Abstract

This paper will focus on how social revolution is seen and reflected in literature and culture. The paper begins with a look at the different definitions of literature by different literary artists; the definitions of culture by noted anthropologists and intellectuals who have made studies of the human society. It will also look at the relationship between literature and culture with the focus on how they interact and interrelate. It will be looking at how culture influences literature and how literature projects the culture of a society. The paper goes on to define revolution and social revolution to set the tone for the main purpose of the paper. After this, the paper will take a look at the issues and concepts of social revolution in literature using the opinions of writers that have lived and worked in a state that has experienced a social revolution. The French and Russian Revolution will be used as elements in this section. The paper, in this section will also look at a reflection of certain issues of social revolution as depicted in a published work of literature. This paper will be using Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe. Finally it a look at the issues and concepts of social revolution in culture, using the Chinese Cultural Revolution as a case study in achieving the true position of culture in social revolution. The opinions of those against the Cultural Revolution will be considered vis-a-vis official comments on how the revolution was carried out, the consequences of actions carried out, the intentions behind actions carried out and lessons garnered from the experience.

Keywords: Literature, Culture, Social Revolution, Society, Violence,
INTRODUCTION

Every society in the world undergoes change at one time or the other. The change could be gradual or sudden; positive or negative; political, social or even cultural. One thing is sure change is a constant in life. Revolution is a form of change. In different parts of the world, people revolt over issues like government policies, religion, racial or ethnic discrimination, economic conditions, patriotic ideologies etc. This paper endeavours a look at the issues and concepts of social revolution to be found in literature and culture.

Theoretical Review

There is no one definition of literature. Different definitions have been proffered over the years. This is a constant because as new writers come, new concepts of what literature is and how it should be are also evolved. A very typical example is the book, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte which was poorly received when it as first published but is today considered as one of the greatest novels everwritten.

Literature according to Professor Egudu is a “method of expression” (Omonode, 1995) G.K Chesterton says "literature is a luxury. Fiction is a necessity" (Collins English Dictionary, 2013)

According to the Russian Formalists, crop of Russian writers that flourished before and during the Russian Revolution, Literature was "not pseudo-religion or psychology or sociology but a particular organization of language. It had its own
specific laws, structures and devices, which were to be studied in themselves rather than reduced to something else. The literary work was neither a vehicle for ideas, a reflection of social reality nor the incarnation of some transcendental truth. It was a material fact, whose functioning could be analyzed rather as one could examine a machine. It was made of words, not of objects or feelings, and it was a mistake to see it as the expression of an author's mind." (Eagleton, 1996) Russian Formalists like Viktor Shlovsky, Roman Jakobson, Osip Brik, Yury Tynyanov, and others believed that literature was functional not written based on emotion but based on fact.

Salman Rushdie on the other hand considered literature to be "where I go to explore the highest and lowest places in human society and in the human spirit, where I hope to find not absolute truth but the truth of the tale, of the imagination and of the heart." (Collins English Dictionary, 2013)

**CULTURE**

Culture in all its varied manifestations is a very vital concept in the world today. Culture is a vital part of every aspect of human life. There are no exceptions to this as the culture of a people determines their world outlook. On one side, cultural differences lead to conflicts, wars, genocides, ethnic cleansings and other atrocities, while on the other hand, cultural differences also make it necessary for the world to relate as one as people start to appreciate other cultures outside their own.

Culture has several definitions which expresses what it is. According to Edward Taylor, culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society."(Varenne, 2002)This is among the first definitions of culture. This definition proffers that all aspects of man's relationship with his society is culture.
Franz Boas in the book *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) considers culture to be, "the totality of the mental and physical reactions and activities that characterize the behaviour of individuals composing a social group collectively and individually in relations to their natural environment, to other groups, to members of the group itself and of each individual to himself. It also includes the products of these activities and their role in the life of the groups. The mere enumeration of these various aspects of life, however, does not constitute culture. It is more, for its elements are not independent, they have a structure." (Varenne, 2002)

Margaret Mead (1937) considered culture to mean "the whole complex of traditional behaviour which has been developed by the human race and is successively learned by each generation. A culture is less precise. It can mean the forms of traditional behaviour which are characteristics of a given society, or of a group of societies, or of a certain race, or of a certain area, or of a certain period of time." (Varenne, 2002) According to her culture is therefore an integral part of any society and plays a vital role in social revolution.

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LITERATURE AND CULTURE**

Literature can not be written in a void. Despite the philosophies of certain writers e.g. Oscar Wilde, who believed in the idea of art for art sake i.e. literature as the expression of beauty, literature needs a particular cultural and social background or setting to operate. The words, the expression of ideas, the settings, the themes, the props in the plays etc are all elements of literature’s necessary relationship to culture.

Literature is considered by certain critics as not only a means of entertainment but whether fact or fiction, it is also a reflection of the society in which the writer generates his or her material. This makes literature a foster child of society. Society on the other hand is made up of value systems, belief systems
etc which is culture. Every society therefore has its culture which is reflected in the literary expression of literary artists living and working in said society.

It should also be noted that the culture of a society places constraints on a writer from that society. These constraints vary according to the cultural practices of the society in question. Examples of such constraints can be found in the works of writers all over the world e.g. Charles Dickens in his *Oliver Twist* where he talked of workhouses for orphans and the old. This was the manner with which the British culture could deal with the poor at the time of Dickens but for a man in present day Britain reading the novel, the idea of orphans working and dying without care is unthinkable. Thus what Dickens considered a social issue at the time, is now only seen in his books as entertainment and the constraints to focus and write on such topics no longer exists. Another good example is Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, where the method of courtship, marriageable age, dowries, etc mentioned in the book that were quite important to a young girl in Britain at the time are simply laughable now as these things are not obtainable in the present day British culture.

Literature has also influenced culture by leading to change in the society. Books on social theories like Karl Marx's *Communist Manifesto* has helped to develop in Russia then later in China, a determination to bring about change in the way things are done. The effect of books like Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1983) where the concept and term *Übermensch* (German for Superman) was first encountered, which Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime misapplied still have far reaching effects in the culture of certain part of the western world, where the Aryan race is considered superior to every other race.

So the relationship between literature and culture is symbiotic as one feeds of the other and vice versa.

**SOCIAL REVOLUTION**
When people hear the word ‘revolution’ what comes to mind in most cases are the burnings, killings, destruction of public properties, martial law, placard carrying citizens being doused with high pressure water hoses, etc. For others, it means a change of government especially from a democracy to a dictatorship which in some cases is a prelude to civil war or ethnic riots. This makes the mention of a revolution a major cause for worry for any law abiding citizen.

Every society must and will experience change at one time or the other. Revolution is a radical change or transformation. It has been used to describe different grand transformation in the social milieu from the industrial revolution of the Victorian Age to the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Revolution can be said to be from the historical point of view, "a movement, often violent, to overthrow an old regime and effect complete change in the fundamental institutions of the society." (Neitzel, 2013) Examples of this include the French Revolution of 18th century which removed the monarchical system of government and tried to totally overhaul the entire system from top to bottom. Another was the Russian Revolution of 1917 which was carried out by the Vladimir Lenin led Bolsheviks, bolstered by the social theories of Karl Marx which were propounded in his book, Communist Manifesto and Friedrich Engels . This revolution like the French's was violent and bloody. The Russian Revolution would for many years provide the blueprint for the way and manner in which revolutions are carried out.

Social revolution according to Theda Skocpol is "characterised by rapid, fundamental change of socio-economic and political institutions and large-scale class upheaval." (Skocpol, 1979) What this means is that unlike other revolutions, coup de tats, protests, riots etc which focus on change in leadership or conditions, the basic characteristics of social revolutions include a change of government and nature of government, in most cases to totalitarian system of government, equality
for all in all aspects of the society i.e. from shelter to access to jobs, and domestic violence.

It should be noted that social revolutions are not started by the elites of the society but rather by the disenfranchised masses who feel that they deserve better conditions and leadership. Thus in such revolutions the elites usually suffer the brunt of the common people's anger.

**ISSUES AND CONCEPTS OF SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN LITERATURE**

Since literature expresses reality as it is or a possibility of how it should be, it cannot be distanced from culture. The climate of a society experiencing or immediately after experiencing a revolution is usually one where literary works being published undergo close scrutiny as works of that period are expected to hold to the ideologies of the revolution. Social revolution which is a societal issue and affects the masses of a particular cultural milieu is therefore represented and articulated in literary works either directly or indirectly; through fact or through fiction.

Leon Trotsky, a famed Russian writer who supported the Russian Revolution considered the issue of what role literature would play in the new Socialist Republic that had been created by the revolution. He considered that the literature of this period will have no business with symbolisms and romanticisms as he considers them to be associated too closely to mysticism which on the whole does not express the realities of life. He also felt that old forms could also be used to express the new socialist way of life. He says "But Socialist art will revive tragedy. Without God, of course. The new art will be atheist. It will also revive comedy, because the new man of the future will want to laugh. It will give new life to the novel. It will grant all rights to lyrics, because the new man will love in a better and stronger way than did the old people, and he will think about the problems of birth and death. The new art will revive all the old forms, which arose
in the course of the development of the creative spirit. The disintegration and decline of these forms are not absolute, that is, they do not mean that these forms are absolutely incompatible with the spirit of the new age." (Trotsky, 2007)

He simply expected it to be different from former works based on the ideological differences of the literature of the revolution from the literature of old. Looking at the violence and death incurred during the revolution, Trotsky considered the works preceding the revolution as irrelevant. He says this on the basis of tragedy being considered to be the highest expression of literature. Since Russia had just experienced a tragic event therefore at the time of the revolution, it was expected that the literature to emanate from the society at the time would have more depth, creative force, and effect than literature immediately preceding the revolution. It should be noted that certain aspects of the Trotsky’s theories were later adulterated. For example, while literary works were censored during Lenin’s regime in the 1920s so as to protect the fragile socialist state from further aggravation among the masses, as he says “We ought to have a watchful revolutionary censorship, and a broad and flexible policy in the field of art, free from petty partisan maliciousness.” Its purpose is to block any tendency which “threatens to disintegrate the revolutionary environment or to arouse ... the proletariat, the peasantry and the intelligentsia, to a hostile opposition to one another.” (Hutter, 2009) Future regimes of Stalin and Khrushchev enforced censorship to protect the bureaucratic class that controlled government from criticism.

During the Romantic era in English literature which coincided with the period of the French Revolution, writers like William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey were attracted to the new ideas of democracy replacing absolute monarchy and the classless society that seemed possible and which the French revolution aspired to achieve. They thus supported the revolution. After the Storming of the Bastille and the Reign of Terror, however,
these writers used their poetry to assuage the trauma and pains caused by the violence of the events and the destruction of hope for a democratic European nation. Poets like Thomas Moore, Thomas Campbell, and Samuel Rogers, used their poetry to express their opinions on new social issues like nationalism. New Romantic poets like Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley agreed with the principles upheld by the Revolution’s proponents at its beginning and used these principles to criticise the British government.

Considering issues of the expression of revolutionary tendencies as some of the themes to be found in literature, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is a suitable specimen. The novel paints the picture of an attempt to disrupt a change that was sweeping over Umuofia, the village in which the story is set. The coming of the Whiteman was a social revolution as they forced a change in religion, dressing, in speaking, in working, in governing, in fact in every aspect of the Ibo man's way of life. This revolution was not accepted by Okonkwo, the protagonist of the novel. He tried to wake his people up and rally them to take up arms and oppose the change that was sweeping through the land but he was mostly unsuccessful as he ended up a suicide. The issue of opposing change i.e. social revolution is therefore presented in this case. The men of Umuofia knew they were beaten but the warrior in Okonkwo refused to accept this fact.

**ISSUES AND CONCEPTS OF SOCIAL REVOLUTION IN CULTURE**

Social revolutions can not occur in a vacuum, a particular culture or cultures are usually the focus of the revolution. Social revolutions though considered to be mostly bloody are expected to be a complete overhaul of the entire social system. It therefore means that culture is also affected by the changes that social revolutions bring about. The process of revolting against an established system is not an easy one; issues would arise for contention during such revolts. The Chinese Revolution
of 1949 is no exception. To change the way of life of over 800 million people as at the time the revolution occurred is not an easy task.

The Chinese Revolution of 1949 that overthrew years of feudal system that oppressed the masses and also years of domination and control by foreign entities, brought about an overhaul of the entire system with the implementation of the socialist political and economic system. The Chinese Cultural Revolution however lasted from 1966 to 1976. It was as a fight over how the Chinese society should be directed and who would be in charge of the new society that would emerge from the change: the working people or a new class of elites.

Some of the issues and concepts of social revolution to be found in the Chinese Cultural Revolution include, firstly claims and counter claims of violence between the entrenched elites and the masses were not unheard of in the Chinese in the revolution, but no revolution can be fully complete without some elements of violence as no opposition would exit peacefully especially in a country of about 800 million people as China's population numbered at that time. In August 1966, a directive was issued by Communist party leaders concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. After this directive, law and order gradually broke down as officials were left to their own devices and the Red Guards terrorised anyone considered not to be adhering to the precepts of Communism. The chaos and violence increased as schools and universities shut down as students joined the revolution. Students were encouraged to change old ways of life i.e. old habits, old culture, old customs and old thinking. They attacked family members, teachers, and public figures as the government itself carried out purges within the Communist party. On the 1st of January, 1967, newspapers were calling the chaos a class struggle, urging workers and peasants to overthrow the political elites in power at the time. The government in later years denies all these and claim that the violence was not as far reaching as this.
Before the revolution, the peasant farmers in the rural areas were basically illiterate. They had little or no access to the necessary amenities that makes life comfortable. In order to make one of the major precepts of communism actually true in practice for every citizen especially those in the rural areas, artists, writers, educationists, scientists, doctors, etc who are normally based in the city, were sent to the rural areas to ply their trade and also to teach the populace in the rural areas so they too can benefit from their knowledge. It is believed though by researchers that these intellectuals were sent to the countryside as punishment for towing different line from party policies. Some of these intellectuals had been beaten, arrested and killed in the process of the Cultural Revolution.

Education which is a vital part of every community's culture did not escape the revolution. The pro-revolutionaries claim that before the revolution, the universities in China were meant for the children of the wealthy and the political elites. That the curriculum had to be revamped to enable the system satisfy the needs of any student that would enrol in the schools as the universities was made open to all and sundry and by the 1970s workers and peasants were going to school to further their education. It should however be noted that political studies and revolutionary politics was made part of the curriculum thus making the youths one of the power bases of the Communist regime. Also the Cultural Revolution left the educational system in total confusion. Schools and universities were gradually reopened in the late 1960s. Lots of youths sent to the countryside missed out in the educational process when these schools reopened thus engendering a retardation in development when entrance examinations into universities where written in 1973.

The Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution set out in a ten year period to wipe out the culture and history of the Chinese people. It tried to change and in some ways succeeded in changing the way of life of the Chinese people. The end result of the revolution was the acceptance of capitalism in China.
CONCLUSION

The effects of social revolutions are evident in the culture and literature of the people who carried out the revolution. The literature itself is changed to fit in with the ideologies of the new cultural systems in use, the culture of the people is also changed or amended to suit this change and create a stabilising effect on the masses. Literature being a powerful tool of cultural modes and forms is used to direct the people towards what the revolution expects of them. The reaction of policy makers to literary works determine for those who must have or intend to read them that such works either encourage the new cultural system or discourages it. Human idiosyncrasies though make leaders and policy makers change some of these policies to satisfy their ego as seen in Stalin’s misinterpretation of Trotsky’s comment on socialist literature. Social revolution therefore has varied reflections in literature and culture.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the issues raised in the paper, the following recommendations are made.

Firstly, if a literary work postulates or pinpoints an ideology which any social revolutionary intends as his or her guiding light that work should not be allowed to be adulterated because the light in the revolution that makes it popular starts dying when that occurs.

Secondly, due to the fact that the thoughts of writers are consumed by many and their opinions trusted, they should be careful of opinions they share concerning social issues especially those that are liable to lead to the breakdown of law and order.

Thirdly, social revolutions are supposed to change the society in order to create an avenue for growth. Arresting, torturing and killing of intellectuals because they are not die-hard fans of the ideology being postulated are right. At
the end of the violence, who would bring the ideas that will move the new nation forward?

Fourthly, students should not be used in acts of violence because they are the future of every society and their character will determine the character of the society in which they live in the future when they become leaders.

Fifthly, in some parts of the Western world, people still look on other humans as sub human. More books like *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe should be written to expose Africa to the world.
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