CHAPTER 13

Policy Studies, Activist Literature, and Pitching for the Masses in Nigeria

Introduction

Though political science, especially policy studies, and activist literature deal with politics, this is more so of policy studies than literature which may not have politics as its concern. Political science and literature are more closely related in their objectives than the often hostile appearance between writers and politicians. The activist writer, as a critic, tends to portray the politician as a reactionary and stumbling block to a progressive society as in Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* and Wole Soyinka’s *The Interpreters*. Modern African literature generally reflects the history of the continent or individual nations, a point that G-C. Mutiso, Janheinz Jahn, Romanus N. Egudu, and others have emphasized at one point or the other during the past 50 years. “History” in African literature is a code name for politics. As such, modern African or Nigerian literature reflects the political experience of the continent or country. It is interesting to note that in the 1990s at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* was taught as literature in the then African and African American Studies Department (now Africana Studies) and also in the Departments of History and Political Science. This shows the subliminal relationship between literature, history, and political science. The emphasis in this chapter is both on the relationship between Nigerian literature and political science in the area of public policy at the local and community levels and the objectives of activist literature and public policy at the grassroots level.

This chapter has as its backdrop the intellectual contributions made by Oladimeji Aborisade in policy analysis in the areas of local government and community studies at Obafemi Awolowo University in Nigeria and at The University of North Carolina at Charlotte.
Aborisade has focused on local and grassroots politics in Nigeria, editing the following books: *Local Government and the Traditional Rulers in Nigeria* (1985), *On Being in Charge at the Grassroots Level in Nigeria* (1989), and *Nigerian Local Government Reformed* (1989). In the period of 1990–1994, Aborisade and Robert Mundt carried out intensive fieldwork in Nigeria and North Carolina in local government and also conducted workshops in Nigeria for the chairmen of local government commissions, the departments of local government in the governors’ offices, the chairmen of local governments, the secretaries, treasurers, and their local government functionaries in Nigeria. This comparative research resulted in the publication of *Local Government in Nigeria and the United States: Learning from Comparison* (1995). Aborisade and Mundt have also authored *Politics in Nigeria* (2002), a seminal work in which they observe that political science is filled with the “mild polemic about the relative merits of a system approach as compared to a more state-centered analysis of political life” (xv). They take a middle road, which is “basically a system approach that views politics as a repetitive process involving individual relationships with institutions (institutionalized political roles), but also an approach in which the state is identified as a major actor and a major set of institutions, which has its own needs and makes its own demands on the system, even as it usually plays a central political system role in ‘allocating scarce resources’” (vi). There is symmetry of sentiments in these two political scientists working on policy matters and two Nigerian active writers in their seeing politicians, military or civilian, as responsible for Nigeria’s lack of economic growth. Here is part of the opening paragraph of the last chapter of the book:

Under the Abacha regime, Wole Soyinka saw a “spiral of murder, torture, and leadership dementia that is surely leading to the disintegration of a once-proud nation.” . . . billions of desperately needed naira have been wasted, a few have grown rich at the expense of the poor . . . In the words of poet Tanure Ojaide,

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\text{We have lost it,} \\
\text{the country we were born into.} \\
\text{We can now sing dirges} \\
\text{of that commonwealth of yesterday—} \\
\text{we live in a country} \\
\text{that is no longer our own} \\
\text{—“No Longer Our Own Country,” 1986 (242)}
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Here activist writers and political scientists in their policy analysis put the blame for the failures of the Nigerian state on politicians. As