

**THE ISSUE OF EXCESSIVE MATERIALISM AS A MAJOR
UNBENDING ENFORCER OF CRIME IN THE TWENTY
FIRST CENTURY NIGERIA AS PORTRAYED IN IFEOMA
ODINYE'S *PAIN IN THE NECK***

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Abstract

The contemporary society of the nation, Nigeria suffers lots of criminal issues. As it is a natural and normal human nature, every effect the human existence creates anywhere, in any manner and to whatever degree either negative or positive, there is a cause and Nigeria is not an exemption. Amidst the many never ending motivations of these anti constitutional activities, this work rather chooses to narrow down its discourse more extensively to the provisions allotted it by limitation, by the text under consideration. It reveals how the victims and most active participants in crime execution happen to fall under the teenage and youth age brackets, believed economically to be the labour force and by extension the supposed productive sector which holds the destiny of a nation. It tells how the author is asking the Nigerian populace what the future of the Nigerian society holds within and outside the country, since they portray and represent the country unpatriotically outside the country; an unpatriotic act and migration caused by the bad situations as poverty, monetary devaluation, economic recession and unemployment etcetera when compared to other countries, given the dignity allocated the country in its foreign affairs with other countries. This work unveils the theoretical postulations of the text even in its fictional mode about the matter of excessive materialism in the society. It however only discusses the description and revolts against the bad situations of Nigerian youths without any prescription on the way out of the problems but suggests it, in its conclusion.

Keyword: literature, materialism, crime, Nigeria

Introduction

Fictional works are not written in a vacuum; there are always some existing social issues that the literary artists want to depict about a given society. Based on the above view, Ifeyinwa Ogbazi observes that,

Literary artists are able to explore the varied nature of human society because they are armed with such sensitivity and sensibility which allow them to make in-depth examination of the life of the community they are acquainted with. With an acute perception, they do not aim at just mirroring societal events as they occur, but also their major pre-occupation is to interpret the life of this society.(77)

Wonder why this work chooses to discuss excessive materialism in the text, *Pain in the Neck* other than the most obvious concepts of racism, human trafficking or women degradation? That is because, cause and effects are driven by intention; intention is the unifying factor between both. Also, what is obvious as in the glaring subject matter of human trafficking, racism and women degradation is a general knowledge whereas the scarcely noticed, excessive materialism is wisdom.

Materialism is a doctrine that the only or the highest values or objectives lie in material well-being, and in the furtherance of material progress. It is preoccupied with or stressed upon material rather than or intellectual things. It also postulates that an economic or social change is materially caused. Materialism as an ethic portrayed by some adherents' of hedonism is not in itself bad since human survival hinges even more on material possession controlled by a country or individuals. To deny the importance of material things could serve as the worst deception that even the hardcore stoics would not neglect. However, degrees of materialistic pursuits vary; each level of desire for materialism determining the category it is classified. Some pursue it just as a necessary phenomenon, others as a needed evil since they perceive it as the cause of all ills in the society. But in the highest abnormal degree is the excessive materialist. The word 'excessive' reveals the dangerous magnitude of materialism which could be inimical to an individual or the society at large.

Excessive materialists are willing to go any mile irrespective of the havoc they will wreck on the society or other individuals in the society. They preoccupy their minds with gains; people greedy of gains could crush others to achieve a resolute determined goal. When it turns to become the spirit of an age, it is inevitable for crime to set in as the occupation or a means to the acquisition of unethical wealth, a birthright as a reward for wicked bravery. Nigeria as a country is beclouded by this deceptive lover, it seduces; to seduce is to subtly lead astray by presenting appealing manifestoes but leaves the victims and propagators languish in misery. Too many factors have precipitated excessive materialism in Nigeria, but her degree of practice of the concept when compared to some other countries is higher for some reasons that are both societal and individually related concerning what success, prosperity or fulfillment connotes. The societal influences manifest themselves in the form of poverty, economic recession, unemployment, poor leadership and devalued currency etc. On another hand, youths who have been trained especially through formal education limit themselves to looking for a readymade white collar job in neglect of the innovation and creativity which education informs a working trained mind. This renders those jobless, in search of parcel money to venture into notorious works. One which involves lots of things but more obviously is human trafficking, especially the deceptive migration of other persons outside the border by some trusted individuals by promising them what they desire only to plunge them into unhealthy occupations, as long as the modern society is concerned.

For the societal influences that prompt the quest for excessive materialism in the country, the leadership of the country have placed its inhabitants not only citizens in poverty, recession, unemployment and devalued currency which drive foreign investors away. The populace dominated by the youths in their reactionary and revolutionary move recount the years spent in training as waste if not provided with jobs. They employ themselves into doing inhumane things such as drug pushing, cybercrime, ritual killings, prostitution, human trafficking etc. Currently, measuring the standard of living of the country using the per capita income of her inhabitants, it was discovered that an average Nigerian lives below 1 Dollar which is equivalent to 360 Naira per day which by extension causes depression in the life of her citizens who contribute great quota to menaces as hunger, disease and death toll.

This increases the cost of living to create which adversely affects the human standard of living. Again, the country ranks among top five most cyber criminal producing country with greater population of the *yahoo boys*, *yahoo plus* (taking of ladies under wears either after drugging and having intercourse with them to native doctors, who use the fluid which the yahoo plus guys are willing to pay even 500,000 Naira to buy just one already worn ladies underwear. The cases of accounts of individuals, countries and corporate organizations to loot the target's funds is rampant, with the country producing leading participants in the abetting of such crimes. Also, with the bad situation on ground, massive ritual killings have increased geometrically overtime as bodies of ripped off heads, cut off privates and human parts have been discovered in fridges by the security agencies as they reprimanded some culprits whereas the reason for the actions remain unsolved. Some are said to be sellers of fellow humans to the ritualists for filthy lucre. Some chose prostitution as a means of livelihood with its follow up harm to the young adults who commit suicide after finding meaninglessness in the life they led or they become vulnerable to ritualists.

Lots of interviews have been given to the inhumane characters about the reason for their inhumanity to their fellow humans. Guess what they attribute it to the bad turn outs of everything in the country which lead them frustration, frustration to resistance to the ills, and resistance to the ultimate desire to become barons in discharging inimical duties irrespective the consequences attached to their misdeeds. This is really a huge pain in the neck of the victims, perpetrators of the evil, the image of the country as represented by its citizens who carry same wicked acts to other countries with their passport and colour as identity, as sense of belonging to Nigeria.

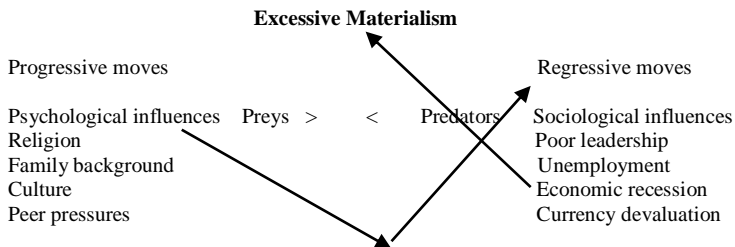
How the pursuit of excessive materialism and its effects ruin persons and society in the Nigerian societal situation as portrayed in ifeoma odinye's pain in the neck

The novel *Pain in the Neck* presents to its readers, an x-ray of the internal system of the society of a people who revolt against the harsh situations confronting them. It turns out to be that the hallmark of the narrative and other subject matters are jeered towards furthering one

ultimate end which is excessive materialism. when proper analysis are made about the motivations behind misdeeds such as human trafficking, drug pushing etc, it reveals that for majority of the perpetrators of the inhumane activities towards another, it is not in their best intentions to carry-out such acts. But in their revolutionary and reactionary move against these harsh conditions, the characters in the novel who are thrust into an absurd world choose the wrong path to dealing with the issues, only to create greater traumatic effects on themselves (speaking of the perpetrators when caught by security agencies), the victims of their acts and the image of the country which is the very duty of a patriotic citizen to protect. Thus they conform to Cicero's observation about the six mistakes that humans make century after century. One them is to think that crushing others to get enriched is the safest route to wealth acquisition. It employs the first person narrative technique in varying forms. The 'I' which is the vehicle of narration represents firstly the authorial view to indicate that she belongs to and has experienced these harsh situations, hence it is a credibility proof of how plausible the prose-fiction is to life. Next is the use of the first person narrative by a major character, Chika to narrate her ordeals and the ordeals of others in China through the use of flashback.

The novel presents the Igbo geographical setting, considering the overriding use of the names of characters attributed to the region, but it is only a microcosm of the country at large given its dominant share in the issue of excessive materialism in the real sense of the situation in the country. The novel tries to reveal the central origin of excessive materialism by providing a fictional theory that is suitably referred to as *the vicious cycle of excessive materialism*. This cycle as derived from the novel reveals the internal causes that reciprocally augment each other in producing the tragic occurrences in a bid to acquire excessive wealth. Majority of all the characters reveal and explore this in the novel in differing forms. The cycle shows the link, a cause- effect relationship of the spirit of the age which is the doctrine that economic and social change is materially caused.

The vicious cycle of excessive materialism as portrayed in *Pain in the neck*



The psychological residue of abnormal human deprivation

The psychological concepts as explored in *Pain in the Neck* is that which attributes the quest for excessive materialism to some psychological factors in the human childhood or teenage age. It implies that young adults who have been restricted from the knowledge of some certain basic things about life by their guardians in their childhood or teenage ages by some influences as religious doctrines, culture, family upbringing, peer pressures tend to become vulnerable tools in the hands of predators (*Pain in the Neck* 100). This is due to some beliefs held by these bodies. However, the effect turns out sour since they will never be confined to their home forever. As they meet other persons and begin to get in touch with other realities about life, they become new to them. In the spirit of adventurism which the youths possess, they seek to explore new grounds only to fall victims of different levels of human abuse. *Pain in the Neck* notes that it is not only the female sex that is the victim of these abuses in terms of human trafficking but also the male, but insinuates that the females are the greater victims (*Pain in the Neck* 180). The residue of these tenets taught these young adults only throw them into confusion at first, later into doubt as their old beliefs battle with their new promising experience.' A double minded man the Bible says is always unstable in all his ways'.

Chika who has just left Nigeria to go further her education in China receives countless numbers of advice from her mother, a religious advise indeed about how harmful men are. As she surges towards Beijing University, her Alma Mata, she seem to appear as she discovers, that only her black skin separates her from the majority whites at the airport. Fortunately she meets Chinedu who acts kindly, genuinely nicely with good intentions towards her (*Pain in the Neck* 16). But Chinedu had betrayed his benefactor Ngozi, his first love in China, a lady responsible for his acquiesced wealth. At home in Nigeria, her mother has often stopped her from playing with young boys of same age range as her, alerting to her mind that men are nothing but destructive. Contrary to the belief her mother previously made her believe, she finds Chinedu to be just a caring man. Her heart yearns to have him especially during the holiday when other students go home and loneliness sets into her life. On several occasions, Chinedu comes closer for a romance, she is in dilemma of whether what Mama taught her was true, but she loves Chinedu who is practically a loving man, the type Mama had told her she will marry. Cut also in the jagged edge between them, is the cultural ethics of the Igbos about marriage which held itself up as a mirror to the two lovers that marriage is required before love making is guaranteed. Chika loses control of her body to Chinedu on several occasions as she is unsure of whether Chinedu or Mama is right or wrong concerning marriage (*Pain in the Neck* 70-71). Thus she says in this paraphrased speech often times indicating confusion;

My hand shivers and my heart beats faster. I do not know what. Should I let him touch me or not? But oh no what will Mama say if she sees me in this manner which I find myself? What if I fail Mama after all she has taught... Chinedu I love my mother. Chinedu remember you have not paid my bride price and you know it's necessary in our culture before we can start any further affair.(Pain in the Neck)

She calls her mom in fear, imagining what her mother would view about her if she was in China with her. Consequentially, she loses her major reason for being in China only to travel round to different hotels, visiting beautiful places which culminate to her incessant rape by

miscreants which batters her and destroys her dreams. The worse came when after not been released by the miscreants, her voluntary surrendering of herself to the police culminates into her deportation to Nigeria without achieving her China dreams.

Other references are made about psychological influences but another major character, one of the double protagonists used in the novel is Adanna who though did not really appear much, the story revolves around her, the reason for Chika's flashback to their morbid experiences in China. Chika who has gone to a restaurant in Guangzhou with her new found love Chinedu, to eat in a restaurant and discovers the reckless touching of men of on an unyielding young lady to such touches. She is however forced to sleep with them until it became part of her, in delusion that she was going to start school in China. Chika who has decided to take the case up queries Adanna about why she does such jobs and how she got to China. This paraphrased speech of Adanna reveals the vulnerability which a psychological residue of abnormal human deprivation could render young adults into.

I was sexually harassed by my father repeatedly. He told me never to tell anyone because he would kill me... he also was said I should not allow any other boy or man to touch me if not, I will get pregnant. Then I summoned courage to tell my mom who was suspicious of my enlarged waist and a sprouting and protruding breast. My mother died later on and fate directed the wheel of my life to a benevolent woman who took care of me as I worked with her in her saloon. A lady known as Auntie White upon various visits to the saloon indicated interest in me. She offered to train me in school which made the woman release me to her. Upon arriving, I asked about the education she promised and 'this is the education' she told me. (Pain in the Neck)

Adanna's vulnerability depicts the psychologically trauma that lack of responsible parenthood can expose a child to in a bid to make it big in life to fit into the societal spirit of the age about material possession, a measure of self worth. The novel in the end uses Mrs Ugah, Chika's

mother, who is a conservative of culture and religious doctrine of the previous century to initiate that the best cure for vulnerability on the sides of innocent young adults is not to shut them out of the knowledge of but reveal to them, the pre-requisite knowledge they need to know and experience such as sex education and financial management, but allow them get exposed to some things needed for growth such as peers to get them acquainted with the basic necessities and challenges as adults. Thus, she says in tears to her daughter in regret after T.B Joshua calls her to come meet her daughter at his church, abbreviated as SCOAN.

I failed you my daughter, I should have allowed you to mingle with others and learn some things early in life. I am to be blamed for all these. (Pain in the Neck 200)

The psychological factors which could plunge youths into being a means to an end (excessive materialism) to the predators are progressive in nature since they seek to discover new ideas though it swallows them up.

Pain in the Neck proposes even further, another theory about that which encourages excessive materialism which manifests itself in the form a societal recreation of the original good intentions of citizens into becoming perpetrators of inhumane acts.

The Hunter's Means-End Trap Theory

This is emphasized fictionally in the novel to imply that some sects of the country are societal recreated to become predators. These sects are obviously said to have been battered by the harsh situations of things ranging from poor leadership to economic recession, unemployment, low standard of living and the likes. It reveals that these sects are well meaning, trained minds of the country with some good levels of experiences in the country. With their potential trapped within them and underutilized or not utilized owing to the unfavourable conditions threatening their future; recreated by situations, they divert their knowledge from their supposed good intended application of their knowledge to acquire abundant wealth irrespective of the means. This is so because the leadership of the country has set the path to excessive

materialism as the spirit of the age as they prepare good manifestoes but on getting into office, it becomes a medium for improper siphoning of public funds to enrich themselves.

Pain in the Neck proposes that the society directs the course of human decisions and fate in a greater degree. The novel focuses on the negative effect of the current Nigerian society on the decision making of youths; a reactive rather than a proactive decision. As a means of escape from conditions as poverty, unemployment, economic recession and low standard of living, youths are forced into drug pushing, but the novels focuses on human trafficking as its major concern amidst many other inhumane jobs. To achieve this end (extreme materialism) the highly exposed youths establish a trap stipulating the advantages that will accompany the agreement to travel abroad with them such as quality education and employment. This attempt is predicted to work out as they stimulate the hunger to achieve extreme materialism which they (predator and prey) desire intrinsically. Upon arriving the shores of beyond their own country, the promises which led them there turns out be a mirage. They are deluded only to become prostitutes, drug dealing, not to their own credit, but to the amassment of their masters and mistresses (predators) wealth.

Firstly, Chinedu is used to depict such attempts on him when he was only a novice whose master has entrusted his properties in China to, on the ground of his faithfulness. Upon his arrival and successful business adventures and successes, some rivals who envy him plot his deportation as they put some cocaine drugs in his business bag. However, he is rescued by Ngozi who has turned baron in the Cocaine business as he recounts it while telling a curious Chika why she came haunting and taunting his life. She enriches him and uses it as a bait to hold him spell-bound as a permanently, using it as a bait to hold his mind in continuous psychological skepticism about whether leaving her or not is a good way of paying back her benevolence towards him. The same cause her, out of jealousy for his love relationship with Chika to subtly convince him to be available in her party; a party in which she unleashes her vengeance upon him and his girlfriend; a party that leads to his unpredicted death.

In another instance as explicated by Ifeoma Odiinye in *Pain in the Neck*,

one of the major characters Adanna is used to portray this victimization, which is a capitalization on the vulnerability she gets from poor parental care and material provisions, a psychological denial. She recounts how she is taken by Aunty White and how she has opted to follow her to China based on her desire to get good education as promised by *the look like good intentioned* Aunty. She also narrates her ordeals to Chika who is also inquisitive. Above all, Chika serves as a typical emblem of restless inquisition. Upon her arrival in China, her mind consciously drifts away from her academic pursuits into adventurous exploration, touring the major cities of China, from Xiamen to Guangzhou, Baima market, Zhongguancun etc through the sponsorship of her lover, Chinedu. Though the lover is of a good intention, but the best intentions cannot save worst scenarios since intentions are abstract and vanishes like mists. Obviously she is a lesson, revealing the danger of excessive curiosity since it can render a rational mind when not controlled, helpless. Though her inquisition leads her to Ngozi's party with assured immunity in the presence of her boyfriend, it is obvious that she does so owing to the awry looks of the Nigerian landscape which can reduce her inquisition to some extent since the country she came from still belongs to the third world country. The following paraphrase captioned in the lines below showcases a comparison between the outlook of the country she came from and the one she is now, before her deportation to country Nigeria, her country of origin, when she touched down the Beijing Terminal, China.

Nawa ooo, China is a very beautiful place. Our Naija, hmmm. I wonder the year Naija will ever reach half of this country. Now that I am here, I must make sure I visit the most important places before I am due to return to see Mama and everyone when I must have completed my studies here. Chaaaii, she muttered these words within her breaths to herself. (Pain in the Neck)

At the end of the story, there is a revelation about all the characters, same thing happened to both ill and well meaning characters- belated expectations. This is due to the overriding mindset about their newly invented economic theory- excessive materialism, the lord of spelling dooms on overtly anticipating minds, the graveyard of dreams in appealing fashion.

Conclusion

To conclude, the title of the book, *Pain in the Neck* serves as a foreshadowing of what the wandering mind of audience should be anticipating at all levels of discourse of individuals, corporate bodies, various institutions and the country, Nigeria. It revolts to advise all units of the country to identify in what way their activities contribute to the continuous breakdown, equity, justice and unity of the country, agree in unison to correct the ills in the society and to ultimately create a befitting society where all and sundry will be happy at equilibrium to cure the Pain in everyone and every sector's neck.

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