

Research Article

Call for Peace and National Cohesion: Reading from Selected Arabic Literary Texts of Nigerian Authorship

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Abstract

Since ancient times, literature has served as a mirror reflecting society and its progress, often engaging with themes of morality, compassion, unity, and peaceful coexistence within human communities. Literature, through both poetry and prose, communicates ethical values that encourage and educate for peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and harmonious social relationships. This study utilizes a descriptive approach to examine the contributions of Nigerian authors in Arabic literature to the promotion of national integration, harmony, and peaceful coexistence among Nigerians of diverse ethnicities and constituencies. By selecting specific literary texts, especially poetry, from the works of three prominent Nigerian literary figures, this paper investigates how Arabic literature of Nigerian authorship has fostered ideals of unity, harmony, and peaceful cohabitation within Nigeria's highly heterogeneous socio-political landscape. Findings from the study reveal that numerous Nigerian Arabic literary scholars have significantly contributed to the advocacy for national integration and peace. Their literary productions emphasize the importance of unity among Nigerians, despite the multitude of languages, rich cultural diversity, and varied practices across the country. These literary works serve as powerful tools for promoting tolerance, understanding, and unity, highlighting literature's essential role in reinforcing shared national values, fostering patriotism, and enhancing collective consciousness in Nigeria's complex and multicultural society.

Keywords

Arabic, Literature, Harmony, Peaceful Co-existence, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Conflicts and unrest in human society has displayed and presented Nigeria, a greatly divided country, as one of communities deprived of harmony and co-existence. Between 1967 and 1970, only a few years after gaining independence from Britain (in 1960), the country was engulfed in a bloody civil war; ethnic group conflicts among Northern, western and eastern regions of the country, terrorist and bandit unrests, Boko-haram phenomenon is unveiled to the world. Indeed, lack of harmony and integration in the society had

results to grave consequences for the wellbeing, orderly growth, and development, stable democratic government, unity and survival of the nation [1] The Nigerian government and people from different dimensions and perspectives have done and still doing all they can to prevent the tensions and 'civil disturbances' which frequently erupt, or have become endemic.

The fact that literature is a reflection of the society has been widely acknowledged and endorsed. Literature reflects

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the society and its changes, its good values and its ills. In its corrective function, literature mirrors the ills of the society with a view and motive to making the society aware its unbearable situations and make necessary measures. It also projects the virtues or good values in the society for people to emulate. Literature, an imitation of human thoughts and actions, often presents a picture of what people think, say and value in the society [2].

It is great delight that Literature, especially the products of Arabic literature of Nigerian authorship in the face of the increasingly monumental crisis of insecurity, sectarian violence, ethnic violence, political instability and threats of disintegration, have contributed massively and immeasurably to the peacebuilding and enlightenment of the people on the importance of harmony, unity and societal integration. Arabic literature, like other indigenous literary productions in Nigeria, with its essential features and characters, its informing ideologies and politics, and its production sociology [3]. In Arabic literature of Nigerian authorship, many are stories designed to portray human life and action and reaction, the writers convey valuable messages for disseminating information and enlightenment. They address through their literary productions attitudes, morale and values of the society; writers of literature transport the real-life events in their society into fiction and present it to the society as a mirror the situations and the feelings of people. Their literature (poems and proses) is not only a reflection of the society but also serves as a corrective mirror in which members of the society adjust for positive change. The present study take a close look at some works of Nigerian literature in Arabic for the reader to known and understand how Arabic literature in Nigeria actually contributes to the societal integration and harmony in the society. Literary texts from the selected Nigerian contemporary Arabic poems, namely Isa Alabi, Barrister Adam Usman and Musa Ali Baba selected and analysed.

2. Literature Review

Nation-building, national unity, national cohesion, call for peace and war against violence and terrorism, have gained a great attention of scholarly studies nowadays due to the non-stop unrests and conflicts in human societies.

Edosa, Enaruna (2014: 61-82) in his study examines the issues, problems and contexts of national integration or the national question in Nigeria. It also addresses the strategies for ensuring national integration in the country; the paper suggests that states should specify their minimum requirements for citizenship or acceptance of non-indigenes from other states of the Nigerian federation, which should be collectively. There should be a fair and equal treatment of all Nigerians as well as a deliberate development of a feeling of oneness among Nigerians towards the attainment of peace, harmony, co-existence and national stability among diverse ethnic groups and constituents.

From and integrated approach, Popoola S. Akorede and Unoroh Solomon Ogheneochuko [4]. argued that Religion and literature are important agents of peace and harmony awareness; both disciplines make people seeing their roles or responsibilities in societal transformation and peaceful co-existence. They (religion and literature) are socialization agents by projecting the values and impact positive aspirations that will enhance harmony, peace and co-existence not only in the micro society but also all over the world. They claimed that man and religion are inseparable because religion is an all-round movement in the light of faith in God and a sense of responsibility for the reformation of thought and belief. According to the study, both religion and literature aim to promote high principles of morality for the establishment of good relations among members of the society and the elimination of every sort of undue discrimination.

Yunusa Muhammad Jamiu, in his study “Integration in Hamid Ibraheem al-Hijry’s *Ma’satul- hub* (The Tragedy of Love)” addressed the history of Arabic literature in the Northern Nigeria and its impacts in understanding among the heterogeneous ethnic groups in the region. Although Arabic suffered considerable neglect with the coming of colonialist who supplanted Arabic with their western education, Arabic regained its vibrancy in Nigeria after indolence. Writing literary expressions in Arabic therefore become a source of integration, unity and harmony among the indigenous people especially in the northern Nigeria [5].

In their submission [6], literature is the mirror to the society. The social problems such as, political, economic, socio-political, and socio-economic are depicted by literary works from time to time. Literature is inclusive in nature. The study claimed that nearly all human sciences find themselves reflected in Literature. Indeed apart from various social problems, Literature also reveals the intricate fabric and inner conflicts. Literature is an effective instrument of conflict resolution and, hence, peace.

2.1. Statement of Problem

Since end of the 20th century and the beginning of 21st century, the entire world with no exception have witnessed and experienced different kinds of insecurity, unrest, violence and terrorism. The issues that have eventually result to breakdown of peace, harmony and peaceful coexistent and the emergence of terrorism and new threats of conflict in various global regions especially after September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. This unbearable change in human society calls for searching and addressing the means of bringing peace, harmony and peaceful coexistence among the individuals in societies. Literature, an imitation of human life and action and a reflection of the human society plays vital roles in creating a peaceful and harmonious society through poems and proses; Literature not only reflects the society but also serves as a mirror in which members of the society can look at themselves and see the need for positive

change.

2.2. Scope of Study

The present study addresses the roles and contributions of Arabic literature of Nigerian Authorship in creating mutual respect and understanding and fostering the culture of peace and denouncing terrorism and violence in the society. The paper adopts texts selected from the literary products (poetry only) of three literary icons in Nigeria. They were selected from different regions namely North, Central North and South of Nigeria.

3. Analysis and Findings

3.1. Literature and Societal Cohesion

The power of literature to say everything has become obvious and cannot be underestimated in human society, literature having the potential to create or reveal alternative realities. Literature either poem or prose has the ability to offer to society a possibility of self-reflection; it possesses the ability to considerably contribute to the joy of life. It creates and forges harmonious and peaceful society [7].

Arabic language and literature over a millennium has addressed the importance of peaceful co-existence and harmony and contributed to the building and integration of human society among numerous different peoples of tribal diversity. Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā (born c. 520—died c. 609) was one of the greatest of the Arab poets of pre-Islamic times, best known for his long ode in the *Mu'allaqāt* collection. A man of wisdom, Zuhayr's poem in *Al-Mu'allaqāt* praises the men who brought peace between the clans of 'Abs and Dhubyān. In the poem, war is compared to a millstone that grinds those who set it moving, and the poet speaks as one who from a long life has learned humankind's need for morality.. Zohayr ibn Abi Sulma) is known as a wise poet as well as a peacemaker. He produced a sort of poetry that is distinguished with superiority. A prolific poet who contributed to making peace within the warring tribes utilizing an expressive Arabic classical language. An integrative contribution that upholds the legacy of the Arab [8].

وَمَا هُوَ عِنَهَا بِالْحَدِيثِ الْمَرْجَمِ
مَا الْحَرْبُ إِلَّا مَا عَلِمْتُمْ وَدَقْتُمْ
وَتَضْرِبُ إِذَا ضَرَبْتُمْوَهَا فَتَضْرِبُ
مَتَى تَبْعُوَهَا تَبْعُوَهَا ذَمِيمَةً
وَتَلْقَحُ كِشَافًا ثُمَّ تَنْتَجُ فَتَنْتَبِ
فَتَعْرِضُكُمْ عَرِكِ الرَّحَى بِتِفَالِهَا
كَأَحْمَرَ عَادٍ تَمْ تَرُضِعُ فَتَقْطِمُ
فَتَنْتِجُ لَكُمْ عِلْمَانَ أَسْمَاءَ كُلِّهِمْ
فَرَى بِالْعِرَاقِ مِنْ قَفِينِزٍ وَدِرْهِمِ
فَتُغَلِّلُ لَكُمْ مَا لَا تُغَلِّلُ لِأَهْلِهَا

War in nothing else but what you've known and yourselves tasted,

It is not a tale told at random, a vague conjecture;

When you stir it up, it's a hateful thing you've stirred up;
Ravenous it is, once you whet its appetite; it bursts aflame,
then

It grinds you as a millstone grinds on its cushion;
Yearly it conceives, birth upon birth, and with twins for issue -

Very ill-omened are the boys it bears you, every one of them the

Like of Ahmar of Ad; then it gives such, and weans them.
Yes, war yields you a harvest very different from the bushels

And pieces of silver those fields in Iraq yield for the villagers [9].

In his golden poems, Al-mu'allaqat, Zuhayr does not only condemn war but he also plays the role of an arbitrator, showing his detachment from the problem but at the same time enforcing the lessons of conduct and morality, his poetry wherein he preaches forgiveness, peace between tribes and considers war as ignominy clearly reflects his great personality and piousness. Indeed, his poetry with its original theme is distant from the fiery bellicose of his colleagues in his era [10, 16].

3.2. Peace in Nigerian Arabic Literary Writings

Reading from Literary writings of the Nigerian Arabic poetry shows that there are diverse thematic literary works been produced and presented by Nigerian poets from different perspectives, differing in scope and context. Out of the poetic writings, criticising social unrests and violence have been one of the prominent and dominant trends in the genres of Arabic poetry. The development that can be traced to the fact that most Nigerian artists are more familiar with the Classical Arabic Literature with they normally studied as a subject in the Islamic Civilization. Since Arabic poetry of Nigeria Authorship is the artistic depiction of the real life of the society, it is therefore natural that it reflects all the various influential phenomena and occurrences in the environment. The political and social situations and complete instability in the country are among the most prominent factors that influence the growth and development and inject the Nigerian literary writers both the North and Yoruba land to express their feelings and thoughts on the unrest situations in the society. Indeed, Writers, especially Arabic writers in Nigeria have been able to demonstrate the events and occurrences in the society by casting them in narrative form. Some writers, in their literary texts, present human conflicts, conflict, resolution, and peacebuilding in their literacy productions and expressions. They reveal the impacts of violence and violence on the people and the society. Their literary works also grant readers and researchers access to the ethical and moral dilemmas that people face in the society.

3.3. Isa Abubakar Alabi

Isa Abubakar Alabi is one of the finest Arabic-language poets in Arabic literary movement in Yoruba land especially and in Nigeria at large. An icon of modern Arabic poetry, he has produced distinctive poetry widely considered the most prominent in Nigeria through which, he was honoured as Prince (leader) of non-Arab poets in Saudi Arabia.

As a wonderful and talented poet, Isa Alabi has produced different verses of poems in different events and contents; he proved himself capable of composing long epic poems and short poems of dynamic joy and appearance. Isa's poetic endowment is evident in his poetry collections "Al-Subaaiyaat" and "Al-Riyaadh" which include several deceptive and educative poems composed in different occasions and events. Indeed, Isa Alabi, a prolific poet with a fine command of rhyme is not only a Nigerian poet, his literary works has gained attentions of scholars and students in the higher institution both home and abroad even in the Arab world.

One of the aspects of tragedy in Nigerian Arabic poetry is the expression of regret over the lack of security and stability. Insecurity is one of the worst epidemics that the Nigeria suffers from. Indeed, many countries all over the world are not exempted from the epidemic. Literature, especially Arabic poetry is the mirror of human society; the Nigerian poets have addressed and expressed the unrests and violence that engulf the society. Indeed, issue of Boko-haram terrorism has been explicit major focus of some Arabic poets in Nigeria; they harshly criticise the social situation, which results to Nigerian people suffering.

Verses of poem, titled "The Terrorists," is one of exceptional poems written by the poet Isa Alabi Abubakar in his diwan "Assubaa'iyyaat," it one of the collections and literary works produced by Isa Abubakar and one of the masterpieces of contemporary poetry in Nigerian Arabic literature. Distinguished by its integration, harmony, and special poetic aesthetics, the poet's idea and position against the process of violence, terrorism, and brutal abuse of humanity has clearly expressed [11,15]

كيف تحقيق ما يرومون بالإرهاب أو هدم سور أمن البلاد
إن ما لا ينال بالسلم قد يصعب إحراره بغارات عـــــــ
أي شيء يا قوم أغلى من النفس التي يُزْهقونها بفســـــــاد؟
أي دين دعا إلى العنف والتمثيل بالأبرياء لنيل المـــــــراد؟
قاتل الله من يشجع في كل مكان تشدد الأوغـــــــاد
إن إرهابهم يفيد عـــــــدو الله من قـــــــيل ضئيره
للعبـــــــاد

How to achieve what they want through terrorism
Or demolish the country's security wall
What cannot be achieved through peace may be difficult
to be liberated with violent raids
Nothing, my people, is more precious than the soul
Which they are killing with corruption!
Which religion calls for violence and mutilation of innocent
people to achieve what they want?

May God fight those who everywhere encourage the extremism of scoundrels.

Their terrorism benefits the enemy of God by being harmful to His servants.

In the abovementioned verses, the poet expresses his feelings against the unfortunate events and painful calamities whose scourges took over the world, the tragedy that led to the shedding of innocent blood and the displacement of people from their homelands. The verses of the poems present to the readers the reality of terrorists and their heinous acts, which include the threat to use violence and intimidation to achieve goals and objectives which eventually resulting to bloodshed and destruction of societal systems. The poet affirms that the teachings of all divine religions completely reject violence and terrorism. He then calls on individuals to adhere to that may lead to security and peace. What is not achievable through peace is difficult to achieve through violence and terrorism. He also called for peaceful coexistence. In many occasions, terrorism as the use extraordinary violence to achieve political, religious, or social goals, according to some analysts, is been used by many politicians to realise their goals and ideologies and as symbol of gaining the sympathy of the people to remain supportive to their government or to eliminate those who oppose their interests. Our literary icon, Isa Alabi takes a different and peaceful position; he sees terrorism in all forms as destruction that only brings misery and loss of lives and properties to society [12].

Apart from addressing the conflict and its effects on the society, verses are also found in Alabi's literary produces presenting policy, encouragement and recommendations to the peacebuilding agents, in terms of what needs to be done to arrest the cycle of violence that has taken root in the state. What can be as symbol of sincerity of the sentiment of in Isa Alabi's love for conflict resolution in his literary works and literary collections "al-Riyadh", the poet says [13].

أي هذا الذي يحب السلام
كن شجاعاً وحازماً مقداماً
فإذا ما قرأت سيرة أبطا
ل تجد جهدنا علينا لزاماً
أين (نابليون) قائد جيش
هو في الحرب قد أقام نظاماً
ثم ذاك القوي (هتلر) أضحى
اسمه ضيقاً يخيف أعلاماً

O you, who loves peace!
Be brave, resolute, and bold
If you read the biography of heroes
You find our effort necessary
Where is Napoleon, army commander?
In the war, he established a system
Then that strong man (Hitler)
His name has become a stigma that scares prominent people

The poet points out that courage and persistence is the best weapon that man can use in the present and future eras, in

order to rise to the highest level. He called on the Nigerian troops who serve in peacekeeping missions by citing some past heroes who have successfully contributed to the global efforts to secure peace and progress across the world. Isa Alabi then begins to narrate the history of the past heroes who rose to the highest position of army commander among the people of the West, such as (Napoleon) and (Hitler).

By doing so, he wants to encourage the audience to be a passionate hero that history will record with golden ink, for the sake of diligence, patience, and integrity for the sake of knowledge. Alabi, with his unique and unparalleled poetic genius, confronts acts of violence by politicians and rulers. He feels with sincere emotion the instability that people are experiencing result to their plotting and planning to achieve their political aspirations. Although it is truth that as long as there has been life, war has been a part of it; however for human society to be conducive for life, there is need to wage war even though the consequences often breed nothing but misery. Isa Abubakar believes that, when a person is called to defend his community, or protect other hopeless, oppressed and defenseless people, it is the responsibility of people to fight to uphold justice.

3.4. Adam Usman (Barrister)

Among Nigerian contemporary Arabic poets who extend their genres to touch present-day issues is Barrister Adam Usman. The prolific literary icon, through his variety of literary works has addressed many societal issues, problems and developments. Born in 1957 in the Northern part of Nigeria, Barrister Adam Usman, the poet has been found to address both local and International issues and occurrences in his Arabic poetry and literary writings. Since 2001, ethno-religious violence and conflict in Plateau State has increased in frequency and intensity; the community violence that led the destructions and killings. Although, the first significant outbreak of violence occurred in 1994 which eventually led to military intervention and concession to local demands. Other major incidences of sectional violence erupted in various parts of the state in 2001, 2004, 2008 and 2010 with other minor skirmishes reported" [14].

During the brutal violence, especially some Arabic poets of Nigeria origin produced many literary texts where they expressed feelings towards the destructive violence that claimed thousands of lives. Adam Othman's Arabic poem, "Remembrance of the Genocide in Plateau State", can be cited as example of Arabic literary expression on political situation, lack of security and stability rooted from the violent campaign carried out by Christians against Muslims in the year 2024. In the literary text, the writer describes the violence as religious- political crisis that causes of insecurity and stability among the citizens, violence that erupted because of the injustice of the ruling party at the time, which led to bitter genocide against innocent people; the minority Muslims were forced to seek refuge and migrate to neighbor-

ing countries. He began the poem by showing sorrow and regret towards the Muslims that experienced that terrible disaster, which led some of the population to migrate to the horizons to escape their lives from that catastrophic calamity. The poet describes his deep sadness and gravity [15].

شدوا الرجال لظعن لا مرد له
إن جل حطب فما للعين إنكار
تغادر القافلات الحي مسرعة
حيث المباني للفح النار تنهار
والحرب تطحن والأرواح سائلة
تشاخصت طور الخوف أبصار
وهل لعـــــــودتهم يوم وقد ولجت
على نزوحهم ليل وأنهــــــــــــــــار
لا بأس والدهر آت بعد مذهبه
حياتنا أنها صوم وإفــــــــــــــــطار
قاسوا الشدائد دبا عن مواطنهم
خلوا الديار على أنقاضها النار

They set off due to an irrevocable situation
If there is a lot of firewood, there is no denying it to the eye

The caravans leave the neighborhood quickly
Where fire-burning buildings collapse
War is grinding and souls are fluid
The stage of fear became clear
Will they ever return?

Days and nights followed their exodus
There is nothing wrong with eternity coming after its disappearance

Our life is fasting and breaking
They endured adversity and fled from their homes
The homes were left ruined by fire

The above verses are examples of the contributions from literary scholars and writers of diverse background, which provides their insights and feelings on the conflict in Plateau state of Nigeria in the 2004 violent conflicts among diverse ethno-religious communities which led to the wanton destruction of lives, livelihoods and property. In his own poetic contributions, Adam Othman criticises the practice of terrorists and their violence to achieve their goals. The verses of the poem express the "impunity with which such criminal acts are committed with no recourse to the due process of the law and subsequent justice for victims and survivors of violence. The violence, which was as waste and a flagrant violation of basic human rights, dismantling the cohesion of societal systems. The destructive conflict, which was a serious threat to the relations of cooperation between members of society and peoples, coexistence between people, and peace and security at the national and global levels.

Musa Ali Baba, a young Nigerian Arabic poet also addresses some societal phenomena. Born in 1981 in Lagos State, Musa in his own poetic presentations and writings criticises Bok-haram terrorists group that have widely contributed to instability, violence and unrests in the Northern Nigeria. The incessant conflicts that have proved very difficult to manage; the conflicts have continued to bedevil the

society with no recognition for the dignity and value of human beings. Many innocents and civilians have been killed

"بُوْكَوْ حَرَامٌ لِّمَ الْإِرْهَابُ فِي بِلْدِي؟
يَزْدَادُ شَرِّكُمْ فِيهِ بِلَا عَدَدٍ!
يَسْعَى بِخَوْفٍ شَدِيدٍ كُنَّا، فَمَسْتِي
تَحْرَرُونَ بِهِ السُّكَّانَ مِنْ كَيْدٍ؟
تَرْمِيهِمْ قَنْبَلَةٌ فِي كُلِّ عَاصِمَةٍ
إِهْلَاكُ قَوْمٍ، لِمَاذَا يَا ذَوِي الْعَدَدِ؟
وَبِنَدْفِيَّةٍ مِّنْ غَيْرِ الْمَرَا مَرَجًا

تردي المصاب بلا شك ولا عَضِدٍ
كَمْ مِنْ بَيْوتٍ أَتَاهَا الْحُزْنُ وَالصَّرْرُ
مَنْكُمْ بِفَتْنَتِكُمْ مِنْ سُوءِ مَعْتَقِدٍ!
"Boko Haram" Why is there terrorism in my country?
Your evil will increase without number!
He seeks with great fear all of us, so when
Do you free the population from liver?
You throw a bomb in every capital
Destroying a people, why, O people of means?
And a rifle without doubt rained
The injured person is undoubtedly deteriorating and there
is no support
How many homes have been affected by sadness and
damage?
Because of your temptation due to your bad beliefs!

4. Discussion

It is apparent majority of Nigerian Arabic poets such as Isa Abubakar Alabi, Usman, Musa Ali Baba and others, in their literary works, have dealt explicitly with societal issues in the areas of social and poetical norms of the time. The form and content of their literary writings were not just presented in order to please their audience but to address political and social and ethno-religious unrests, conflicts, violence that have become the order of the day. Like Arab poets, many Nigerian Arabic poets expressed their ideas of peace symbolically. In other words, they conveyed the message of peace through another medium without infringing upon the fashionable principles of the era. Many of their poetic writings address and criticise social unrests and violence that have been one of the prominent and dominant trends in the genres of Arabic poetry. The contents of their works are overwhelmed with call for national integration, harmony and peaceful co-existence. This has to their works been considered for academic studies and research throughout Nigerian Universities and abroad. Study of Arabic poetry of Nigeria shows that there have been produced and presented by Nigerian poets from different perspectives, differing in scope and context. Out of the poetic writings, criticising social unrests and violence have been one of the prominent and dominant trends in the genres of Arabic poetry.

5. Conclusion

The paper examines the elements of integration, harmony, peace and war against conflict, violence and terrorism in the poetry of the selected Nigerian Arabic writers. They are Nigerian poets and literary icons whose works have become important sources and materials for the students and scholars of Arabic Literature in the society; the findings show that majority of the writers are all men of high poetical genius, many verses of the poetry. They are Arabic poets who are literarily gifted and endowed with sense of rhyme and the ability to express vigorously, in their rich language, to express their feelings and opinions on the societal changes and occurrence. The paper concludes that the Nigerian writers of Arabic poetry, through their literary efforts have been able to play their quota towards the development, call to peace, harmony, and societal integration in their diverse thematic literary works. The study draws together the contributions and analyses of various Nigerian Arabic poets. Some of the poetry that address and criticise the issues and events relating to ethno-religious violence, conflicts and terrorism were selected for study and analysis. The study shows that Nigerian Arabic poets, like other Arab poets have contributed immeasurably to the integration, peace and harmony in their society.

Author Contributions

Tajudeen Yusuf is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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