

Transculturalism and Fractured Narratives in Two Contemporary Nigerian Novelists

Andrew Ibeawuchi Nwagbara

Abstract

The novelists chosen in this study deploy disconcerting narrative strategies that account for the fractured psychical and emotional components of the major protagonists. In Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen* and Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, the novelists engage major characters, circumstances, and situations that point guilty fingers at the human conscience. The choice of these novels is due to the tragic circumstances of the major protagonists in the two novels. Tragedy is seen in this research as a transcultural phenomenon that cuts across cultural backgrounds. The novelists adopt non-linear narrative patterns, the transcultural identities of the duo prose fictions. It is also the back-and-forth narrative style and the recurrent tragic events in them that justify their choices for this study. The family of Mr Eme Agwu, who is at the centre of all the tragedies in Obioma's *The Fishermen*, is subjected to the most horrific tragic experiences. In Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, Hassan and Hajiya Binta mingle in the ecstasy of love, which culminates in multiple tragedies. It is the theory of postmodernism that has assisted in unravelling the tortuous agonies of the major personalities in the novels. In doing a separate and in-depth analysis of each literary text, the undulating narrative style of each writer is exposed. The writers collectively succeed in stretching to the limits of the patience and endurance of the reading audience and the major protagonists in the two novels. The selected novels have put forth some human experiences that cut across ethnic groups and religions in the Nigerian environment, which is the homestead of the novelists. Finally, these prose writers have established the truism that human tragic experiences cut across cultures.

Keywords: Cultural Studies; Transculturalism, Fractured Narratives, Contemporary Nigerian Novels, Postmodernism.

Introduction

The most appropriate question that requires an urgent answer in this paper is What is the meaning of contemporary? The answer to this question cannot be divorced from the concept of time. The word 'recent' becomes the closest answer to the question posed earlier. The next germane question is, how can one establish a benchmark for the prose fiction so classified as recent or contemporary? For this research, these are Nigerian novels published from the beginning of the second decade of the twenty-first century to date.

These novelists have attended to issues that are current in their various communities and societies in Nigeria. These include: political events, cultural situations, the moral decadence of the political leadership, poverty induced by corruption, and migration, amongst others. These prose writers share the view of Breyten Breytenbach that when a writer is confronted with a mirage of acute social and economic inequalities in his/her society, he/she “is called upon to articulate the dreams and the demands of his people” (166). Contemporary Nigerian novelists have dominated the literary space with the dreams and demands of their immediate societies. The novel form has thus provided these writers with the privilege to fulfil the opinion of the Nobel laureate, Naguib Mahfouz, that “... art is generous and sympathetic” (124). It is these twin phenomena associated with the works of fiction that have helped boost the creative impetus of the earlier Nigerian fictional prose writers. In response to the robust creativity of the early Nigerian novelists, several literary critics sprang up. These included: Oladele Taiwo, Charles Nnolim, Chinua Achebe (writer and literary critic), Wole Soyinka (writer and literary critic), Emmanuel Obiechina, Chidi Amuta, Ernest Emeyonu, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo (writer and literary critic), Dan Izebaye, amongst others. It has therefore become necessary to have literary criticisms of the recent novelists who have broken away from the literary styles of the much older writers. These contemporary novelists, including those discussed in this study, have shown remarkable boldness in their choices of themes and narrative styles. One of their techniques of narration is to infuse a lot of suspense in their storylines such that at the end of their novels, the readers are left bemused.

Transculturalism is a multidisciplinary subject that can be applied to literary discourse. Transculturalism, like enculturalism, “unifies people by providing them with common experiences” (Kattak, 28). These experiences may be tragic or joyous, pleasant or unpleasant. The term is a joining of two words: ‘trans’ and ‘culture’. The word ‘trans’ is derived from the Latin language, and it means ‘across’. *The New International Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary of English Language* expands the meaning of ‘trans’ to include any of the following: “across; beyond; through on the other side of; as in”. From the two definitions above, the word ‘across’ seems to be the most acceptable definition of the word ‘trans’. The meaning of the word, culture, has been interpreted as the ways of life of a group of people. Therefore, transculturalism points in the direction of those human experiences that find commonalities across cultures. Tragedy is one such that has been a part of human life in real and fictional spaces. For it is the rare sordid and unexplained affairs of men in human society that are captured in these selected works of fiction.

The focus of attention of this paper is the unique narrative techniques adopted by the two novelists in the selected prose fiction that succeed in creating psychological and emotional traumas in the lives of the major protagonists. In other words, how well

have Chigozie Obioma and Abubakar Adam Ibrahim, the writers of *The Fishermen* and *the Season of Crimson Blossoms*, respectively, performed in presenting their storylines to capture the ruptured psychic realities of the central characters that ultimately lead to calamitous situations in the novels? What makes the study stand out is the choice of two fictional Nigerian writers, whose settings and characters of choice are of different ethno-religious backgrounds. While Obioma chooses characters of Igbo extraction living in the South West of Nigeria, the town of Akure, with predictable patterns of cosmic and cultural realities, Ibrahim in his novel, utilises two protagonists who are Muslims living in a Northern Nigerian environment with the societal expectations of religious piety. Despite these divergences, the transcultural similarity of tragedy becomes the lot of the major protagonists in the two novels. This study in attempting to discuss the narrativity of the two selected novels, looks at the issues of sexual escapades between a criminal and a widow mingled with criminality in a predominantly Muslim environment in the prose fiction of Abubakar Adam Ibrahim; and the spiritual bizarreness of a madman whose prophesy leads to series of tragedies befalling the family of the protagonists in the novel of Chigozie Obioma. These two writers offer refreshing perspectives on the Nigerian novel.

It is the direction of the narrativity of these selected novels that is of interest here. Benjamin Orji-Mba quotes Bello-Kano who views narrativity to indicate “the closure or identification of a system of structuring a text in terms of how events are plotted... that narrativity dictates the beginning and end of a story including the physical and temporal spaces involved” (14) Orji-Mba further states that “writers now abandon simple narrative structures for complex ones in a bid to rediscover the real through the imagined” (149). Orji-Mba concludes that “story-telling is an art, and every writer is free to adopt any narrative choice that will effectively drive home the intended information to the reader at the right time” (149). The two novelists in this study have adopted the above use of Orji-Mba in the crafting of their prose fiction.

The meaning of the word fracture points in the direction of breakage that can occur in the human body or any normal flow of events. This word can refer to a disjointed flow in the daily existence of humans. The two novelists whose works are selected attempt to use their narratives to present to the readers protagonists whose lives undergo a series of turbulences that ultimately lead to colossal tragedies. In each of the novels, the novelist begins his storyline with such breathtaking gusto that the conclusion of each story is difficult to determine for a first-time reader. It is this narration of the various disordered existences, the situations of the unpredictability of what to expect next from the central characters, that has made these two novels one of a kind. It is a similar, unique storytelling by these writers that has engendered interest in the study of the narrative styles of Chigozie Obioma’s *The Fishermen* and Abubakar Adam Ibrahim’s *Season of Crimson Blossoms*.

It is an accepted axiom that literary criticism of the modern era should be garnished with a literary theory. In carrying out an inquest into the narrative patterns of Chigozie Obioma and Abubakar Adam Ibrahim in *The Fishermen* and *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, respectively, the literary theory of Postmodernism is ideal. From the name, this theory comes after the modernism theory. J. A. Cuddon views postmodernism as “a general term used to refer to changes, developments and tendencies which have taken place in literature, art, music, architecture, philosophy, etc. since the 1940s and 1950s” (552). This implies that it can be used to do a critical analysis of a work of literature. For Lekan Oyegoke, “at the poetic level, there is the tacit assumption that the terms 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' are synonymous with obscurity” (13). Habib M.A.R.'s subject's postmodernism to three applications (interpretations) of which the historical development is the most crucial in this study. For him, “The clear difference, however, between modernism and postmodernism rests on the fact that the latter is different from earlier in both subject matter and style” (247). He states that “The historical phenomenon has generated two further registers, that of postmodern theory... and that of literature and art...” (Habib, 247). He further holds the view that “postmodernism is marked by a recognition of ethnic, sexual and cultural diversity” (249). These are the reasons for adopting this literary theory in the analysis of these two novels.

The major characters in Obioma's *The Fishermen* exhibit the characteristics of ethnicity and cultural diversity, while the major protagonists in the *Season of Crimson Blossoms* show traits of sexuality and some displays of cultural and religious attachments. There are other features of this theory. It has influenced the ways writers have approached issues like narrative techniques, thematic interests, and the development of characters in works of literature. This theoretical construct has, amongst many other uses, exposed the fragmented and disjointed natures of narrative styles in fictional works. Postmodernist literature also blurs the lines between reality and representation as seen in the novels Obioma and Ibrahim in this research. This theory has been influenced by poststructuralism, deconstruction, and postmodern philosophy. The major proponents of this theory include Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson, and Terry Eagleton. Several writers have exhibited traits of postmodernism in their works of literature: Kafka, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf, and Brecht (Habib, 249). Habib sees postmodernism as expressed in the writings of Beckett, Robbe-Grillet, Borges, Marquez, Naguib Mahfouz, and Angela Carter. These writers rest their styles on the breakdown of narrative structures and conventional poetic forms, the use of allusions, parody, hyperbole, collage, and pastiche.

Fractured Narratives and Transcultural Features in *The Fishermen* and Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*

The opening salvo of Obioma in *The Fishermen* is a series of prophetic events to unfold in the novel. The first is the poem of Mazini Kunene. The first line of Kunene's

poem, “The mad man has entered our house with violence...” (Obioma, 7), makes a direct reference to the apocalyptic expectations of the narrative. Also, the Igbo proverb in the same epilogue, “The footsteps of one man cannot create a stamp”, is a false testimony of the events that transpire in the novel. The ordinary interpretation of this Igbo proverb runs contrary to the content of the poem of Kunene. For if the footsteps of a man, no matter his height and size, cannot precipitate a stampede, how come one madman who enters a house with violence disrupts the existing peace in a household? From the epilogue, Obioma creates an ambiguity in the minds of the readers. The novelist further creates an ominous cloud of expectation in the storyline with the expression “We are fishermen” (Obioma, 9). The reader sees a similarity between *The Fishermen* and Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*. After closer scrutiny, the novelist discovered it to be the story of brothers desirous of partaking in the adventures associated with the fishing expeditions in a rustic western Nigerian town. The choice of Benjamin, the fourth son of the family of Mr. Eme Agwu, as the omniscient narrator creates anxiety for the reader. Why Benjamin and not Ikenna, the first son? Perhaps, Obioma reserves a very crucial role for Ikenna; one that will alter the destiny of all the members of his family. Obioma in introducing a statement and an event, initiate the suspense that endures till the end: “Eme, remember you have growing boys back here...” (11), is the statement of a mother who anticipates a handful of troubles from her five teenage boys and a girl in the absence of their father. The reader does not understand the import of this lamentation of a worried mother until the tragedies begin to unfold. Also, the event that led to the transfer of Mr. Eme Agwu from the Central Bank of Nigeria Branch in Akure to Yola disrupted the equilibrium that hitherto existed in the family.

The tragedies that befall the family cannot be divorced from this event. According to Benjamin, “This is why everyone has come to believe that had he not left Akure, our home would not have become vulnerable and that the kind of adversity that befall us would not have happened” (31). In Mrs. Agwu’s statement above, coupled with the absence of Mr. Eme Agwu from home, the novelist creates a fertile ground for tragedies. Obioma, through the narrator (Benjamin), further confirms the fragmented narrative structure of the novel when he observes that, “when I look back today, as I find myself doing more often now that I have sons of my own, I realize that’s it was during one of these trips to the river that our lives and our world changed...” (20). From this statement, one establishes the retrospective nature of the narrative. It is the flashback technique that the novelist has adopted as his narrative technique. Perhaps, there is a connection in the narration between the above statement by Benjamin and the subsequent one. “I opened my eyes, cleared my throat, and started all over again” (301). The earlier explanation by Benjamin establishes a rupture in the narrative pattern of the prose fiction to show that this is a story being narrated several years after it had taken place, while the later one presents the entire

story as a dream. These two statements from the narrator create a bizarre storytelling and a ruptured narration.

It is important to note the narrative sequence of the novelist, which involves having a subtitle for each chapter. Such subheads provide insights into what to expect in each chapter in terms of prosaic content. Therefore, the narrative of each chapter flows seamlessly into the next. For instance, the first chapter titled '*Fishermen*' ends with the importance the narrator attaches to the Omi-Ala River; "I realize that it was during one of these trips to the river that our lives and our world changed. For it was here that time began to matter, at that river where we became *Fishermen*" (20). The second chapter is titled "*The River*" to synchronise the end of the first chapter with the narrative/content of chapter two.

In the fourth chapter titled "*The Python*", the focus of attention shifts to Ikenna, the architect of the tragedies that befall his family. It is these tragic events that define the entire storyline. It is from this chapter that Ikenna "turned into a Python..." (47). This is the result of the 'Guerdon' (39) he and his three other brothers receive for fishing in the accursed and dreaded Omi-Ala River. The parents of the boys have this ominous impression of the river, and the boys are forbidden from fishing in the river. It is their disobedience to this instruction of their parents that nosedives into their subsequent encounter with Abulu. Subsequently, Ikenna acquires the temperament "to harm an adult" (42) when he supervises the slaughtering of Mama Iyabo's rooster for being the person who serves as the carrier of the news of the Omi-Ala River adventure of the boys to their mother. "Ikenna's metamorphosis" (58) becomes one that alienates him from the rest of his siblings. The relationship between him and Boja (his immediate younger brother) is one of "mutual respect for each other" (49). The fight between the duo, which leaves Boja with "bloodied lips" (60), marks the beginning of the antagonism between them, which endures till the later part of the novel. This bloody duel between the two brothers culminates in one brother killing the other when the tragedies begin to unfold. This is one of the streams of narration in the novel where the narrative style of suspense is employed by Obioma to sustain the anxiety of the reader. To assist Ikenna, the progenitor of evil in this novel, to quickly attain his zenith in the obnoxious assignment given to him by the writer, he becomes belligerent even to his mother to the extent of addressing her as "this woman" (65). When their mother makes the expression, "Two is enough" (66), the narrator foresees it as the "foreboding of the things that would befall our family a few weeks..." (66). The tragic build-up begins from here.

The metamorphosis of Ikenna, who is the central figure in this novel, continues. He is suddenly consumed by "evil spirits" (69) that must be exorcised by a father who is far away in Yola. Despite being painted as the "Judas Iscariot" of the family, he possesses the charisma to defend his siblings in the face of any injustice meted out to them. As a pupil of Omotayo Nursery and Primary School, and in a "moment spiritual" (71), he steps in to defend his brother Boja from being unjustly

punished for protesting against the caricature pronunciation of his name, Boja nonimeokpu, by the head teacher. To fend off his brother from any corporal punishment, Ikenna angrily says, “My brothers and I will all leave... there are better schools out there where we can get better Western education...” (71). His brothers have always seen him as their leader, who has “...led us with a full-lit torch” (81). He is considered “a prowling lion when an outsider rattled any of us” (81), according to Benjamin, the narrator. At this point, he becomes a generalissimo who leads, and his brothers follow. He leads them in their encounter with M.K.O. Abiola, the presidential candidate of SDP in this work of fiction, where they are awarded a special prize by the politician”; ... these four boys of one family will now be awarded scholarships by the Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola Campaign Organisation” (79). In addition to this generosity of this presidential candidate, the “M.K.O. calendar” (80) which is the souvenir that symbolizes their encounter becomes “a badge... a testimonial of (their) affiliation with a man almost everyone in the west of Nigeria believed would be Nigeria’s next president” (80). When this calendar gets torn by Ikenna in a fit of cataclysmic anger, the reality dawns on all his siblings that he has destroyed their collective dream and hope of reaping from the victory of the politician.

Abulu the madman becomes a major part of the metamorphosis of Ikenna. This “vision seeing” (85) madman defines the trajectory of the destiny of Ikenna, the “head boy” of the family of Mr. Eme Agwu. Abulu is hated by the people “because they believed his tongue harboured a catalogue of catastrophes... The prophesies he gave to people bred fear of the dark fate awaiting them... “(101) His earliest vision is “the ghastly motor accident that claimed an entire family...” (101) He thus becomes “the oracle of the scribbler of the telegraph of fate” (101) His visions are occasionally beneficial to the community like that of the men “clothed in masks and dark clothes” (102) who robs the community on a particular night. Another beneficiary of his positive vision is the daughter of the politician who is kidnapped and subsequently rescued. These are a few of the positive sides of his visionary ecstasy. The mysticism surrounding his personality includes his abode, which is “a decrepit truck... abandoned because of its bloody history” (98). This is a truck that “crushed into an electric pole... killing an entire family” (98). This is a man whose personality occasionally transforms into “a prophet, a scarecrow, a deity, even an oracle” (100). Abulu’s choice of Ikenna as the bearer of his “proverbial benevolence” can be interpreted along the lines of Ikenna’s disobedience to the voice of wisdom from his brothers and friends on their first encounter with Abulu. This madman “who killed his brother” (87) and raped his mother is capable of the unimaginable. It is this vicious individual Ikenna threatens that “if he comes any closer, we will tear his flesh with the hooks, just like we kill fish, and throw his body in the river” (88). It is in an act of reciprocity to this threat that Abulu places humongous curses on Ikenna. In responding to the time-tested axiom that an action engenders an equal and opposite reaction, the

following catalogues of evil curses from Abulu become the albatross of Ikenna: Ikenna, you shall die” (89).

Ikenna you will be mute... Ikenna you be crippled... your tongue will stick out of your mouth like a hungry beast, and will not return back into your mouth... Ikenna you shall lift your hands to grasp air but you will not be able to. Ikenna, you shall open your mouth to speak on that day... but words will freeze in your mouth... Ikenna you will swim in a river of red but shall never rise from it again, Ikenna you shall die like a cock dies (90).

The most significant of these curses and the one closest to Ikenna’s heart is, “Ikenna you shall die by the hands of a fisherman” (93). Ikenna specifically informs his brothers; “He saw a vision that one of you will kill me...” (94). The novelist thus presents these ominous predictions as the precursor to the tragedies to anticipate in the narrative.

Obioma provides in the narrative an opportunity to avert the impending catastrophes in the family of Mr. James Agwu. The mother of the boys offers the ecclesiastical option of spiritual cleansing in the Assemblies of God Church for the curses of Abulu on Ikenna. She questions Ikenna; “Do you want that madman’s prophecy to come true?” (106). To reinforce this question, she questions him further: “What do you think is the cause of all your misbehaviours if not because you believe your brothers will kill you?” (106). Ikenna, as a boy destined for disaster predictably responds “I don’t want to go to any church” (106) He also insists, “I don’t feel I or anyone needs deliverance from anything...” (106) The novelist in enforcing a predictable course of narration in this prose fiction, infuses in Ikenna “The fear of death as prophesied by Abulu (as being) palpable” (109). He now exists in “a strange world within which he was irretrievably trapped and beyond which nothing else existed” (109). Unfortunately, the mother of the boys underrates the vicious impact of these curses on the well-being of Ikenna; “Ikenna, Ikenna, you have chosen to believe the vision of a madman, a useless fellow who is not even fit to be called a human being” (111). Unfortunately, her conclusions on Abulu are wrong. When Aderonke kills her drunken husband, it is believed that Abulu’s prophecy has come to pass. For Mama Iyabo; “Abulu curse am. Im tell Biyi say na the thing wey im treasure most go kill am. Now im wie don kill am” (113). This catastrophe quickens the effect of the madam’s cause on Ikenna. For, “it was here that his illness began...for it seemed that the account of the man’s death had established in him the unquestionable inescapability of Abulu’s prescient powers, causing smoke to rise from things yet unburned “(114). The novelist further quickens Ikenna’s steps along the path of

disaster when he claims; “listen, Mama, I’m a scientist. I no longer believe in God” (117)

The orgy of catastrophic activities in the novel begins with Ikenna and Boja. It is the brotherhood between them that marks the advent of the cocktail of odious circumstances in the novel. The bond between the two predates the arrival of Abulu, the architect of evil. Ikenna is scheduled to travel to Canada in the company of his father’s friend, Mr. Bayo. This is truncated by Boja who throws “Ikenna’s international passport that contained a Canadian visa in the well” (132). His reason for doing this is “because he didn’t want Ikenna to leave him” (132). However, it is Ikenna who “...arranged for Boja to throw the passport in the well because he did not want to leave without him; they would go together when they were older” (132) After undergoing the novelist’s inflicted transformation, “Ikenna turns this act of love” (132) between the duo to “an act of ultimate hatred” (132) for which Boja must be punished.

The fulfilment of Abulu’s prophecy begins subsequently. In a gruesome fight between Ikenna and Boja, Ikenna is stabbed to death, and as predicted by the madman, all the paraphernalia associated with his murder come to pass. The novelist, all along, keeps Mr. James Agwu out of the scene until the tragedies begin to unfold. This is a deliberate narrative technique of a lacuna by the novelist to enable him to drive this novel to its inevitable tragic conclusion. For it is “two days after Ikenna died” (151) that he returns. The next in the line of calamity is Boja’s death, though not prophesied by Abulu. Boja commits suicide and subsequently drowns himself in their family water well; his “body floating on top the water, his clothing foamed a parachute behind him, bloated like a fall balloon” (170). Why has the novelist allowed the first two sons of this family to experience death in a sequence that is determined by their ages? Perhaps, Obioma desires to rely on the traditional Nigerian precept that death decimates the offspring of this family based on seniority to affirm the oneness of the physical and the spiritual that Abulu represents. The novelist offers Abulu the opportunity to attend the memorial service of these two brothers, where he “repeated mentioned Ikenna’s name” (235). In doing this, the madman reinforces the name of the principal recipient of his vicious epithet.

The novelist, through the character Obembe, helps prolong the narrative of the novel. His two elder brothers have died because of the same prophecy. This is not the end of the evils expected of the vision of the madman. The novelist smoothly prolongs the storyline by initiating a thought pattern in the other two brothers. According to Obembe, “Abulu killed our brother. He is our enemy” (202). He concludes, “I will kill Abulu” (202). Obembe’s desire to commit this revenge is borne out of the following reason “I will do it for them because he killed our brothers. I will do it for them” (202). This sets the stage for further tragedies to be expected in the story.

It thus becomes obvious in the narration that the two brothers, Obembe and Ben, must collaborate for an effective execution of the plan to kill Abulu. The initial reluctance of Ben (the narrator) to be a part of this revenge becomes obliterated when the entire family encounter the madman for the first time in the novel. The agony of a mother who loses two of her young sons due to the curse of the evil man on this occasion becomes the prompting factor to make the narrator participate in the murder of the madman. According to him, "It was he who took away our brother. It was he who deposited the poisonous venom in the hot blood of our brotherhood.... In Ikenna's belly" (211). According to the narrator, "The djinn that seemed to suddenly possess us" (254) makes them kill Abulu by jabbing "the hook of our lines blinding at his chest, his face, his hand, his head, his neck and everywhere we could..." (254-255). But rather than being fulfilled and happy in avenging the deaths of their elder brother, they became roosters after they killed Abulu"(258). The novelist makes Obembe escape from punishment amongst the four adventurous brothers. After spearheading the murder of Abulu, he runs away from the imminent punishment awaiting him and Benjamin. The narrator bears the cross for the murder of an insane man who has brought untold hardship to the principal family in the novel. "He must bear the cross of incarceration, a court trial and imprisonment for the sake of his brothers" (284). The logical conclusion of the story is the imprisonment of Benjamin and his subsequent release from the gallows after six years. However, the sudden emergence of Obembe from Benin City on the day of his brother's release from prison further emphasises the ruptured nature of the storyline.

The novel *Season of Crimson Blossoms* is the debut attempt of Abubakar Adam Ibrahim at prose fiction. It shares the similarity of a tragic conclusion with Chigozie Obioma's *The Fishermen*. Ibrahim adopts a storyline that is highly anathematised in a typical Northern Nigerian Muslim setting. The reason for this is that certain social behaviours are not expected of the adherents of this religion in real and fictional domains. Therefore, in the choice of the storyline of this novel, the novelist has deliberately desecrated the usual pattern of behaviour expected of the two major protagonists in the novel. The unholy affair of the duo, Binta Zubairu, a grandmother of fifty-five years of age, and an illicit drug dealer, Hassan aka Reza, becomes an unprecedented assault on the time-tested behavioural pattern of the adherents of this religion. The novel also exposes the pretence that the Islamic religion has used in shielding the immorality of some of its worshippers. Perhaps, to avoid being accused of using this novel to paint the Islamic religion in a bad light, Ibrahim presents the prose fiction as a dream; "dreams can be dainty and beautiful like butterflies and just as fragile" (290).

The narrative design of this prose fiction is racy from its beginning. In the first paragraph, the novelist lays bare the history of the major female protagonist, Binta Zubairu. The "pungent smell" (Ibrahim, 9) of her environment defines the tragic

direction of this novel. The first encounter between Binta and Hassan (Reza) also unfolded in the first chapter. The rest of the storyline is built not on the stealing of the household items of Binta by Hassan and the subsequent return of them by him, but the fact that the armed robbery sows “in her the seed of awakening that would eventually sprout into a corps flower, the stench of which would resonate far beyond her imagining” (14). The narration is thus built around these complex imaginaries. It is neither her material loss nor bodily injuries sustained during the robbery that are her worries, but the physical grip and body contact with Reza that triggers the sexual sensation in her, which had been forgotten, pleasant memories. It is the smouldering experience that leads to the “moistening of her long-abandoned womanhood...” (28).

The novelist, without much ado, lays bare the personality of the major male protagonist and the settings of the novel. San Siro is the abode of Reza “the rogue with spiky hair” (37). This place, named after the arena of the famous AC Milan Football Club in Italy, is the venue of vices. In the writer’s choice of unique characters (perhaps to show his liking for the Italian Serie A), there is a character named Gattuso after “a rugged Italian football” (38). Reza holds sway here as the lord whose law must be obeyed. The novelist seamlessly provides the information that gives a full portrait of Reza and saucily provides information on the setting of the novel which is Abuja. Reza, for instance “was expelled in the final year of secondary school” (58) for breaking the nose of a teacher. He is unable to continue his education, according to him, because “Too much metal in my head, too many knife fights, too much weed, too much... stupidity” (58). Thus, from this simple outline, the content of Reza’s character, “an insufferable weed dealer” (65) is unveiled. Curious in Ibrahim’s narrative, there is Binta’s frequent comparison of Reza and her late son, Yaro. At various moments of her sexual escapades with Reza, she compares the vitality and youthfulness of the duo. She sees in Reza a resemblance to the late Yaro. Can this be a feeling of infatuation of a mother towards her late son? She confesses, “it disturbed her, this constant reminder of her son when she looked at Reza” (101-102). The two men share the habit of taking drugs in common. At a point, she dislikes her late son for smoking ganja; fate finds her entangled in a love affair with Reza, who is also a drug addict like the late Yaro.

Ibrahim adopts a binary narrative pattern, which involves developing two plots side by side. The major of these two is the love story of Binta and Reza and all the intrigues therein. The minor is the activity of the Senator who is involved in the nefarious engagements associated with Nigerian politicians; the mingling of politics with criminality. The novelist credibly uses Reza in the two different plots. He is presented as a multi-talented personality, who as an intrepid criminal, combines his role as the kingpin of San Siro with an intense love affair with a fifty-five-year-old widow and the job of a political thug. To cap it all, Kareema sees him as being “...

soo handsome” (130). The novelist thus uses a superb narrative skill to make a character combine all these roles admirably in this novel.

Ibrahim adopts the time-tested pattern of the fictional narrative structure of dividing the novel into parts. As expected, he creates cataclysms in the first segment creates cataclysms that lead to the tragic events in the second part of the novel. The novelist draws a tragic outline that begins with the robbery incident, which leads to the love affair between the two major protagonists. It is this love entanglement that leads to the murder of the prominent and influential businessman, Munkaila Zubairu, the son of Binta, by Reza. Reza pays with his life for this criminal act in a set-up organised by his political godfather, the Senator. In all of these detestable scenarios, one character, Reza, is involved. The news of Reza’s death comes via the state mass media apparatus: “Reza, a notorious criminal, was shot dead by the police while resisting arrest in connection with the murder of businessman Alhaji Munkaila Zubairu” (288).

Conclusion

Despite the free-flowing storyline of *The Fishermen*, an element of deceptiveness is noticeable in its narrative structure in the last sentence of the novel: “I opened my eyes, cleared my throat and started over again” (301). This conclusion will remain subject to diverse interpretations by literary critics. This is the utterance of the narrator who has woken from a daydream and begins to tell the story of his reverie. The narrator (Benjamin) of the entire novel tells the story of Obioma’s woolgathering. Similarly, in Abubakar Adamu Ibrahim’s *Seasons of Crimson Blossoms*, the story ends in a dream-like scenario; “dreams can be dainty and beautiful like butterflies and just as fragile” (290). The two novelists also act in unison, prefixing every chapter of their novels with proverbs or titles that provide clear ideas or summaries of the contents. In *The Fishermen*, the title of each chapter reveals the subject matter of the narration to expect. The first sentence in each chapter alludes to the title. Obioma occasionally uses graphic illustrations to describe the various methods considered plausible in the killing of Abulu, their tormentor, by Obembe and Benjamin. Occasionally also Obioma like Ibrahim employs the use of popular African proverbs to draw the readers’ attention to what to expect in the preceding chapters of their prose fiction. These two contemporary Nigerian novelists display similarities and diversities in their common achievements of fluidity.

In the disjointed pattern of the prosaic flow, Obioma in *The Fishermen* adopts one nefarious, insane character, Abulu, to precipitate the various tragedies. The novelist also deliberately creates a needed vacuum with the absence of Mr Eme Agwu from home to provide a suitable environment for the obnoxious events that occur in his household. These techniques are obvious master narrative strokes. For Ibrahim, the two crimes committed by the major male protagonist, Hassan, begin the novel and

bring the narrative to a close. His death, in the end, is not tragic but a reward for a vicious character who has lived all his fictional life fully soaked in criminality. Thus, these two major protagonists, Abulu and Hassan, become the two personalities who play similar roles in the two novels to achieve a narration pattern that remains intriguing and full of suspense till the end.

Works Cited

- Breytenbach Breyten “The Writer and Responsibility” in *African literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, Tejumola Olamiyan and Ato Quayson (ed), Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford and Carlton: 2007.
- Cuddon John Anthony. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, Penguin Books, London: 2013.
- Habib M.A.R. *Literary criticism from Plato to the Present: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, West Sussex: 2011.
- Ibrahim Abubakar Adam. *Season of Crimson Blossoms*. Cassava Republic Press, Abuja and London: 2018
- Kottak Conrad Phillip, *Anthropology: Appreciating Human Diversity*. The Magraw Hill Companies, New York: 2013
- Read Allen Walker et al. *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language*, standard international media Holdings, USA: 2012
- Mahfouz Naguib, “Noble Lecture in African Literature” *An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, Tejumola Olamiyan and Ato Quayson (ed), Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford and Carlton: 2007. Page range of the article.
- Orji-Mba and Onwuka Benjamin. “Narratology of Environmental Degradation and Militancy in Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* in Currents” *African literature and The English Language* (CALFL) Vol ix, (2014): page range of the article
- Obioma Chigozie. *The Fishermen*. Cassava Republic. 2020
- Oyegoke Lekan “Uses of Aesthetics of Obafusation “in Re-Visioning Humanistic Studies, Eruvbetine. A. E. and UDU Yakubu (eds), African Cultural Institute, Lagos: 2009, Pp 11—19.