REALISM DILEMMA AND THE NIGERIAN FICTION: A REVIEW OF SELECTED NIGERIAN NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

This research paper has looked at the dilemma of Nigerian novelists in presenting Nigerian realistic imprints in their prose narratives. In the course of doing this, there is an inquest into the concept of Realism as an art movement whose origin can be traced to the period after the French Revolution and was preceded by the Romantic literary movement. In this research, therefore, there is a textual analysis of some selected Nigerian novels along the line of the principles propounded by the proponents of the Socialism Realism theory, a subset of the Literary Realism spectrum. The principles of the Socialism Realism theory is thus the literary instrument of interrogating Festus Iyayi's *Violence, One is Enough* by Flora Nwapa, and *A Drop of Mercy* by Humphrey Dibia. These novelists with effective use of characterization and thematic discussions have linked their fictional storylines with the realities in their Nigerian communities.

Key words: Reoccurring, Realism, Literary Realism, Nigerian Novel, Realistic Imprints.

INTRODUCTION

Realism in art has been defined as "the representation of reality" (wikipedia.com). Also, "it is the attempt to represent subject matters truthfully, without artificiality and avoiding artistic conventions…" (wikipedia.com). It is often used interchangeably with the concept of naturalism although they are not the same. Neil Lazarus (2013) a literary critic gives Georg Lukacs definition of realism to mean "the avatar of truth in post-feudal (capitalist and socialist) art… (340). He however

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sees naturalism differently as a "weakening of the relation between ideological principle and individual fact…" (341). The concept has its origin traced to a historical movement that began in France after the French revolution of 1848. It marked a shift from the period of Romanticism which had existed for several decades before the French revolution. With its advent as a form of literary creativity, a new generation of writers emerged in English and American literature. (masterclass.com).

This research paper aims at addressing the issues around the Nigerian novelists using their prose fiction to paint true life pictures-social, economic and political situations within the Nigerian geographical space. These writers like their ilk in other climes have related the thematic interests of their novels to realistic events in their societies. Therefore, this academic exercise will highlight the activities of the major protagonists in the selected Nigerian novels that tally with realistic situations in the environment of the novelists. These situations include cultural, social, and economic predicaments of the fictional central characters in these prose narratives. This paper recognizes that in addition to other topical issues of interest, these Nigerian fictional writers have discussed reoccurring issues that have transcended several decades. It is also in light of the above, that the paper x-rayed the realistic imperatives of the major protagonists in Festus Iyayi's *Violence,* Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough,* and *A Drop of Mercy* by Humphrey Dibia using the literary realism theory as the apparatus of literary critical discourse.

What then is literary realism as a technique of literary creativity? This is "a literary genre, (which is) part of the broader realism in arts, that attempt to represent a subject matter truthfully, avoiding speculative fiction and supernatural elements" (wikipedia.com). In this narrative style, the novelist structures the storyline of his/her fiction to portray existing situations that the reader can easily identify with. He or she utilizes scenes, settings, themes, and other narrative techniques that are closely related to truthful representations in his or her prose fiction. The earliest writers associated with this creative style include; Honore de Balzac, Gustave Flaubert, George Elliot and William Dean

Howells. Literary realism concepts are a branch of the broader Realism Art Movement which came after Romanticism. The realist art movement started in France in the nineteenth century and lasted till the early twentieth century (masterclass.com).

An important is the fact that Literary Realism as a style of expression in the novel has several types; Magical Realism, Social Realism, Kitchen sink Realism, Socialist Realism, Naturalism, and Psychological Realism. (masterclass.com). Of these variants, it is the Socialism Realism style that best captures the narrative techniques and the characterizations of the major protagonists in the selected novels for this research. In a simplistic definition, Socialism Realism is that realistic representation of the lives and living conditions of the working class and the poor (masterclass.com). Festus Iyayi, Flora Nwapa and Humphrey Dibia in their respective novels selected for this paper, discuss the realistic dilemmas that their central characters encounter in their fictional societies and by extension the Nigerian environments of the writers. Therefore, in the textual analysis of these novels, the tenets of Social Realism will perform the function of a literary theory and its constituents will be used as the instruments of discussing the activities of the major characters in *Violence, One is Enough* and *A Drop of Mercy.*

Social Realism as a model of Literary Realism addresses "the lives and living conditions of the working class and the poor" (masterclass.com) in novels. This type of artistic technique has been associated with not only visual art but also discusses amongst other things, the social, radical injustices in human societies which the novelists capture in their novels. This theory which is also known as Socio-Realism has also been used to address the difficult life struggles of poor working class people. The novelists who have adopted this approach try to paint through the central protagonists in their novels realistic pictures of the lives of ordinary people within the societies of the writers. They use the activities of these characters to criticize the social structures both in the fictional and real spaces. The novelists whose works of fiction have been used in this research have discussed various social engagements of the poor who grapple with the economically induced problems of survival, cultural injustices against

the female gender, and a multiplicity of economic difficulties involving a young man that is involved in a complex amorous relationship that ends up disastrously. In *Violence, One is Enough and A Drop of Mercy,* each writer addresses social inequalities affecting the major protagonists and they talk about these problems as reoccurring situations in the social life of Nigerians.

REALISTIC IMPRINTS IN VIOLENCE: ONE IS ENOUGH AND A DROP OF MERCY

In Violence (2003), Festus Iyayi, a late leftist ideologically inclined writer and academician treats the triad of conflict, passion and reality. This trinity of interest runs through the gamut of the novel. These three characteristics are so intertwined in the novel that one can't separate one from the other. Even though this pioneering attempt at fictional writing by Iyayi has been reviewed by literary critics along the line of the obvious social stratification that exists amongst the two major families in the novel; it is the existential realities discussed by the novelist which are still present in the Nigerian environment that will be the interest of this research. In Nigeria, there exists the unequal relationship between the rich and the poor; and that amid the illicit passionate love affair between the men and the women, the exploitative aspirations of the rich come to the fore.

There is no gain saying that in the co-existence of the poor and the affluent in our society, the oppression of the poor by the wealthy has remained timeless. It is this that has made the events in *Violence* evergreen. Idemudia and his wife Adisa represent one side of this coin of existence, the subjugated class of the poor. For this couple, the most basic thing in life which is food is difficult to come by. The sight of "unfinished jollof rice, dodo, meat and beans being emptied into the dustbin" (p18) is enough to unsettle Idemudia. He has to engage in taxing jobs like unloading bags of cement from a lorry to earn as little as a five Naira. "Five naira Money! When had he ever had money?" (p38). This represents the agonizing attribute of a man of abject poverty; the grin reality of the daily life of the poor in Nigeria.

This pittance cannot assuage the body of Idemudia that has endured persistent hunger and has been reduced to "*nothing more than a child*" (p52). To earn a five naira wage, Idemudia has to fall sick for days afterwards. To avoid "*scratching the bottom of pots and racking their brains over how they were going to get their next meal*" (p86), Idemudia and his wife must pander to the whim of the rich. In another instance of the oppression of the poor by the influential, there is the narrative of a rich man who grabs the plots of land of the poor and subjects them to police intimidation; "*they say he has always taken land from people like that"* (p109) as if that is the morally right thing to do. Queen and her husband Obofun belong to this human class that enjoys oppressing and taking advantage of the financial predicaments of the poor.

In this novel, the writer brings out the nexus that exists between passion and reality in corrupt civil servants stealing properties of the government and selling the same to female businesswomen for sex. Iriso, a civil servant offers to give out "twenty cartons of milk containing almost two thousand tins of peak milk plus three thousand eggs" (p.88) for "*an hour's lovemaking*" (p.101) with Queen. This existential reality has remained a common practice with the male officials of government and businesswomen in Nigeria. For Queen, men are "*so cheap"* (p.89), accepting a few minutes of sexual intimacy in place of financial gratification. Within the current Nigerian reality, many female contractors have been awarded government contracts by male top government officials based on the amorous relationship existing between them. Queen as a businesswoman in this fictional narrative gets contracts to build government low-cost houses without being an engineer. It is the inequality between the rich and the poor and the exploitative desires of the affluent that Queen takes advantage of in her relationship with Iriso. Her rich husband Obofun combines passion and exploitation also in his dealing with Adisa who is poor and cannot pay the bills of her family. He offers her some cartons of whisky to sell and make some profit in exchange for an illicit love affair thereby taking advantage of her poverty. Obofun remorsefully sees himself as "a vulture picking at the flesh of a helpless prey." (p.199).

In this narrative, the experiences of the anonymous sick man who shares a bed with Idemudia in the hospital pricks the reader's emotion. The inhuman extremity that this man encounters in his brief lifetime reminds the reader of the dastard acts of the bandits who rape women, kill helpless individuals and kidnap individuals for ransom in the north of Nigeria. This man is left to mourn the death of his wife that is raped to death by nine political thugs, a daughter, Itetah who is abducted by soldiers and whose where about remains a mystery, and an only son, Anuoha who is killed as a soldier. For this man, "first it was my wife, then Itetah, then Anuoha. They were all gone…" (p147). The agony of this man is synonymous with that of the parents of the Chibok girls and Leah Shuaibu whose daughters have remained in the captivity of the Boko Haram terrorists for several years. The novelist deliberately offers the reader this bit of information through Idemudia who has also been traumatized by poverty to enable him appreciate the fact that his difficult moments are not the worst any man can endure.

Similarly, at the construction site of Queen in Ugbowo, the realistic imperative plays out profoundly. The labourers; Idemudia and his friends, Patrick, Osaro and Omoifo are subjected to the obvious injustices and maltreatments that the poor who are desperate to eke out a decent living face. They are engaged as replacements for others whose energies have been expended and their justified requests for higher wages are rewarded with dismissal. This is the ruthless response to Queen's observation that "I understand that some of you want more money" (p.234). With the engagement of Idemudia and his friends, her exploitation of the sweat of the poor continues. But these financially vulnerable men have no options. Idemudia's response sums it all; "I stay because I have nowhere better to go" (p.211). Despite this, Idemudia and his friends are aware that "we earn so little and yet we are worked harder than slaves" (p.146). The novelist further proffers some reasons responsible for the pitiable existence of this class of people. Perhaps it is their "unfinished education,…joblessness, …hunger,… poverty that leads to the different forms of violence" (p.243) in their lives of which poverty is one. It is this that makes Idemudia "(sell) his blood" (p.157) at the hospital for "fifteen naira a

pint" (p.157) to feed his family. But in real life, every man must have justifiable reasons to hang on to a distasteful experience.

But unrealistic is Idemudia's refusal of the sum of three hundred naira financial inducement from Queen to prevent the strike by the laborers at her construction site at Ugbowo. His reason falls flat within the reality of the present-day Nigeria. His response to this offer shows some contradictions; "I do not want the money. True I need it and I am poor. But I could never accept such money. I am a man" (p.288-289). The poor in the present Nigeria will accept this financial offer rather than accepting Queen's customary offer of sexual inducement. However, with the effective use of blackmail, Queen wins and Idemudia loses. It is the use of this masterly creative weapon by Iyayi that the conflict in the novel is finally resolved.

Flora Nwapa holds the distinguished appellation of being Nigeria's first female novelist. In her other novels'; *Efuru, Idu, This is Lagos and Other Stories, Never Again, Wives at War and Other Stories*, she exemplifies the indefatigable spirit of a clear headed female literary artist. Her novel *One is Enough* follows the trajectory of other female Nigerian novelists in the elevation to a higher pedestal the struggle of the female folk to assert themselves in a Nigerian male dominated society. The interest on the prose fiction *One is Enough* in this academic paper is to establish the events in the novel as being comparable with the agony of several women in the Nigerian environment; that the experiences of Amaka, the main female protagonist are timeless and thus portray the realistic image of the barren woman in Nigeria who tries to assert herself in various other human endeavours. This novel as expected must have been discussed by literary critics along the line of feminism literature, however, it is the realism embedded in the narrative that is of utmost interest in the paper.

Nwapa begins *One is Enough (*1990), with a proverbial salvo that points in the direction of her area of interest. The Hausa proverb which when roughly translated means; *"A woman who holds her husband as a father, dies an orphan"*, prepares the mind of the reader to travel on a terrain that is rough but predictable for Amaka the major female central character. The novelist presents Amaka as a young ambitious woman

who despite her early misfortunes of being barren after six years of marriage, becomes successful in business and *"soon bought a plot of land and began planning a house of her own*" (p.10). This is a replica of the realistic scenario in most urban Centres in Nigeria and around the world where young married women achieve success in their businesses and careers.

In this fictional society, the achievements of the female individual is not recognized even when she buys a car for her husband and fails to take public glory for this so as not to belittle her husband. Amaka replaces her husband Obiora's rickety Volkswagen car with a new Peugeot sedan and prevails on him to keep it a secret; *"… I don't want people to know. Let's keep it to ourselves, please"* (p.16). Her efforts at helping her husband keep his job in the government Ministry goes unnoticed because she is a barren woman. As in the Nigerian society, the mother-in-law exerts a humongous influence on her married son to the point of marrying a second wife for him. In this instance, Amaka's mother-in-law coldly informs her, *"my son has two sons and tomorrow the mother of these sons will come and live in this house with her sons…"* (p.14).

Of utmost imperative is the high level of ill-treatment that some wives receive in the hands of their husbands. The act of wife battering over little misunderstandings between couples has remained a sore feature in Nigerian society. Obiora has beaten Amaka in the *"second year of their marriage" (*p.26). But in a display of deep-rooted complex, she accepts being guilty of murdering Obiora even when her assault on him is in self-defense during his second physical assault on her. It is difficult to understand the intention of the novelist in subjecting her to this dismal level of self-pity and guilt. Nwapa should have portrayed her as a courageous amazon who has defended herself in other to be alive. *"I have killed him. He did nothing to me. I am a bad woman. Come, all of you, come to save him and kill me"* (p.29-30) is the novelist's way of painting Amaka and the women folk as weaklings. Her effort at self-defense should be applauded rather than being ridiculed. However, as a makeup tactics, the writer imbibes in Amaka the courage to move out of Obiora's house and relocate to Lagos to start life anew; where she also realizes that "*A childless marriage cannot last in the Nigeria of today.*

So if a wife is unable to have children by her husband, she should leave and try elsewhere" (p.34).

In Amaka's sojourn in Lagos to reinvent herself, she experiences a realistic scenario that is peculiar to most urban centres, especially Lagos. To survive, she needs to get involved in business activities that will earn her huge profits. But a more profound reality of her stay in Lagos is her amorous involvement with both Rev. Father Mclaid (Izu), a priest of the Catholic Church and Alhaji. This is so because within the cosmopolitan cities in Nigeria, single ladies get entangled with rich and influential men to live larger than life experiences. For Amaka, these two men are her means of achieving financial fulfillment in Lagos. For an amorous relationship, the Alhaji "*helped (her) buy the site…. (where) … she hope to build a flat on …"* (p.68). Rev. Fr. Mclaid helps the protagonist make huge profits from businesses with the army and also assist her in reinvigorating her passion for men. "*I had failed in practically all my relationships with men until I met you and at the right time…"* (p76), she admits of Mclaid. She also admits that with her new status as a successful woman, she has "*said goodbye to husbands" but not goodbye to men"* (p.85). The impact of these assertions remains obvious; it is her acceptance of the necessity of a male lover in her life that necessitates her becoming pregnant for the priest. This normally sordid action of the priest has become a frequent occurrence in the realm of ecclesiastical construct in the universal Catholic Church. Amaka gives birth to a set of boys with Mclaid as their father, a regular replica situation within the Catholic priesthood. As correctly observed by the novelist through Ayo (Amaka's sister); *"A lot has changed. Nuns found themselves pregnant during the war. Priests had lovers who bore them children and some of them are still priests today…"* (p.126-127).

The novelist in the later part of the novel turns Amaka into a woman who is eager to be liberated from the shackles of male control. She begins to see herself as a self-sufficient and successful woman who does not need a husband for whatever reason. She thus wears the toga of the modern day lady as she holds the opinion that *"something gets hold of me as a wife and destroys me… I don't want to go back to my 'wifely' days. No, I am through with husbands…"* (p.127). Perhaps, the life journey of

her sister Ayo who has four children without a husband fascinates her. The conduct of Mclaid as shameful and timeless as it is, has been a reoccurring disgrace to the Catholic church.

Commendable of the novelist is the admirable role that she assigns to Amaka's mother in the resolution of the conflict in the novel. She is presented as a fair minded personality who despite travelling through a rough route in the upbringing of her children, fails to queue behind a seemingly senseless daughter and takes side with Mclaid. In doing this, she raises fundamental moral questions,

> Amaka, didn't you know he was a priest of God when you slept with him? He was only good as a lover, as a man who arranged contracts for you and not good enough to be your husband?" (p.140-141). She is an epitome of integrity in the mold of several women in the Nigerian clime. In resolving the conflict in favour of Amaka the major female protagonist, Nwapa creates a mystic reality that compels Fr. Mclaid return to the priesthood and abandons the desire to marry Amaka. In conclusion, Amaka achieves her desire that "One is Enough

In the novel *A Drop of Mercy* (2012), Humphrey Dibia examines some of the realistic imprints of the Nigerian space. These include some of the issues that characterize the human relationships between people from different social segments of society. This prose fiction that was first published in 1987; the era of the military regime in Nigeria, discusses pertinent issues prevalent during the period which have also become actualities in the present day.

The central male character in the novel, Maliki (Miki) Ikeji represents the typical Nigerian male child who experiences poverty at childhood and vows not to travel along that social trajectory as an adult. As an adolescent and as a member of the search team that discovers the corpse of his father, he understands the nature of the tortuous experiences of his late father up till the moment of his death; a man who has died as the headman of a patrol team working with the Nigerian

Railway Department. Thus, at a critical crossroad in the life of Maliki, he vows that "*I will never live like my father; I must never die like him"* (p.10). This defining moment shapes his journey in the novel; experiences of a hero-saviour that are realistic with what the young men of his similar social background face in Nigeria.

Conversely, Dibia presents a female protagonist Jordana, a beautiful girl of mixed race, to the reading audience as a way of acquiescing to the existence of a social disequilibrium in the human relationship amongst the characters in this fiction. She is the daughter of a rich Lebanese business man in Lagos and the novelist deliberately uses her opulent background as a contrast to that of Maliki to engender the right level of conflict that will sustain the flow of the narrative. In addition, the novelist introduces the shadowy character, Dr. Gamar Eteng, a radical university scholar, to reinforce the existence of a social imbalance in the society which corruption has helped to aggravate. Through Dr. Gamar, the novelist bemoans; "*Fellow Nigerians, look for yourself. Look at the devastating result of our indolent greed: beggars, criminals, prostitutes, and delinquencies. The scum of society hovering at the brink of unleashed violence*" (p.26). The Same scholar in a lecture delivered in Benin City directly informs the Nigerian audience, *"A portrait is the man who is willing to risk everything that is dear to him: friends, fortune, comfort, health and even life itself. A patriot would risk all these for the love of and service to the nation"* (p.56).

These requirements have remained germane even in present day Nigeria where the leadership is bereft of patriots. The novelist always introduces this minor character to dilute the obvious capitalist deluge of the flow of the narrative. His views usually call to attention the effusive corruptness of the politicians in the novel. In Nigeria, past and present, there have always been such radical contributions to national discourse by intellectuals of his ilk. But on a different occasion, Dr, Gamar toes the line of the political oratory of Peter Obi, one of the presidential candidates in the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. Like Obi, Dr. Gamar views the tragedy of our daily existence as "the misguided values, the misapplication of our potentials in the pursuit of vulgar, ephemeral things… what we need "*… is the reorganization of our*

production and distribution systems so that you, the common people of this country, may fulfill the great potential of your abilities in the industry…" (p.149).

In using the idealistic views of Dr. Gamar as a metaphorical foreground, it becomes imperative to examine the novelist's portraiture of Maliki within the context of a corrupt society. Maliki for instance realizes too soon after qualifying as an engineer that in life one is faced with *"the harsh realities of everyday living*" and all "*ivory-tower dreams and schemes*" (p45) dissolve into the thin air. He also experiences that in the fictional Nigeria as in reality, corruption is elevated to the weird status of a giant individual walking on four legs; that the society believes that "*it wasn't fair to incarcerate a man just because he dipped his hands into the public till. After all it was public money… On the other hand, it was a crime to steal private property" (*p.146). Therefore, the proceeds of corruption are visible in this work of fiction similar to the situation in Nigeria. "*Private jets rapidly became things one took for granted. They were mere conveniences for politicians for fly-by visits to their constituencies…"* (p.46). The eagerness by the society to celebrate corrupt individuals creates disillusionment about the usefulness of university education. In *A Drop of Mercy,* the ridiculous treatment Maliki receives from his friends and relations on his inability to give his late mother a befitting burial lends credence to the above. Many sympathizers during the burial vow that *"their kids would not have anything to do with college…"* (p.80). However, when the social pendulum switches from poverty to ill-gotten wealth, Maliki displays affluence at the memorial service of his late mother a year later which elicits an amenable opinion from these people. They *"were all determined after the party to see their children through college. That, they agreed was the only way to become Maliki, synonym for a millionaire"* (p.148). During this party *"American dollars and British pounds were being sprayed and plastered on the sweaty faces of skinny ladies and obese matrons"* (p.148-149) akin to the political party presidential primaries of the two major political parties in Nigeria recently. Thus, the fictional characters in the novel and the Nigerian citizens have lost their *"capacity for austere happiness…"* (p.64). This has made them *"become strangers to human warmth and kinship with each other, which were typical of the African*" (p.64).

As a young engineer working with the government ministry of works Maliki is the desire of ladies for marriage. Therefore, the contest for the affection of the male protagonist by Jordana and Biola remains a constant sore experience in the Nigerian environment. The quest to marry Maliki is worth visiting a witchdoctor in Ijebu Ode to seek for his assistance. He prepares for Biola two different packets of native poisons; one to make Jordana mad and the other to make Maliki impotent while making love to another lady. Related to this, is the habit of young men living in slums as in Malu Road to desire to marry the daughters of the rich living in posh neighbourhoods like Ikoyi. The beauty of Jordana reinforced with the opulence of her parentage and the desire for an upward social mobility by the male central character makes it irresistible for him to fall in love with her. For it is the desire of man to seek for a migration from the abyss of material poverty to the cocoon of affluence.

Related to the above is the flood that ravages the slum where Maliki lives. This natural catastrophe which occurs on a night of bliss with his lover is the usual occurrence amongst slum dwellers in Lagos. It highlights the precarious existence of the poor in Nigeria who daily battle with the vagaries of nature. Dibia probably makes Jordana experience this natural disaster for her to appreciate what the other side of human existence looks like.

The novelist has not failed to do caricature of the political intrigues of politicians in this fiction. These politicians- Senators Zaman, Darlington Bristol and Amadin in their mannerisms showcase some of the despicable habits of the elected members of the parliament in the novel. These politicians participate in the formation of "three committees to tour different regions of the world to seek a solution to armed robbery in Nigeria…" (p.87). Their actions are however in tandem with what is prevalent in the country in the present day. The elected legislators in Nigeria presently engage themselves in similar frivolous subculture.

Drug peddling locally and abroad by Nigerians has been a sore circle of life style for several generations. In this novel, Dibia does not fail to highlight the evils associated with the experiences of the

criminality of the central male protagonist and another fringe female character, Bimpe. For Maliki, it is his quest for quick wealth to assuage the peasantry of his past and present existence. This is in addition to the devilish desire to meet the financial expectation of his lover Jordana, and the ambition to belong to the class of *"the Haves"* (p.112) rather than been a member of the derided class of *"the Have-Nots and the Have-Not-Paid-For-What-They-Have"* (p.112).

Dibia does not fail to throw sarcastic remarks at the ordained priests of the church in this novel and by extension the Nigerian society. The death of the notorious fictional character Walking Dead (WD) should elicit a bout of joyous acclamation from the law abiding citizens of this fictional society who will breathe the air of safety. For these people, he should enjoy an accursed memorial. But *"the archbishop of the Holy Church of Jankara"* (p160) chooses to toe a morally offensive route of singing the praise of a dead criminal. To him, WD *"was a man of high moral principles and a convinced philanthropist… WD lived his life as an example—performing invaluable services to his people…"* (p.160). This is similar to what a typical minister of God in Nigeria will do. This archbishop celebrates a man of despicable character rather than condemning his life of criminality.

Finally, the experiences of the young men, Awol and Arow are a caricature of the encounters that young people have with drug barons and human traffickers in the nation presently. These merchants of death like Jordana and Maliki (now a drug baron and baroness) have for several years turned unsuspecting youths into drug couriers abroad and subsequently destroyed their future with long stay in prisons abroad. As a pay back, these youths murder these drug merchants and subsequently end a love affair of greed and criminality. On this sad note, the novelist brings to an end this fictional narrative that captures various characteristics of the prevailing social and economic realities in the nation. He uses the activities of the two major protagonists simultaneously to draw parallels between affluence and poverty, avarice mixed with criminality. It is in the novelist's effective joggling of these that the beauty of the novel is unfolded.

CONCLUSION

In all these novels, each writer has endeavoured to discuss some of the prevailing socio-economic and cultural imperatives in Nigerian society using the purview of fictional expressions. They have used the major protagonists in their novels to discuss diverse ills that have bedeviled their real environments in the past and present. In doing this, they have gone against the belief of some literary critics who have canvassed for the "art for art sake" dictum. For these Nigerian novelists, a literary work should go beyond the level of mere literary artistic expressions and discuss issues of social, political, economic or cultural concerns. Dibia, Nwapa and Iyayi have thus concentrated their thematic conversations around existential topics on any of the above or a combination of them in these prose narratives.

In *Violence,* Iyayi's focus of attention is the exploitative habits of the rich in their social and economic interactions with the poor. This is visible in the entire novel; the rich couple of Queen and Obofun use every given opportunity to take undue advantage of the poor family of Idemudia and Adisa. This is a realistic caricature of the various interfaces between the affluent and the poor in both fiction and reality. The remedy for this oppressive co-existence is the provision of affordable education to the children of the poor, jobs for the educated and vital social amenities in the Nigerian society, so as to reduce significantly the slavish existence of the likes of Idemudia and Adisa in *Violence.* Nwapa on her part in *One is Enough* tackles the timeless accusation leveled against the womenfolk for being responsible for all cases of bareness in every Nigerian family. The novelist uses the experiences of the major female protagonist to prove wrong this unscientific sterileness. Nwapa in so doing emboldens the women in Nigerian society who suffer from such a culturally induced prejudice. In Dibia's literary work, he addresses the realistic dilemma of a young man's quest for upward social movement. The major male central character Maliki detests the squalor that pervades his childhood environment as a result of the poverty of his parentage. For him to achieve this social mobility, he has to break an egg for him to make an omelet. He has to violate social rules by committing crimes to achieve

material wealth; he has to get entangled in a marriage to the daughter of a rich Lebanese in a bid to escape from the grip of poverty. Dibia grapples with all of these conflicts and contradictions in his portraiture of the realistic dilemmas of the major male protagonist in *A Drop of Mercy*. The moral lesson that is derivable from his novel is that everyone will get punished for every crime committed. Contentment is a virtue expected to be imbibed by all readers of this enchanting prose fiction of Dibia.

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General Observations/Comments:

1. ***Generally, the typo errors and grammatical corrections were done in-text, so the other corrections, as noted below, should be done on the work;***
2. ***To make the work richer than it is, there is the need to build in more literature on aspects of Literary Realism.***
3. ***The analysis; comparisons, juxtapositions and similarities of Realism Dilemma amongst the 3 Nigerian fictional novels studied should be clearly explained rather than the long stretch of a bit isolated presentations on each of the novels.***
4. ***The Abstract is Ok with the slight adjustments made.***
5. ***The conclusion should be a bit more detailed, and may build in recommendations capturing the core components of the analysis.***
6. ***If the Author notes and corrects the observations, then the article is Ok for publication.***