viewpoint. Most readers will,

easily support the disdain against corruption, bribery, high handedness, injustice by Sadiku, Hussaina, Jibran, etc.

Sometimes, the discourse in Gimba's novels is conducted in the form of Questions and Answers. Through these questions and answers, certain beliefs are either re-affirmed or repudiated. Some questions are rhetorical and are used to emphasise a point. For example, Sadiku in Trail of Sacrifice (1985) absolves himself of any wrong doing in his relationship with Umah through the following rhetorical questions:

> Deceiving you again?
> What do you mean?
> Have I ever deceived you before? P.17.

Every novelist speaks to his reader(s) through his characters. It is therefore important that the novelist creates characters that are convincing, realistic and appropriate to his artistic goal. The expression and utterances of the characters should reflect their age, occupation and social background. The greatest characters, Boulton (1975:77) submits should "have a roundness, complexity and multiplicity, they develop, they give the impression that they had a real past, have a real future".

Gimba's characters, particularly, the protagonists, are always conscious of the future. They are more concerned about life hereafter. Their individual and collective aspiration is to secure for themselves a place in a paradise. Hence, they are always conscious of their moral/spiritual conduct.

Characterisation differs from one writer to another. Some characters are created tragic (Okonkwo in Achebe's Things Fall Apart) symbolic (K in Kafka's The Trial) allegorical (the children in Golding's Lord of the Flies). Gimba's characterisation is very unique. they reflect the social/occupational

composition of his society. Youths (Makanjira, Sadiku, Basil, George, Haliyfah, Jameelah) House wives (Hussaina, Miriam, Zahrah) Technocrats (Hamzah, Zaalim, Faruk Kolo, Bala Bakatsoro) security operatives (Lt. Col. Bakri, Sqr. Ldr. Solomon Santali, Major Khalid, Commander, Sayyid Abbud). These characters are also representatives of the contending interests in Gimba's society.

In each of his novel, Gimba has an alter ego. The alter ego serves as his mask through which he articulates and projects his vision of man. Sadiku is his alter ego in Trail of Sacrifice, Hussaina in Witnesses to Tears, Faruk Kolo in Innocent Victims, Hamza in Sunset for a Mandarin, Shareef in Sacred Apples, and Jibran in Footprints.

These characters are very prominent individuals in his novels. Through them, the reader is given an insight into Gimba's perception of his society and its multi-dimensional socio-political problems. To a large extent, Sadiku, Hamzah, Hussaina, Zaharah, Shareef, Faruk Kolo, could be described as type characters. Boulton (1975:108) describes a type character in the following manner:

> a lesser character may be a type; sensible housewife, brutal prison guard, unworldly scholar, man-about-gallant soldier, luscious temptress poor old man or perhaps a moral type... He may be a mere spokesman, express the view of a social class, a articulate some philosophical or religious concept; be a mouthpiece for the author's own views.

Gimba's protagonists are obviously his mouthpiece in the novels in which they appeared. They also espouse his philosophical/religious concept of man in a changing world.

In each of his novels, Gimba has a worldview to project. It is a worldview firmly anchored in a religious/moral paradigm. As a novelist, he is convinced that a moral reformation of man is necessary if his society is to be rescued from its present aimless drift to bring out the contending views in his society, Gimba often pairs his alter ego with other characters. In Trail of Sacrifice, he pairs Sadiku with Makanjira, in Innocent Victims Faruk Kolo with Ben Ali, in Sunset for a Mandarin Hamza with Jawara, in Sacred Apples, Zahrah with Shareef, in Witnesses to Tears, Hussaina with Lahab. Through their discourse and conflicting views, the reader is gently persuaded to accept a specific viewpoint as the most appropriate for the common good of the society.

Gimba creates meaning by creating dissimilar characters. Their conflicting views are often juxtaposed and contrasted. In Sunset for a Mandarin, Hamzah's attempt to attribute his release from the police cell at new Tymbuctu to divine intervention is quickly challenged and contradicted by his friend, Jawara, who reminds him that the release is made possible through the intervention of a senior military officer. In Sacred Apples, Zahrah's stubborn resolve to stay single is later reversed through the persuasion of her brother, Shareef and her friend, Miriam.

Another distinctive feature of Gimba's characterisation is the existence of villains. They are present in all his novels. The villains are depicted as the bad members of the society whose moral and social conduct is inimical to the general well being of the society. They are mostly people occupying

important positions in the society. They are the elite, people with considerable financial and political influence Squadron Leader Solomon Santali, Commander Abbud Sayyid, Waleefa, Zaalim, Justice Nura Alfa are examples of the villains. Through their bad moral conduct, they undermine the collective interest of their society.

One dominant and recurrent feature of Thomas Handy's Mayor of Caster-Bridge is the presence of chance and coincidence. Henchard, the hero, moves from one coincidence to another until his tragic death. Like Hardy's Mayor of Caster-bridge, Gimba's novels are full of chance and coincidence. In Witnesses to Tears, it is chance that brings Hussaina and her husband, Mr. Lahab together. Prior to the ride he offers her, Hussaina had never met Mr. Lahab who later becomes her husband. He meets her by the roadside on a rainy night. Moved by compassion, though he is not going in her direction, he offers to drop her at home. In the course of the journey to Hussaina's house, they exchange addresses. This chance meeting was to later change her life. Against the tacit disapproval of her father, Hussaina marries Lahab only to regret doing so later. Coincidentally, at the time they met none of them was married and each of them was eligible for marriage.

It is also chance and coincidence that made Squadron Leader Solomon Santali to go on an inspection of the Department of Animal and Crop Production at the precise time the staff were on break. Bala Bakatsoro reports to his duty post five minutes beyond the stipulated time. This angers Squadron Leader Solomon Santali and as common in contemporary Nigeria, he orders

Bakatsoro and other late comers to "frog jump". Bakatsoro refuses and is beaten to death by his orderlies.

Sadiku's accidental, non-deliberate exposure of his examination Questions to a female student, Mary is also attributable to chance. Mary, the food prefect of Mwene Redemption High School, walks into Sadiku's office precisely at the time Sadiku is putting finishing touches to his questions. This tempts Mary and when she gets the opportunity to be in Sadiku's office alone, she steals the questions and gives them to her co-students. It is also chance that brings Zahrah and her first husband, Yazid Awwal, together. Their families arrange their marriage. Fate and coincidence made Zahrah to drive into an angry mob on her way to Rabbah. The mob snatches her three children and sets her car ablaze. Fate also intervenes as Rashard and his wife, Miriam, rescues the children. It is a coincidence that Zahrah secures an appointment with a Federal Agency when its boss has just divorced his only wife.

Again Gimba's novels depict reality. There is a serious element of verisimilitude in each of his novels. Gimba's novels are fair portrayal of his society. They give an acceptable picture of the social and political reality of contemporary Nigeria. His novels are a parody of 20th century Nigeria with all its imperfections and complexities. Although they are primarily works of fiction, one can easily identify in them some significant historical events in the chequered history of Nigeria. In Trail of Sacrifice, the National Youth Service Scheme appears in a fictional form as the National objectives

Fulfilment Brigade (N.O.F.B). The protests/riots which accompanied its introduction by students in 1973 is re-enacted in the protest of Sadiku and his colleagues against the National Objectives Fulfilment Brigade at the beginning of the novel. Makanjira and Sadiku several times allude to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 - 70 in their discourse.

The Justice Nuru Alfa's probe panel in Innocent Victims is symbolic of the various probe panels that came into existence after the collapse of Nigeria's second Republic in 1983. The burning down of Annex Three is similar to the wanton destruction of public buildings by unscrupulous civil servants who want to cover-up their financial mis-deeds. The mob action in Sacred Apples, is reminiscent of the use of violence by aggrieved social groups in Nigeria to press home their Demands. Popular among these riots are the SAP riots of 1985, the Kaduna Religious cricis, the Ife-Modakeke uprising and the endless bloodletting in the Niger Delta area.

Part of the social realism of Gimba's discourse is his realistic portrayal of Nigeria and her hydra headed socio-political problems. In each of his novels, he gives a graphic description of the collective amnesia frustration, despondency, and hopelessness, disillusionment that characterise Nigeria. He captures in simple language, tension, uncertainties, turmoil, confusion, conflicts and crisis in Nigeria's social fabric. the strain in the nation's social system sometimes explodes into riot (Sacred Apples/Trail of Sacrifice) unrestrained murders (Witnesses to Tears) ethnic mistrust and abuse of power, detention

without trial (Sunset for a Mandarin) broken homes and family disintegration (Sacred Apples) the total collapse of the social and political institutions (Footprints).

Gimba's novels are highly sociological and situational. They are not a polotical, as many people would like to assume. They have a strong moral commitment towards the peaceful resolution of the crisis facing mankind.

The atmosphere that pervades his novels reflects the distressful and dehumanising political landscape of their social background. Gimba's artistic goal is to re-humanise a dehumanised humanity. He believes this could be attained through a moral reformation of man.

In fact, two sets of vocabulary are easily identifiable in Gimba's discourse; a moral vocabulary relating to conscience, spiritual and personal conduct and a social vocabulary relating to respect, politeness, decency, decorum, propriety in personal and official relationship. In his novels, Gimba strives for moral truths by exposing the moral ambiguities facing his characters and by extension, his society. He depicts the contradictions between the outward display of religious sentiments by his characters and their individual moral conduct.

The characters are used as symbols of certain abstract values. Sadiku, Hussaina, Jibran, Zahrah, Hamzah, Faruk Kolo are a symbols of humility, honesty, perseverance, trust, patience and endurance. His heroes and heroines are personifications of the positive values Gimba will like to see enthroned in his

country, Nigeria. These characters are embodiments of the social values very dear to him.

In terms of setting, Gimba's novels are contemporaneous. They are about present-day Nigeria. Gimba uses satire and sarcasm in x-raying his society. He satirises the idiosyncrasies and incipiece of many Nigerians, their desire to become rich at all costs, their over bloated ego, their sentimental attachment to male children. As a novelist, Gimba, is an iconoclast. He is not an idealist. He is not after the creation of a utopian society - a sinless society. He understands the limits of human endurance and tolerance. He is a novelist willing to accept and forgive genuine mistakes.

The climatic and physical landscape of Nigeria is given adequate portrayal in his novels. The plains and the dense forested parts of Kokania in Trail of Sacrifice are obvious allusions to the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria. New Tymbuctu, the capital city of Songhai in Sunset for a Mandarin and Footprints is obviously an allusion to Abuja, the new Federal Capital (city) of Nigeria. The flora, the typology the vegetation and other physical features of Nigeria are adequately highlighted in Trail of Sacrifice. Below is a description of the southern part of Kokania:

> Sadiku needed
> no one to tell him
> that they were
> now in a strange
> land, trees, tall
> trees bounded the
> road on both sides. P. 24.

The rich forested southern part of Kokania is the direct opposite of Sadiku's dry, sun-scorched plains.

Another distinctive feature of Gimba's narrative is the use of metaphors. Aristotle in poetics as cited by Miller and Cuvie (1972:75) asserts that "it is the mark of the genius to make good metaphors. Gimba may not be a genius; but he uses metaphors aptly. This is evident from the following passage in Trail of Sacrifice:

> The following morning was
> cool with a cloudless sky.
> The morning sun seemed to
> be smiling on the earthlings below
> even the trees bore some cheerful
> elegance as their leaves danced to
> the gentle melody. P. 135.

This passage combines imagery, personification and metaphor. Dissimilar objects are brought together - the cloudless sky, the cheerful trees, the smiling sun and the dancing leaves - are contrasted with the sad earthlings below. The sun, the trees and the leaves are personified; giving the qualities of living things.

Gimba also uses traditional mores in his discourse. Sacred Apples begins with an exploration into a common belief among his people, the Nupes, that the owl is a bird of bad omen. When Zahrah could not get to Rabbah at the expected time, her grandmother, Zubaydah, becomes alarmed by the consistent hooting of the owl on a tree near her house. To her, the hooting of the owl signifies danger. And in order to ward it off, she picks her rosary and starts making supplications to her God. Her mind is not at rest, until her granddaughter, Zahrah unexpectedly knocks on the door.

The night is also a dreaded period among the Nupe people. They perceive it as a time when malevolent forces are active looking for people to devour. Sadiku's dread of the night on

his first day at Mwene reflects this crucial aspect of the average Nupe man's psychology. The belief/fear of witches and wizards is an integral part of every Nupe settlement.

Closely related to the above is the use of Religious murals and fables by Gimba. The origin of polygamy is depicted in the form of a fable. According to the story (in Sacred Apples) God created every living thing. He first created the woman and put her in the care of two men. When it was time for them to sleep, the women went to sleep with one of the men. In the morning, the man who was abandoned by the women the previous night is discovered dead. He apparently died out of jealousy. The angel monitoring them reported his sad development to God. God then decided to reverse the situation. He puts two women under the control of one man. In the morning, none of them had died. They only lost weight. Because they survived, God decreed that women are more strong-hearted than men and therefore, man, despite his weakness should take control of the women. Although an interesting fable contradicts the practical reality of life and it seems (unconsciously) to imply that a woman's subordinate position to man in many parts of the world is God ordained.

The ability to create realistic and convincing characters is crucial to the success of any artistic enterprise. The closer the character is to reality, the more convincing his actions and utterances. The reader should see the similarities and differences between a fictional character and the people he meets in real life. Gimba's characters are people his readers will likely meet in real life. One can easily meet the youthful

and idealistic Hallyfah, Sadiku, Makanjira in any of the Schools in Nigeria. One can also meet civil servants/technocrats who like Hamzah and Faruk Kolo, are pre-maturely retired from service. The number of divorcees like Zahrah is getting larger by the day in Nigeria. A significant percentage of them are in the urban centres.

Gimba sometimes, uses physical differences in height, skin texture, and facial features to differentiate his characters. Sadiku is taller than Makanjira, Shareef, is an introvert while Rashard is an extrovert. Hamzah is more inclined towards religion, while his friend, Jawara, adopts a more practical attitude to life and its problems.

Many novelists do write their novels using the omniscient narrative technique. In this type of narrative technique, the narrator is not easily identifiable. He is the unseen voice that is always with the characters, narrating their activities and utterances to the reader. The use of the omniscient narrative technique has many advantages. The omniscient narrator can make free and unbiased comments on the actions of the characters, analyse their motives, thoughts without any prejudice. This is affirmed by Boulton (1975:26) according to him:

> The omniscient narrator can comment on anything he likes, he can analyse motives more objectively than a character, he can drscribe things no other persons could really see such as man's terror in confinement or a dream.

In most of his novels, Gimba adopts and exploits the advantages of the omniscient narrative technique. His narrator is not an identifiable person; but his presence is pervasive. He exists in every novel of Gimba, monitoring the activities of his characters and reporting the same to the reader.

The stream of consciousness technique is also another common feature of Gimba's discourse. Through this technique, the inner thought processes of the characters are revealed. Character's anguish, mental calculations, moral crises are explored through this technique. At the end, the reader is given a composite picture of the psychological make-up of a character, his inward strength/weakness and his state of mind.

In order to explain a situation, authors do sometimes intrude into the discourse between their character. They do this either to add more information on what is being discussed or to explain why a character is thinking towards a certain direction. Authorial intrusion is very prevalent in Gimba's discourse. This makes it impossible to give an honest assessment of his characters - their motives or the reasons behind some of their decisions or actions. Gimba's discourse is often spiced with humour. He can describe an explosive situation with comic relief. For example, when Sadiku is to buy food on his way to Mwene, he wanted to be served what is permissible in his religion, Islam. He therefore insists on the waiter telling him the type of bush meat he intends to serve him. The waiter's response in Trail of Sacrifice provides a comic relief to a highly charged situation. The waiter's description of a money is full of humour:

> Wetin they dey
> call, am. But e dey climb
> tree like this... P. 25

From the waiter's response, Sadiku infers that he is talking about a money, which is not permissible to a Muslim and therefore, declines the offer.

Pidgin English, a distorted from of the standard English, has become a permanent linguistic feature for 20th century Nigeria. There are many varieties of the Pidgin English in Nigeria today. Pidgin English has no standard orthography or syntactic structure. At the level of semantics, the meaning attached to a word or an expression may vary from one community to another. But despite this, Pidgin English is widely used in Nigeria by both the literate and the non-literate. By using Pidgin English in his novels, Gimba is reflecting on the linguistic reality of his country. He uses Pidgin English to indicate situations (formal or informal) or to differentiate between his characters. Most of his messengers, labourers, artisans, taxi drivers, etc, use pidgin English as a medium of communication. The taxi driver, whose car is bashed from the back by Sadiku and his friend, addresses them in Pidgin English. In anger, he says to Sadiku in Trail of Sacrifice:

> Your eye no see
> proper? Na learner you
> be? If you no be learner
> and you see proper-proper,
> how come you hit me from behind
> for this bright sunlight day? Hey? P.28.

In certain circumstances, even the characters with formal Education are compelled to speak Pidgin English. For example, when Sadiku, a product of the University of Pondo arrives at

Mwene Redemption High School, he meets an illiterate old man guarding the gate. After gesticulating with his hands several times without any positive result he changed to pidgin English in order to convince the old man at the gate that he has genuine reasons to be allowed into the School. This is the way Sadiku (Trail of Sacrifice) addresses the old man:

> Look Papa
> I be visitor
> for the big man
> wey be Principal
> here. I be him guest.
> Gomfment people wey dey
> for Nayiba send me make
> I come give am message.
> The bigman know say I dey
> for road tonight, tonight. P.95

Here the reader can see the necessity for Sadiku's linguistic adaptation. In a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, the key to survival is linguistic adaptation. For example, Sadiku's just arriving Mwene for the one-year compulsory National service. He cannot speak the indigenous language of his host community. The only alternative opened to him is to speak Pidgin English or risk sleeping in the op,en in a strange land.

A pun is the deliberate and conscious play on the meaning of a word. There are many puns in Gimba's novels. In Witnesses to Tears Gimba uses pun in the following manner:

> Different, difference
> or do you mean deference? P.17

Here Gimba is playing on the meaning of the words different, difference and deference. What he is trying to say in the above pun is simple and clear; people are created differently, they must therefore have differences in their opinions but they should be prepared to deffer to a superior viewpoint or reasoning.

In Sacred Apples too, he uses pun in describing the movement of the cattle egrets. "In their flight, they did not seem in flight". In this example, there is a play on the meaning of the word flight (to run from danger) and flight (to be afraid).

However, Gimba's language is often too formal and trite. It rarely captures the vivacity, tempo, nuances, and essence of what may be described as Nigerians' peculiar mode of expression. The daily coinages, provincialism and mannerisms are lacking in his novels. Code-switching and code-mixing, which is very common among Nigerians are totally absent in his novels. His language though simple lacks the local colour and vitality often associated with Achebe's language.

Sometimes, his language is poetical. He has a collection of published poems titled Inner Rumblings. In Footprints, little Haliyfah gives his vision of the future in the form of a poem:

> We the young shall grow out of the seeds our adults sow, surely ours is the marrow for cocks shall crow than our sun shall glow... P.249

The journey motif is now a common feature of the African novel. Ngugi uses it in Petals of Blood, Armah in The beautyful ones are not yet born, Sembene Ousmane in God's bit of wood and Mariam Ba in So Long a Letter. Ngugi uses the journey from Ilmorog to Nairobi to dramatise the plight of the peasants of Kenya, Ousmane as a means of confronting an unjust and exploitative Economic system, Armah to show that military coups in Africa change nothing except the faces of those in power and Mariam Ba to show the futility of running away from an oppressive social system.

Gimba uses the journey motif for a variety of reasons. In Trail fo sacrifice, Sadiku's journey to Mwene o,pens his eyes to the great potentials of his country - its beautiful landscape, natural resources and rich agricultural potentials. In Sacred Apples, Zahrah's journey to Rabbah is a journey in self-discovery. At Rabbah she discovers that as a woman, she could cater for herself, her children and neighbours. Prior to the journey, Zahrah never contemplated, even for one day, the possibility of herself becoming the breadwinner for her family. But after the journey, she discovers that any woman with a sound education could cater for herself and her children. She therefore resolves to give her children particularly, the female ones, good Education. In Sunset for a Mandarin, Hamzah's journey to new Tymbuctu and subsequent incraceration in a police cell reveals to him the dehumanising nature of his country's penal system. The journey motif in Gimba's novels always ends in the mental and psychological transformation of the affected character.

Another distinctive feature of Gimba's discourse is the thriller-like manner in which he begins his story. The beginning of every story of Gimba is always super-charged, full of tension and suspense. He creates suspense through deliberate detour or shift of focus in the course of narrating an event. He usually begins his stories on a high tempo and when he is almost getting to the climax, he will abandon the event being narrated for a fresh one. Hence his novels are highly episodic.

Witnesses to tears begins with the admission of an unnamed patient at the trauma ward of the Khartoum Hospital. Who the lady is or why she is brought to the Hospital is not immediately revealed, instead, the narrative shifts to another fresh episode - the murder of Serah Bello. It is towards the end of the novel, the identity of the patient on bed is revealed, the reasons for her trauma and the link between her and Serah Bello.

In Sacred Apples, Gimba effectively exploits the mechanism of suspense to retain the reader's interest in his story. The story begins with the grandmother of Zahrah anxiously waiting for her. What delayed Zahrah's journey to Rabbah is not immediately revealed. From her grandmother's home at Rabbah, the story shifts to an angry demonstrating mob. Zahrah, whom the grandmother has been anxiously waiting for, drives into the mob. They burnt her car and out of fear, she runs away leaving her three children at the mercy of the mob. The reader will be eager to know the fate of Zahrah's three children. But this is not immediately revealed. Instead, Zahrah is offered a ride by a man who turns out to be a wanted criminal and a rapist. He attempts raping Zahrah but changes his mind when she tells him she has AIDS, the dreaded acquired immunity deficiency syndrome. Three days after her arrival at Rabbah, Zahrah concludes that her three children must have been killed by the mob. People came to console her and her grandmother. But as usual with Gimba, the unexpected happened. A week after her encounter

with the mob, her brother, Shareef, walks into their Rabbah home with all the three children. They are rescued by Rashard and Miriam, a childless couple whom Zahrah had never met before.

Gimba's resolution of conflicts and tension is often melo-dramatic. The tension soaked and super charged atmosphere of Footprints ends in a Hospital with Haliyfah day-dreaming about his girl friend, Jameelah. In sunset for a Mandarin, the conflict between Hamzah and his boss is brought to an abrupt end when commander Sayyid visits Hamzah's sick bed and apologises to him. In Sacred Apples, the domestic wrangling between Zahrah and her co-wives is also brought to an abrupt end with the sudden and unexpected demise of their husband who dies after eating the poisoned apple meant for Zahrah.

Gimba's dramatic resolution of conflicts comforms with his belief in God and His omniscient presence in everything that affects man. With GOD, nothing is impossible. Even though we may dislike Gimba's melo-dramatic resolution of crises, it has become a permanent feature of his discourse. There is always recourse to religion or divine rescue by his characters. In some instances, whole Quranic verses are cited to justify/ rationalise certain actions or repudiate certain beliefs. For example, when Hamzah, the innocent mandarin, is confronted with commander Sayyid's brutality, he seeks for protection in his religion. Instead of fighting back as expected, he cites several verses from the Quran to justify his docility. Because, he will not want to do violence to his faith, he accepts his mistreatment as a test from God. Similarly in Innocent Victims, Faruk Kolo concludes that his current travails are a test of faith by God.

Gimba's protagonists often have a fatalistic attitude of life. This affects their understanding and interpretation of social relationships. They find it difficult to differentiate between secular relationship and their religious obligations.

The use of flashback is a prominent feature of Gimba's discourse. Events that took place in the past are linked with the present through flashback. In Sacred Apples, Zahrah reminisces over her relationship with Yazid Awwal. She traces the beginning of their relationship from when her grandmother persuades her to marry Yazid to when he eventually divorces her. In Innocent victims, using the flashback technique, Gimba gives an overview of the genesis of the conflict between Hajj Faruk Kolo and his military boss. Through series of flashbacks, in Witnesses to tears, Gimba links the events in the past with the present ones.

The use of Irony is one easily identifiable feature of Gimba's discourse. There is always an ironic twist in his portrayal of people and events. It is an irony that Zahrah will marry a man who has just divorced his wife in a similar manner as Yazid divorces her. It is also an irony that morally good people like Hussaina, Mr. Anas, little Sagiir, Bala Bakatsoro will have to die leaving behind crooks like Dr. Saahir and Zaalim.

The feeling of premonition is common among Gimba's characters. They always have a strange feeling anytime something unpleasant is about to happen to them. The day her father (Mr. Anas) died in a tragic accident, Hussaina is not happy throughout the day, she could not fathom out the cause of her unhappiness

until her father's tragic death in an accident the previous day is brought to her attention.

The Zahrah prepares to visit her grandmother at Rabbah, she is sad and restless, instead of being happy. She could not understand the reasons behind her sadness and strange feelings, until she later drives into a mob, which maltreats her and snatches away her three children.

The title of a novel could give an insight into its major concern or thematic focus. The titles of Gimba's novels are mostly summaries of their central plots. Sunset for a mandarin, as the title suggests is about the fall of a senior civil servant. Innocent victims is about the brutal persecution and maltreatment of innocent people. Trail of sacrifice is about Nigeria's compulsory one year National Youth Service Scheme. Footprints is an inquiry into the type of legacy the present generation of Nigerians will bequeath to its future generations. Sacred Apples is about the sanctity of marriage and the marital institution. It is very easy to predict the focus of Gimba's stories from their titles.

The positive features of Gimba's novels are their concern with contemporary Nigeria. His novels are contemporaneous. They are fresh, stimulating and revealing. They discuss Nigeria's complex socio-political problems without inhibitions. They challenge every Nigerian to reform his moral conduct or continue to suffer an endless circle of unfulfilled dreams. This is their message. This is what they communicate to every one of us.

CHAPTER FOUR

Literature is about life and life is full of many contentions. One of the contentious issues in African literature today is what should be the appropriate role for the creative artists - poets, novelists and playwrights - contemporary Africa.

There are diverse opinions over this issue. However, they could be divided into two broad schools. The first school of thought as exemplified by writers like Christopher Okigbo and J. P. Clark believes in the philosophy of art for its own sake. In the opinion of this school, the creative artist should be given the freedom to create in accordance with the dictates of his artistic imagination. This school is opposed to what it perceives as the subtle attempt to get the writer involved in the social or political issues of his society. Politics, it feels, is outside the realm of imaginative literature. The artist, Okigbo argues, is not a politician, a teacher, or a preacher. And in his opinion, a writer who wants to teach, or propound an ideology, should be prepared to write religious or political tracts. To Okigbo and Clark, there is a clear distinction between Art and politics, literature and other none literary issues.

Ironically, Okigbo died in one of the finest acts of political engagement. He died at the battle front fighting on behalf of his Igbo people during the Nigerian civil war of 1967 - 1970. Had Okigbo survived the war, the chances are he might commit his poetic talent to the actualisation of the collective dream of his people.

The second school of thought subscribes to the view that the creative artist has a crucial role to play in Africa. This is the position of Ngugi (1972), 1981) Achebe (1975) and Amuta (1989). It is their opinion that the writer should be concerned about the events happening in his society and should feel free to use his artistic talent as a legitimate tool for making commentaries on these events. In the metaphor of a rat and the burning house, Achebe compares the African writer who refuses to address the "burning issues" of his time, to a man whose house is on fire, but who ignores the raging inferno, to chase a fleeing rat. Put in another form, the African writer has to choose between the collective survival of his society, in a period of heightened socio-political crises and the dictates of his artistic imagination. If he decides to chase a rat, while his house is on fire, he risks loosing himself, his society and all that he cherishes.

Achebe, Ngugi and Amuta, it should be noted, are not opposed to the concept of artistic freedom, the artist should strive to be socially and politically relevant. He should write on issues germane to his community and the survival of his people. He should not be indifferent to the 'monumental injustice' his people are subjected to or the social deprivations existing in his society.

In Africa, the writer should serve as an illuminating light, a beacon, pointing to the way out of Africa's dark socio-political tunnel. He should also be a source of hope and inspiration to his people. The voice of reason in an unreasonable social set-up.

If we take into consideration the contemporary Africa, this proposition is strong and attractive. Since its first contact with the outside world, the African continent has never been stable socially and politically. It has been moving from one social upheaval to another. Prior to its physical conquest by some countries of Europe, a substantial number of its people were taken away as slaves. This greatly depleted its population. The direct colonization of the continent and the subsequent imposition of alien socio-political and economic structures closely followed the slavery area.

Today, Africa remains the last developed part of the world, the continent with the lowest per capita income, and the poorest human development index. Hunger, poverty and social instability are the commonest features of Africa. There is a general feeling of frustration, despondency, hoplessness and disenchantment all over the continent. The poverty afflicting many countries of Africa have resulted into civil wars - Angola, Burundi, Rwanda, Algeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone with very dire socio-economic consequences. For example, in the Rwanda conflict alone, an estimated one million people, lost their lives. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, is just emerging from a decade-long military dictatorship and a transition programme that nearly torn the country apart.

In this type of unpleasant and distressing socio-political landscape, the writer (if he wants to be taken seriously) has a social and moral responsibility to his people. He should use his artistic talent(s) to save his people from total destruction.

He has the moral obligation to articulate their collective dream, fear and aspiration. In short, he has to be socially committed and politically engaged in his creativity. This has become even more necessary, in view of the recent disastrous performance of Africa's military and civilian elite.

As a novelist, Abubakar Gimba believes in the functional role of art. He sees literature as a means to a greater political end. This is very evident in his novels. He is a novelist with a strong social mission and a strong political commitment. A democratic - stable Nigeria is the motivating inspiration behind Gimba's artistic discourse. Khan describes him as a "social critic with a tragic but positive attitude to life" and Okome as an urban novelist who understands urban middle class pretensions, their fears, joys and anguish more than any prose writer now, perhaps with the exception of Ben Okri".

This chapter is a critique of Gimba's discourse, the strengths and weaknesses of his Art. The chapter shall examine in detail, the positive aspects of his vision as well as its limitations.

A writer consciously or unconsciously, is both a chronicler and an interpreter of the events of his time. He records in his creativity, the issues affecting him or his society. In the codification and interpretation of the social reality of his time, he is likely to be confronted by two challenges: the challenge of locating and sistuating in their proper historical perspective, the problems facing his society and the challenge of diagnosing truthfully, the causes of these problems.

A creative artist's response to these problems is also not free from extraneous influences. The way and manner the artist conceives and interprets his society is likely to be conditioned by the economic organisation of his society and his position in it. As Boulton (1975: 29) observes "stories do not tell themselves, whoever is telling a story must be somewhere in relation to the story".

Amuta (1989) asserts that there is serious ideological interference in the way a writer interprets his society. Depending on his ideological position or inclination, a writer may adopt a progressive/revolutionary attitude to his society or a reformist attitude to it. Amuta is making serious allusions to the formalist, Marxist and Liberal - humanist perception of literature. The Marxists will like a writer to create characters that have the capacity to execute a radical transformation of their society, with emphasis on the repudiation of its existing social and economic structures. The formalists will admire a work of art for its aesthetics - the beauty of its Language, style and other literary devices, while the liberal - humanists will stress change in a moderate non-radical manner.

Onoge in Nwoga (1978: 95) Corroborates Amuta's assertion when he posits that a work of art could be classified as either:

a) reactionary (conserving the exploiting social structures)

b) revolutionary (that is assuming the stand point of the oppressed who historically stand to negate the exploiting structure).

Abubakar Gimba is certainly not a reactionary. He has a positive attitude to life and the challenges of his time. He is also not a revolutionary in the traditional sense or conception of a revolutionary. However, the elements of revolutionary zeal are visible in his artistic discourse. Gimba is more of a reformist. His primary objective as a novelist, is the moral reformation of man and his society. But considering his cultural background, Gimba could also be considered as a progressive within the limits of his religion. It is a credit to him that despite his highly privileged position in Nigeria, Gimba is still conscious of the acute poverty, social deprivations and destitution which afflict many Nigerians. He is aware of the social vices that are dehumanising Nigerians. These vices and how to eliminate them dominate his artistic discourse. They are well documented in his novels and his characters are victims of these vices.

His artistic discourse is aimed at re-inventing the Nigerian dream, of restoring hope to the hopeless, justice to those who suffer injustice and freedom to the oppressed. In his discourse, Gimba preaches love, peace and the universal brotherhood of mankind. He seeks for a society that is both humane and fulfilling, a society that could guarantee the happiness of every man, regardless of his tribe, religion or status. His novels are both inspiring and challenging. They inspire hope in man's ability to overcome his problems and also challenges him to transcend those vices which are inimical to his survival.

As a novelist, Gimba is passionately concerned about Nigeria. In Once upon a reed, the problem of the country, he declares, is hypocrisy. Nigerians, in his opinion only pay lip service to the essential values upon which depends the true growth of their nation. Man's hypocritical attitude to values is the main object of Gimba's satirical attack. He sees writing as both a vocation as well as a fight. A fight for the enthronement of the right values in human relationship. As a fighter, he wants the writer to fight carefully so as not to destroy those very things he seeks to protect. The writer should not see himself as the alpha and omega of his society, the only person with the right solutions to its problems, neither should he impose his views on the society. The writer should give his society the freedom or liberty to accept or reject his worldview. Hence, Gimba's moderate (non-radical) approach to his society. He is humble enought to accept that a writer is capable of making genuine mistakes. But in what ever circumstances he finds himself, Gimba will like the writer to make the happiness of man his paramount concern.

His quest in his novels for a human/egalitarian society through moral persuasion is very close to the principles and philosophy of liberation theology. As the name suggests, liberation theology is the deliberate and conscious attempt by Christian clerics, particularly, of the Roman Catholic persuasion to use the pulpit not only to preach but also to champion popular causes. The Church became an arena for criticising bad governance, corruption, human rights abuses and social injustice.

Liberation theology was a direct response to the misuse of power which characterises the third world countries of Latin America, Asia and Africa in the 70's and 80's. Its primary goal was the reformation of the society by reforming the moral conduct of those in power. As should be expected, liberation theology transformed the church into an arena for active political engagement, active social affirmation and conscious moral re-orientation.

Surprisingly, the church made profound impact on the world. Its campaigns partly led to the fall of many despotic regimes in South America, Asia and Africa. It successfully galvanised the world against undemocratic and dictatorial regimes. Financial assistance, loans, grants and other forms of bilateral agreements with these regimes were tied to Democratic reforms and Improvements in their human rights records.

One unique feature of liberation theology, was the emphasis on moral persuasion as a means of inducing social change, instead of violence. It was totally opposed to any form of violence as a means of attaining social objectives or political goals. It should be equally noted that as a novelist, Gimba is totally opposed to violence. He is an apostle of peaceful change, peaceful transformation and peaceful moral re-generation.

His vision of human happiness as enunciated in his novels is comparable to the broad concerns of socialist realism or Marxist aesthetics. Kamenka (1969: 48) describes scientific socialism as "essentially humanist and the essence and the essence of its humanism is its conception of the happiness of the individual".

The search for a happier life for man is the main focus on Trail of sacrifice, Innocent victims, Footprints, Sacred Apples, Witnesses to tears and Sunset for a Mandarin.

In Gimba's novels, there is a direct correlation between man's happiness and his moral conduct. There is also an observable link between the weaknesses of his socio-political institutions and his moral behaviour. These institutions are corrupt, because man himself is corrupt. This is the reason why Gimba is more inclined towards attitudinal change. This is also the point of departure between him and Marxist aesthetics. Unlike Marxism, which calls for a total repudiation of the existing social structures - seeing them as exploitative and oppressive, Gimba places more emphasis on the moral reformation of man without any radical alterations in his social institutions.

The most important thing as Hussaina his alter ego in (Witnesses to tears) tells her husband is the human mind "change it and you have changed the entire society". His emphasis on man's moral reformation is reflected in his creation of characters with very strong moral appeal - Sadiku/Makanjira in Trail of sacrifice, Hussaina/Anas/Sagiir in Witnesses to tears, Faruk Kolo/Ben Ali in Innocent Victims, Zahrah/Shareef/Miriam in Sacred Apples and Jibran in Footprints. There is an implicit but strong suggestion by Gimba that if Nigerians could emulate the moral conduct of these characters as exemplified in their honesty, piety, fear of divine retribution, sincerity, love, spartan life, Nigeria will become a more humane place.

The absence of these values in Nigeria is seen as a direct threat to its survival. Realism is a critical aspect of Gimba's discourse. He depicts Nigeria in a realistic manner. Corruption, graft, embezzlement of public funds or what Abubakar describes as negative national attributes are very prevalent in contemporary Nigeria. He depicts them as stumbling blocks to its development. Certainly any attempt to reform Nigeria must take cognisance of these vices. Shagari's ethical revolution, Buhari's War Against Indiscipline, Babangida's Mamser and Abacha's total war against indiscipline are all aimed at fighting these vices. But unfortunately, these policies made little impact on the country. They lacked one critical element, - moral persuasion. The policies were imposed on Nigerians through fear, intimidation and the force of the "koboko", the horsewhip. Hence, Nigerians easily went back to their former lives immediately, the regimes were out of power.

Many people who are familiar with the novels of Gimba, particularly students, have expressed their dismay over what they considered as his non-radical approach to the social problems of his characters and by extension, Nigeria. They may have a valid point. But viewed from the perspective of his social background Gimba can be described as a radical. He has in his novels and without inhibitions, touched on some of the most sensitive issues in contemporary Nigeria. Military dictatorship, Religious intolerance, ethnicity, Feminism - are issues many Nigerians today may not want to dabble into.

They are sensitive and explosive issues. Any wrong comment on them could throw the nation into confusion and violence. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that every violent revolution will end in the positive transformation of man or his society. In Africa, Kenya, Algeria, Angola, Zimbabwe, are valid examples of the painful failure of revolutionary struggles. The several years of bush wars are yet to have any positive impact on these countries. Instead, some of them are trapped in endless and vicious circle of violence.

What is rather required,is a consistent check on man's moral behaviour, his gradual reorientation towards positive values. This could have a more enduring impact on him. This is what Gimba preaches.

Furthermore, in appraising him, people should be conscious of his religious background. Islam, his religion does not encourage violence for its own sake. Where it is attainable, Islam prefers a peaceful change than a change through compulsion. This is because anything done through compulsion hardly lasts. In Islam, violence can only be used in extreme circumstances.

The failure of Gimba's protagonists Sadiku, Zahrah, Hamzah, Jibran, Faruk Kolo to induce the expected moral transformation of their society (through their exemplary life) should not be seen as an artistic weakness. It is rather a realistic portrayal of Nigeria. Despite the overwhelming evidence of corruption in every aspect of life in Nigeia, there are still a few honest Nigerians. The corrupt majority only overshadows these few.

The general tendency among critics to describe Gimba as a northern writer is misleading. If it will be a misnomer to describe Soyinka as a southern writer or Achebe as a eastern writer, then it will be a greater misnomer to describe Gimba as a northern writer. There is nothing really, northern, in his discourse. Even the local colour one comes across in the novels of Achebe or the plays of Soyinka is totally absent in his novels. One can form a mental picture of the Ibo or the Yoruba from the writing of Achebe and Soyinka, but one can hardly form a composite picture of the Nupe (Gimba's ethnic group) or the North from his novels. The problems he highlights in his discourse are not peculiar to the North alone. Corruption, graft, human rights, violations, which are some of the dominant issues of his novels, are not restricted to any part of Nigeria. The whole country is his artistic canvas. He is writing about the Nigeria of the 20th century. He is better described as a Nigerian novelist. Therefore, although, a writer from the North, he is not a Northern writer. As he himself asserts in Once upon a reed:

> "Let's remember that justice is neither a Hausa-Fulani nor is truth a Yoruba man. Freedom is neither an Igbo nor is peace a Nupe or Tiv. Oppression is neither a northerner nor is fraud or corruption a southerner". P.10.

One positive aspect of his discourse, is the topicality of the issues he enunciates. Footprints and Innocent Victims capture graphically the traumatic experience of Nigerians under despotic and insensitive military regimes. In Footprints, remarkable historical dates (i.e. June 12) and phrases such as (this government will not be stampeded or blackmailed into taking certain actions) are documented for posterity.

Sacred Apples, gives a voice to the voiceless female folks of 20th century Nigeria. In what may be considered as a radical posture, Gimba calls for a re-appraisal of man's attitude to polygamy, marriage and girl-child in Nigeria.

Innocent Victims and Sunset for a Mandarin depict the absolute discretion of the Nigerian civil service by both the civilian and military elite. In Once upon a reed he compares the civil service to a chicken beaten by rain.

Witnesses to tears x-rays the mental and physical anguish many Nigerians are subjected to by the state. Nigerians are all witnesses to the unresolved murders/disappearances of many innocent Nigerians.

Gimba's style and language are very simple. His plots are not too complex. This makes his novels accessible to the broad spectrum of his society. Because of his simple style, his novels are like mirrors held unto Nigerians to have a look at themselves, as they had never done before. If they don't like the image seen in the mirror, they should be prepared to change. Change is inevitable in his discourse. Nigerians must be prepared for a new moral re-birth, a new orientation and a new vision of life. This is inevitable if they want a strong and prosperous nation. A nation built on universal values such as equality, freedom, peace and justice. For it to be effective, the change must encompass all the segments of the society, leaders, followers, students, teachers, writers, readers, husbands, wives, mothers, daughters, brothers, sisters e.t.c.

In his discourse, every unit of the society needs cleansing. He re-echoes this view at the launching of his sixth novel, Footprints. According to him "Each one of us should re-examine himself, x-ray himself, scan himself and see how we are contributing to our mounting problems".

Although a powerful and a persuasive novelist. There are certain observable defects in Gimba's discourse. The most obvious one is the lack of variations in the theme of his novels. All his published novels have one central theme - the need for man to cultivate a new moral behaviour. The concern with morality is a legitimate theme. But, it is rather becoming too monotonous in his discourse. Literature is about man. It is also about life and life is full of many complexities. This is hardly reflected in his novels. There is little or no variations in the thematic focus of Trail of sacrifice with Innocent victims, Sunset for a Mandarin, Sacred Apples, Footprints or Witnesses to tears. Their socio-political landscape is similar. The society which they depict is dominated by man's inhumanity to man. The reaction of their protagonists is equally similar and predictable. None of them could overcome the problems confronting him. None could resist the physical indignities visited upon him by the society.

His charaters are too timid and passive to make any lasting impression on the reader. They expect divine intervention in the face of extreme physical abuse. Their inability to take crucial decisions gives them the image of pathetic characters. They lack pathos and their attitude to life is too fatalistic.

The lasting impression of Okonkwo in Achebe's Things Fall Apart is because he is a man of action. Okonkwo will never shy away from taking a decision, no matter how unpleasant. The attitude of Gimba's characters to life is comparable to that of Obi Okonkwo, the grandson of Okonkwo in No longer at ease or Waiyaki in Ngugi's The River between. They give the reader the impression of a people confronted by social forces they could not comprehend or challenge. In his future novels, Gimba should strive to give his characters, the ability to challenge and resist their exploitation or oppression. He should create characters that can combine moral persuasion with affirmative action.

Closely related to the above is the tendency to cram too many topical issues into one discourse. In Trail of Sacrifice and Footprints the discourse covers a wide range of topics: Political instability, violence, dictatorship, diarchy, tribalism, religious intolerance, women, feminism, human rights violations, war, fuel shortages, youths, national service etc. All these are legitimate issues for any artistic discourse. But when crammed into one small discourse, they become too many for the reader to grasp and too huge for effective management by the artist. Presently, there is more bite and punch in Gimba's non-fictional essays, his speeches at differnt form and magazines than in his novels.

There is also too much of authorial intrusiuon in his artistic discorusc. This is because he relies heavily on description and dialogue in his discourse. The reader is

not allowed to probe in to the inner anguish, reaction, moral crises, dilemma, etc. of his characters. The reader is more in touch with Gimba than with his characters. Because there is no character introspection, his characters could not rise to the level of elevated or tragic characters. As Mowah in Okome (1992: 77) rightly observes: Gimba's protagonists fail to achieve an enabling or dignified stature because Gimba's art failed to elevate them as such...

> This is because Gimba's craft only etches through description and dialogue. The absence of profound monologues, self searching moments, psychological crises which unearth as it were the protagonists' humanity marks the borderline between the greatness and smallness of literary characters".

In his future discourse, Gimba should strive to distance himself from his characters. He should provide enough room for the reader to probe into their psyche, personality, mental balance, their reaction to crises, dilemmas and appreciation of difficult situation should be revealed.

Although his language and style are simple, compared to novelists like Achebe, Ngugi, Armah, Ousmane and Mariam Ba, Gimba is yet to cultivate the skills of using the English Language imaginatively to depict his Nigerian experience. The greatest challenge before him is how to adopt the English language to suit his artistic purpose(s). In some cases, the expressions/speeches of his protagonists are too plain and direct for a work of art. His characters speak sometimes as if they are at a political rally. Two examples, one each from Trail of sacrifice and Footprints, will help in buttressing this assertion. Sadiku to Makanjira:

> let's face it, in this country nobody does anything that will not be of direct gains to him and quick too. Sacrifice is dying. And people are selling their entire manhood in pursuit of self. Honour for the glory of the larger society is dead. P. 193.

In Footprints, Dibrin to his friends:

> Our leaders are a reflection of us. The problem with many of us is that we don't own upto our deficiencies. We want some one else to heap all our blames upon for our failures. The leaders, the government, the military are quite convenient scapegoats. The press, critics, human rights activists, women activists, environmental activists, the left, the secularists, the theologians all want to take on government, the leaders for catisgation. P. 292.

These expressions are overtly didactic, plain and certainly having a story to tell and a valid worldview to project, what he lacks is the appropriate language to support his story and his attractive themes.

Gimba's discourse is overtly didactic. He allows the desire to teach, educate or propound a world view override the artistic aspect of his discoruse. His creativity, style and plot are all subordinated to theme. Because of this, his discourse is often devoid of crucial literary elements and devices of literature.

In his discourse, propaganda is allowed to overshadow art/creativity. There should be a balance of theme and language, both are equally important.

There is also a palpable absence of local colour in his novels. They are too detached linguistically and culturally from their environment. Although his novels are mostly set in the urban centres of Nigeria, the provincialism, code mixing,

code switching and coinages, which are prevalent in most discussions between Nigerians are absent in his novels. One hardly feel the vitality or pulsating beat of the Nigerian cities, as one would feel in Cyprian Ekwensi's discoruse or Achebe's discourse particularly, in A man of the people. Gimba's language is too formal.

The Nupe like other ethnic groups have a rich culture of oral traditions. Folk tales, fables and proverbs are very popular among them. Gimba hardly exploits this rich tradition of oral literary materials. In Petals of Blood, Ngugi through Abdullah exploits the rich oral traditions of the Gikuyu to add local colour and beauty to his disocurse so also Achebe in Things Fall Apart. Gimba hardly explores the rural parts of Nigeria. There is too much concentration on Nigeria's urban centre, the elite and their group in-lighting or frivolities. An occasional trip into the rural parts of Nigeria will enrich the quality of his discourse. It will also add colour and beauty to it.

The melo-dramatic manner in which he resolves the conflicts facing his protagonist is becoming an artistic weakness. Issues are raised without being logically resolved. Footprints ends with little Haliyfah day dreaming about his girl friend, Jameelah on his hospital bed. The profound crisis facing Zahrah and her co-wives is brought to an abrupt end through the sudden death of their husband after eating a poisoned apple meant for Zahrah. Sunset for a Mandarin also ends in a melo-dramatic manner with commander Abbud Sayyid's visiting

Hamzah's sick bed. This technique does not give room for an indepth analysis of Nigeria's complex socio-political problem. The constant recourse to religion or divine interaction is becoming from an artistic weakness:

As Mowah in Okome (1992: 74) rightly observes: "religious answers do not elevate literature because they are given without the larger exemplification of life". There is a need to de-emphasise the present melo-dramatic manner of resolving crises/conflicts. The characters should be imbued with the capacity to face the challenges of their time. Literature is not magic and magic - like solutions should not be given prominence in any serious (Literary) discourse.

Despite all these Gimba still remains a critical litary voice in contemporary Nigeria. Nigerians can only ignore the issues he enunciates in his novels at their own peril.

CHAPTER FIVE

"May God save the nation" Gimba views this simple statement he made during a local television programme in 1978, as his most creative work. It was both a prayer and an apprehension. An apprehensive feeling against the destructive path Nigeria seems to be heading. This concern and fear for Nigeria is also reflected in his novels.

Gimba has tried within the limits of his artistic discourse to encapsulate the socio-political problems confronting his country, Nigeria. In each of his novels, a deliberate attempt is to re-invent the Nigerian dream - the dream of a strong, prosperous and united country. This dream, he feels, will remain deferred, unless Nigerians are willing to change their moral conduct.

He sees a direct link between the moral behaviour of Nigerians and the development of their country. He is also convinced that Nigeria cannot be developed on such false values like corruption, injustice, dishonesty and cheating.

He is a writer who is greatly influenced not only by his religion but also by the inherited traditional and cultural code of his people, the Nupe. Islam, Christianity, Judaism and the positive moral values they preach are very crucial in his discourse.

He has a strong aversion for the religious pretence, hypocrisy and deceit of many Nigerians. If only Nigerians will practice truthfully and honestly, the teachings of their religion, Nigeria will become a more humane society and her dreams will be fulfilled.

His discourse covers a wide range of topics - politics bureaucracy, poverty, marriage, and the civil service, social relationship (both formal and informal). These institutions, he feels, should be built on staple moral values that transcend both time and space.

His consistent call on Nigerian's to adopt a more positive attitude to life, is recently echoed by President Olusegun Obasanjo in his independence anniversary speech to the nation. In this speech , president Obasanjo attributed Nigeria's underdevelopment to the moral behavior of its citizens in the following words:

> Fellow Nigerians,
> I have chosen today
> the 39th anniversary to
> address you on an issue
> which I consider of the
> utmost importance to all
> of us Nigerians.
> It is not about what we have
> achieved as a country neither
> is it so much about what we
> hope to achieve in the future.
> I wish to think along with
> you about the moral foundations
> that should govern all our
> actions as we continue to
> search for a just free and
> affluent community in Nigeria -
> it is this extra quality of
> our lives citizens, this essence
> that transcends material life
> which I define as anchor,
> the centre that must bind
> and hold together everything
> that we do as citizens. It
> is the absence of this centre
> that has earned us so many
> wasted frustrated years...43

This submission coming from Nigeria's number one citizen is a vindication of Gimba's position. It also vindicates his consistent indictment of the moral conduct of Nigerians, their

disregard for Honour, in both their official and private conduct. To Gimba, the many 'wasted' and 'frustrated' years are a direct consequence of the spiritual conduct of every Nigerian.

Gimba places two options before Nigerians: adopt a positive moral attitude and become developed or continue with your present moral attitude and have your dreams deferred. Nigerians must make a choice between their present indulgences and the development of their country.

In his discourse, he sees every institution in the society as vital. And every citizen - man or woman, young or old - as having crucial role to play in the survival of the society. Gimba adopts a 'holistic' attitude to his society; his ctiticism is not restricted to the leaders alone. It is all encompassing - students, teachers, police, farmers, traders, parents, cvil servants, contractors, etc. Each has contributed to the present deplorable state of things in Nigeria and each could also contribute towards improving the situation.

However, there is another strong view, which locates the socio-political problems of Nigeria in the economic organisation of the country. This view attributes the moral weaknesses of Nigerians to the economic and social deprivations they suffer or are subjected to by capitalism. It is the opinion of this view that an economic system which allow or make it possible for a few people to (corruptly) manipulate the resources of the society can only breed dishonesty, greed, cheating, graft and other observable negative vices. In this type of economic system or social milieu, the individual will be more concerned

about his survival than with his moral conduct. Since he cannot get his legitimate entitlement(s) including basic facilities such as medical care, good education, employment, appropriate salary/wages, pension, gratuity, leave grant etc, through honest means, he is forced into corrupt practices. The choice is between survival and death. Therefor,e the best way to induce the required moral change in Nigeria is to re-appraise the economic organisation of the country. Put in another form, the average Nigerian should not be expected to be honest, Godly, or God fearing in an economic system that is dishonest and totally anti-God.

However, these these two contradictory views are united by one common problem - the general underdevelopment of Nigeria. They are also united by one common goal - the desire to enthrone a more humane, prosperious and united Nigeria. A Nigeria built on socio-political justice.

Our perception/interpretation of Nigeria may differ from that of Gimba but we cannot ignore his lone moral voice on the contemporary political landscape. As a novelist, Gimba has spoken, the choice is essentially that of Nigerians - to trod the path of honour and morality or to remain in a vicious circle of frustrated dreams. The choice is ours and ours alone to meke.

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