

The Ethnic Novel: Impediment or Facilitator of Nationhood? The
Example of James Onyebuchi Ile's *Verses of Uncharted Heaven:
The
Second Coming of Biafra*

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Abstract

—The Ethnic Novel: Impediment or Facilitator of Nationhood? questions the role of literature (and the arts) in engendering nationhood in Nigeria. It does this through the examination of James Ile's ethnically declarative novel, *Verses of Uncharted Heaven; The Second Coming of Biafra*. The paper argues that the novel and, indeed, all literature can facilitate or impair the spirit of nationhood, depending on the author's deployment of the literary codes such as imagery, symbolism, point of view etc., which he or she has chosen to communicate through. It concludes that the novel under study impairs rather than promote the spirit of nationhood.

Introduction

The ethnic novel can engender nationhood. The proof of this is in the fact that most national literatures started as ethnic, before acquiring their national status, which usually takes place after a long time of existing at the ethnic (or local) level. But not all ethnic literatures may become national literatures, and therefore, not all may promote or engender a spirit of nationhood.

The word —ethnic (or ethnicity) is rather vague: a word with no common or generally acceptable definition. It would take on one of several meanings depending on who is defining it, and from what social, sociological, anthropological or political standpoint. For example, one could talk about something as ethnic Tarok or Igbo, or the Hausa and Yoruba as ethnic nationalities. Yet, one could talk about something as ethnic Nigerian or Indian, as if these

countries were made up of a homogeneous people. It is in this sense that we talk about ethnic American, British or Nigerian literature.

Ethnic literature is the literature that contains and focuses on ethnic references, which give it its unique identity. Ethnic literature identifies with, and speaks for, a particular ethnic group (tribe). It assumes a sympathetic posture towards the group no matter the narrative point of view. Ethnic literature, therefore, is mainly written by members of the ethnic group to which the references are made. Such references include the people, their land, culture, traditions, names, language, history, religion and anything with which they are identified or associated. These are the things that define ethnicity, that bind and define a people as an autochthonous group, as a nation, distinguishing them from other groups.

We also talk about national literatures in the same way that we talk about ethnic literatures – as literature produced by nationals (or others) for the nationals, and with the sensibility that is unique to the nation. In the case of Nigeria one can only talk about national literature with the tongue in one's cheek, which lends credence to the theme of this conference – —ethnic literature and the challenges of nationhood. That the concept of nationhood in Nigeria faces challenges is evident in the contestations of its status. Many Nigerians insist that Nigeria is a country and not a nation, not only because of the diversities in those things that define a nation, but also because of the lack of a common ideology. The expectation, therefore, is that literature (and the arts in general) should be used to bring the diverse ethnic nationalities together by blurring the sharp dividing lines. Whether this can happen or not depends on the ability of the writer to rise above his/her primordial ethnic interests and pursue higher national interests. This is what makes the difference between ethnic and truly national literatures.

Ethnic literatures have thrived in every multi-ethnic nation where there is literary production. These include the developed democracies such as Britain, France, Germany and the USA. But for these nations, ethnic literatures have become subjects of archival interest only, as truly national literatures have emerged. In Britain for instance, national literary icons include the likes of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy and D.H. Lawrence. Jean-Paul Sartre, Andre Gide, Marcel Proust, Emile Zola, Samuel Beckett and Albert Camus are some of France's literary heroes. From Germany are the likes of Frantz Kafka, Henrich Mann, Hermann Hesse,

Gunter Grass and Thomas Bernhard, while America's literary icons include Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Henry James, Ralph Ellison, Mark Twain, Richard Wright, Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway and many others. Nigeria is not without writers whose works may be considered truly national. Wole Soyinka, Nigeria's Nobel Laureate, may have drawn heavily from his Yoruba background for his literary canvas, but his thematic concerns are national. Along with him are writers like Chukwuemeka Ike, Wale Okediran, Abubakar Gimba and many others.

Ethnicity and Nigerian Literature

Not many Nigerian literary works would escape the label of ethnic literature, especially the early writings from the late 50s until the mid or late 70s. If they were considered as *Nigerian* literature, it was due to ignorance, and because the critics were mainly foreigners for whom the whole of Africa was just one *tribe*. Thus, when we talk about them as Nigerian or African literature, it is only as a geographical expression. Then, it did not matter that Igbo land, culture, tradition, and worldview were all very different from those of the Tarok or Tiv of the Middle Belt. Therefore, in reality those were Igbo, Yoruba or Luo literatures. Today, the informed critic would distinguish between the early ethnic Achebe of the first three novels (*Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God*, and *No Longer at Ease*) and the later national (or more appropriately, cosmopolitan) Achebe of *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*, before he returned to being an ethnic champion in *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*.

The reason for this ethnic inclination is located in the history of the development of the literature itself. Before independence the indigenous groups that became Nigeria were organized strictly along ethnic lines, existing as independent nations and even after the amalgamation and subsequent creation of a republic they remained closed units, looking more unto themselves than the larger unit. Nigeria's founding fathers, for instance, have always been regarded as heroes, but in reality, they were heroes of their ethnic groups.

The origins of written literature in Nigeria support this claim. The development of the Onitsha Market Literature in eastern Nigeria catered to the needs of the Igbo-speaking ethnic nationality. So were the Hausa literary works pioneered by people like Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (*Shehu Umar*), Abubakar Imam (*Ruwan Bagaja*), Bello Kagara (*Gandoki*), and Mohammodu Gwarzo (*Idon Matambayi*), which catered to the needs of the northern Hausa-speaking ethnic

group. This tradition was pioneered by the southwestern region, which became literate earlier than the other regions (apart from the Arabic and Ajami writings of the north). The earliest Yoruba writers who represented the regional ethnic group were Isaac B. Thomas, D. O. Fagunwa, Amos Tutuola, Afolabi Olabimtan and Adebayo Faleti. As the nation gradually evolved in the years preceding and after independence, it became more and more cosmopolitan, and so were the literatures. But the spirit of nationalism was not sustained and encouraged, and therefore much of our literatures have remained basically ethnic.

There is something limiting and negative, even derogatory about the concept of ethnicity, especially in the context of a pluralistic society like Nigeria. Yet, it is the ideal basis for human identities all over the world, and the foundation on which nationhood is established in multi-ethnic societies. Recognizing its role in literature, as in all other spheres of life is an important step towards resolving the challenges of nationhood. A nation, after all, is an agglomeration of ethnic nationalities or, in a few cases, an ethnic group large enough in numbers to have a country of their own.

The things that define an ethnic nationality (or group) are the same that define a nation state, of course, with some modifications. For a multi-ethnic nation like ours, language, history, culture and traditions are bound to differ. The binding (or bonding) factor, therefore, would be a common ideology and sensibility. Where this happens, those differences would not be a challenge, but rather a source of strength; what Nigerians have believed and often talked about without making it happen. But why has this not happened? What has been the reality with regard to ethnic diversity and the lack of an ideology? How have our literatures, especially the ethnically propelled works responded to the reality on the ground? How should the ethnic novel respond to the challenges of nationhood in Nigeria? Or, indeed, is it possible for ethnic literature to do what we expect it to do? These are the questions this essay seeks to answer.

Ethnic literature may be categorized into two: the one produced by an artistic mind, intrigued by a phenomenon – the place or land, culture and tradition of the group etc., and the one compelled by a desire to drive a cause. The first type produces a romantic picture, inviting the reader to savour its beauty, while the second provokes thoughts (usually) drawing attention to what has happened and demanding some form of action or reaction. The second arises from a conscious decision by the writer to create a functional work beyond aesthetics, beyond

entertainment. Great literature is produced when the first and the second type are brought together in the right mix.

The Ethnic Novel and the Challenges of Nationhood

Ethnicity seems to be at the core of Nigeria's problems with nationhood. Indeed, the rising consciousness of ethnic nationalities in Nigeria (and globally) has been the cause of conflicts that have claimed millions of lives. It is the root of many other problems that have beleaguered and challenged the country, such as poor leadership, revenue allocation imbalance, power sharing formula, the —federal character syndrome, government patronage, etc. These issues always raise tempers sharply, mortally dividing the people, and sometimes leading to serious conflicts. In the eyes of many, it is also the reason why Nigeria fought the bitter civil war, also known as the Nigeria-Biafra war. Discussing the role of the ethnic novel and the challenges of nationhood requires a critical examination of the way the novel has responded to these challenges.

The society may not dictate to the writer what to write, or how to write, but he is a member of the society (of the ethnic group) and is therefore accountable to the society. This is more so with the society from which our chosen author hails: the Igbo society. As Achebe tells us in his essay, —The Writer and His Community, the individual Igbo artist does not (and should not) own his creative product (47). It belongs to the community, which keeps custody on behalf of the god or goddess that gave the individual the creative force and energy. Perhaps this explains the preponderance of crusading ethnic literatures among the Igbo, especially since the Nigeria-Biafra war.

The ethnic novelist is a champion of the cause of his ethnic group and is responsible to his community. But the question is; if he is responsible to his ethnic community, could he also be accountable to his larger community, the nation state? For, it is only when the ethnic novel can transcend the boundaries that separate ethnic groups that it could contribute to nation building. Ethnic bigots may not be able to transcend these boundaries, but real artists would, using their ethnic enclave as a microcosm through which they could connect to the whole. Yet, this seems to be the difficult task for many writers. Let us use a Hausa proverb to illustrate why this is so: —So, so ne, amma sonkai yafill, meaning, —Love is love, but love of the self is greater, or —The best care is to take care of oneself.

This attitude is a human weakness, a pitfall, to which exceptions are rare. Examples abound in Nigerian literature, especially from the southeastern part of Nigeria, and more recently, from the Niger Delta, and this is understandable. These include Chinua Achebe's last work, *There was a Country*, Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Cyprian Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace*, and *Divided we Stand*, Odia Ofeimun and Tanure Ojaide's poems scattered in their several poetry collections, and many more. All of these are works propelled by (political or social) causes, through which the authors hope to draw attention to problems that, from their own literary and ethnic prisms, they believe, threaten Nigerian's nationhood.

James Onyebuchi Ile's novel, *Verses of Uncharted Heaven: the Second Coming of Biafra*, belongs to the second category of ethnic literature; a novel compelled by a cause. In this group, it belongs to the second sub-group—a novel that hopes to transcend the boundaries of ethnicity and present a national cause from an ethnic standpoint. This is evident in the portrayal of Phillip Ndudi, the father of James Ndudi the protagonist, and in James Ndudi's initial conviction about the possibility of being a citizen of the world, and becoming not only a nationalist but also an international figure. Bold in its title, further emboldened by its cover design and the book's whole enterprise, *Verses of Uncharted Heaven* is unashamedly ethnic Igbo literature meant for a general Nigerian audience. Nevertheless it is deceitful in its execution because in the end, it fails to convince us of its declared purpose or cause, which is to propose and promote a detribalised Nigerian nation that would treat all citizens on merit rather than ethnic, religious, geographical or any other primordial affiliations.

This is the enterprise that Ile pursues through his protagonist, a young Igbo boy from the state of Biafra. His name, James, (along with other factors) gives the novel an autobiographical quality. We meet James Ndudi at a young (pre-school) age, and we follow him until adulthood (in his final year in the University), when his mind is formed and he has begun to impact on his society.

His age is suggestive of the clichéd —leaders of tomorrow and —future of the nation gimmick that has been sold to the Nigerian youths since independence.

The plot is woven around the young man's educational ambition and his botched effort to secure admission and study the course of his choice (Law) in a university of his choice (Zamad Bell University, Zina). This happens, supposedly, because of his ethnicity; an Igbo from Biafra state dreaming of gaining admission

into a university in Hafana. He fails to register, and is forced to idle away a year, during which he discovers the world of books in his guardian's library. This leads him to discover other fields of study, chief amongst which is the discipline that would afford him the opportunity to express himself. He chooses to study languages and literature (like the author), which would afford him the opportunity to write literature that would bring about a change in his country's sick social structure that stifles individual and national progress, killing the spirit of nationhood by promoting mediocrity against merit because of ethnic differences (90). He chooses to study German literature and language, and goes to Germany to do this (like the author).

It is not only important but also instructive that James (the protagonist) chooses literature as the medium to pursue his cause. He writes a controversial novel entitled —Memory Lane, a title drawn from his guardian, Mr. Obiefuna's statement (91), which was meant to plant the seed of hatred in him and discourage his dream of becoming a detribalised Nigerian, an idea his father had inculcated in him from the cradle. The novel is published in Nigeria but he escapes to Europe, while those connected with its publications—Lumumba, the man in charge of publicity, the editor, and the chairman of the Sixth Estate Publishers—get into trouble. Lumumba and the editor are in detention and the Chairman is being hunted, all charged with treason. The book is banned.

Lumumba (a name that betokens an African revolutionary spirit) had got a leading newspaper to publish a review of the novel, in which the editor (of the newspaper) —...believed (that) the writer...wanted to prove that literature was an instrument of change (232). The question is: Change in what direction? Ile, through his protagonist, tries to convince us —...it was never my intention to whip up ethnic sentiments any more than I was interested in ethnic bickering: I wrote *Memory Lane* to show the world the consequences of domination and to show Nigeria what was at the end of the road they had chosen... (232) (my emphasis).

James also lionises Oguguo, the —radical separationist character and hero of —Memory Lane, as well as the firebrand campaigner, Comrade Odumegwu for championing the struggles for an independent state of Biafra. Comrade Odumegwu is obviously Odumegwu Ojukwu, the anti-hero of the Biafra cause, without any disguise,

As Ngugi wa Thiong'o tells us, literature gives us a form of knowledge about reality, which we acquire through a pile of images.

But these images are not neutral. The images... try to make us not only see and understand the world of man and nature, apprehend it, but to see and understand it in a certain way, or from the angle of vision of the artist... itself largely affected by the margin of natural social and spiritual freedom within which the practitioner... is operating... the arts then act like a reflecting mirror, this way or that way... But what is reflected in the mirror depends on where the holder stands in relation to the objects . . . (57-8)

Ngugi chose his words wisely. The writer is not the mirror; he only holds the mirror. So, he makes choices to a large extent. He decides where and when to point the mirror. He is like the film director, framing a shot and limiting the viewer's perspective. But the reader or viewer is not another mirror, not an unthinking machine; they are interpreters of what they see. Art, after all, is not what is intended or declared but what is deduced, or imputed. A work of art is judged on the meaning it offers, not on the declared intention. For, while the author chooses what, and how to show to us, there are several factors and conditions that affect our interpretation of what we see. In the end, we act on the authority of the text, and not the author.

To put it another way, no image can be presented in a fully and wholly objective way. To demand such an image, to expect a totally objective image from any artist let alone an ethnic novelist, is to ask for the impossible; it is unrealistic. For an ethnic novelist to pretend to be presenting his reader with an objective image (or images) is therefore to engage in a game of deceit. The author may declare where he stands, but it is the work (acting like the lens of a camera) that declares what it offers. It is through this lens that we shall examine *Verses of Uncharted Heaven*, to see whether or not it has done what it claims to have set out to do; present to us a detribalised hero (in a detribalised book) who is working for a positive change to put Nigeria on the path of true nationhood.

Verses of Uncharted Heaven and the Challenges of Nationhood

Given the developments in Nigeria's politics of ethnicity, no Nigerian will ignore or even take lightly the subtitle of Ile's novel: *The Second Coming of Biafra*, or the novel's other ethnic references. The title is supported literally, by the

book's cover design, a painting depicting (supposedly) an Igbo settlement being razed and ravaged by soldiers, with a few casualties on the ground. This is what sets the tone and the dominant imagery in the novel: the Igbo as an endangered group that must struggle to free itself. This is further accentuated by the blurb, a quotation from Habakkuk in the Bible, which affirms the eventual coming to pass, of what has been prophesied—in this case, the return of Biafra. Yet it must not be assumed just from the foregoing that the novelist is an ethnic jingoist who supports the second coming of Biafra as an independent nation. In a pluralistic nation like Nigeria, a writer may draw attention to the ethnic cleavages that threaten its unity, which, if eliminated, would engender better nationhood. However, when we look beyond the cover, the bulb and the references to the images, symbols and metaphors the writer uses to prosecute his cause and how he deploys them, when we consider is diction and tone, and his narrative point of view, we are left with no option than to conclude that his sympathies lie with his ethnic nationality and not with the nation state as he declares.

Verses of Uncharted Heaven uses two ethnic groups as its referents—the Igbo of Biafra state and the Hausa of Hafana state—to take on the problem of ethnicity head-on. The thinly disguised Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, (Zamad Bell) is in Kaduna State, but Hafana may well represent the whole of the Hausa States, or Hausa land. In order to establish that ethnicity is not peculiar to Hafana, the novel states that ethnicity is everywhere, that there are different levels of it, and that even amongst the Igbo, families not indigenous to a particular place (Guzegu for example) were treated as strangers who had no right to land and other privileges. Ethnicity was so palpable that at a tender age after writing his first major examination which would take him to Secondary School, James was afraid he may fail the exam, simply because the marking would be done in a different state by people of a different ethnic group. Very early in the novel we get contrasting pictures of the two groups: one educated and industrious and the other ignorant, lazy and hungry. But it is also established that,

Every issue in the polity was interpreted on ethnic lines, every stronghold of a group was suspected as ploy to dominate others; life was, therefore, compelled to be lived in fragments so that the ship of state could only function as desired by the group in power. (38)

This experience foreshadows the problem of his admission into the university and the role ethnicity is to play in destroying his ambition and reshaping the course of his life. The unity of ethnic nationalities has been a major problem for Nigeria since independence. This lack of unity (or the friction) amongst competing nationalities has affected development and increased poverty amongst the populace. Poverty has given rise to increased competition and suspicion, widening the gap between the groups, and bringing about all kinds of conflicts and crises. This is the —realityll James Ndudi is made aware of. It is the reality James Ile knows and tries to fight through his young hero. Having been brought up as a detribalised young man, James disagrees with his guardian’s caution against his decision to choose Zamad Bell University, Zina, in Hafana state, instead of the one in their home state of Biafra.

Obiefuna drives his point harder, to make the young James realise he was living in a dream world:

I’m in the position to tell you more about the country than your father – Philip! If you do not know, know it now that your identity as man from of Biafra, for a fact does not augur with some people: Your presence... will spark off feelings of meanness in certain circles . . . (147). He goes on to give the reasons as Biafra’s daring war of self-determination, their possession of both mental (intellectual) and material resources, and their adventurous and self-assertive nature, as qualities that put the mat an advantage;

—qualities needed in man for a nation to growll(148). James is not convinced by the argument. That these are qualities needed for a nation to develop is a fact. But could they also be qualities that can bring problems for a nation? Are these qualities the exclusive preserve of a particular ethnic group? How long is the young James going to hold on to his —citizen of the worldll belief? For, the success of the author’s declared purpose depends as much on this as it is on our interpretation of his message as yielded by the supreme authority, the text.

Not long after his doubt, James’s faith is shaken (though not destroyed) when, on his way to Hafana land to register and assume studies in the University he meets yet another Igbo ethnic bigot, Mr. Ikedi, Lumumba’s father, who lives and does business in Hafana, and who tells James that Biafrans were not welcome in Hafana, and that although he had an authentic admission letter, it was doubtful that Zamad Bell University would accept him.

At the slightest provocation they would begin to destroy our shops, making you suspect that they are envious of our material success... They say we are everywhere. I cannot deceive you, my son, you made a wrong choice. (153)

The reality, however, dawns on James once he gets to the Law faculty and finds out that his name is not on the list, and that there is nothing he or anybody could do about it.

In the faculty building he comes across a professor from his home state (of the same ethnic group). This raises his hope of getting help. It is important to note that he was following —a primordial instinct that drew one to one's kind (171) and that the professor was, —perhaps ... also reacting to a primordial instinct. (172) But rather than solve his problem, the professor offers him more lessons on ethnicity.

That is it. They don't want you. You see my dear boy, I am only an expert . . . I have not been able to be convinced that I belong here, either; neither will you be. *I cannot change my identity; neither can you* (174) (emphasis added)

The professor does not solve the problem, not because he doesn't want to, or because the problem is beyond solution, but because, he too, is helpless being an Igbo from Biafra, although he does not make any attempt. This is what we are given to understand.

Now, James is literally crushed and Mr. Obiefuna's teachings about the country begin to ring true to him. —Did he not tell me that the country's unity was a shallow sham? Did he not say that there was an unhealthy rivalry among the ethnic groups? (174). These are deep expressions of regret at his myopia. He weighs the lessons and his new findings against his father's teachings, about becoming a citizen of the world, a detribalised man, and the scale begins to tilt towards the side of his people; towards Oguguo, Obiefuna, Ikedi, Odumegwu and the professor.

The things Ile has written about are the facts about contemporary Nigeria, and many writers have also used them as raw materials for their literary works. But the way he has held his mirror, where and how he has pointed it, makes the difference for the reader, and the implications for nationhood. Ethnic literature can ennoble a nation if its referents do not alienate the rest of the nation. The questions to ask about *Verses of Uncharted Heaven* are: Can every Nigerian relate to the

issues treated in the book? Can we truly empathise with the hero; can we all feel for him? Can this novel be recommended as a text for young Nigerians in schools? If the answers to these questions are in the negative, then a sense of nationhood has not been created. As we pointed out earlier, ethnic literature can engender nationhood only when it transcends its ethnic boundaries, in its references, thematic preoccupation and authorial/protagonist point of view. The book has not done these.

Compare, for example, the statement about the Igbo possessing those fantastic qualities needed for a country to develop (148) with the view about the Hausa as observed by Igbos who went to work in the north, at a time when —merit still counted and certificates as evidence of merit mattered:

Many (Igbos) were shocked by the crass ignorance of the hosts, for whom religion and tradition mattered most. Patrick could not understand why the people had to be picked while they were grazing their herds of cattle and brought to school . . . Wherever he (Patrick) went, he saw how children and adults balled their hands in a demonstration of power and greeted him: *rankadede*, as if he was one of their leaders, who seemed to be God's representatives on earth. (8-9)

Even if this were the fact, how does it sit with the reader? How is one who is not from Biafra, or who, perhaps, is Hausa, expected to react to this statement? And this is one out of many in the novel.

The concern for the country's future, expressed in many ways in passages here and there, may be an indication that the author's goal wears a nationalistic garb. After all, as Phillip Ndudi makes us understand, ethnicity is a national malaise practised even amongst the locals in Biafra. When we hear Ndudi mutter to his son, that —ethnicity was the disease that had infected everyman in this part of the world, (21) and urge him to become a citizen of the world, we are led to believe that the author has a nationalist, even global concern. This nationalist/global concern is more elaborately claimed in the name and profession of Lumumba, the image-maker of the Sixth Dimension Publishers. Clearly, we are meant to see him in the image of Patrice Emery Lumumba, the revolutionary nationalist leader and first Prime Minister of the Congo, who led the struggle for its independence. Lumumba was martyred by a combination of reactionary and imperialist forces that were irked by his leaning towards socialist Russia. As a

journalist, Ile's Lumumba does not only give a voice to the voiceless masses but is also a crusader against the emasculating establishment.

However, as the author tells us through his young narrator, —Good books also live (sic) some impressions on the reader—like the one I just read would do . . . advocates world citizenship—a world without hindrances, ethnic or racial!! (90) This passage serves two purposes; it reinforces the declared intention of the author, and more important, it asserts the authority of the text, upon which the work is finally judged. *Verses of Uncharted Heaven* therefore, leaves some impressions on the reader—as it has just done with me.

Conclusion

It would appear, from the overwhelming evidence *Verses of Uncharted Heaven* offers that no truly ethnic literature would engender nationhood unless, like other literatures, it is able to rise above the demands of its ethnic cause to become truly national (what Achebe was able to do with *Things Fall Apart*). There are two reasons why it seems difficult for Ile to achieve the status of a national writer. National literatures are the expression of the writer's personal feeling of a sense of nationhood, and a sense of belonging. It follows, therefore, that there has to be a *nation* in the real sense of the word, which Nigeria is yet to attain. But as we said earlier, there are Nigerian writers we can regard as nationalists. So, how is this possible? This takes us to the second reason, which is where *Verses* falls short.

Writers make choices. It is the writer who holds the mirror and chooses on what, and how to point it. A writer can choose to be an ethnic hero (as it was the case with our founding fathers), or a national hero. This is what has made writers like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, the Achebe of *Things Fall Apart*, and many others across Africa different. Their works have a national colouration even when the references are drawn from their ethnic backgrounds. They pursue a national cause, seeing themselves as the eyes and the mouthpiece of the society, its watchdogs. We do not get this impression after reading *Verses of Uncharted Heaven*. The book's title, its subtitle, the biblical quotation that supports the title, which assures of the certain return of Biafra, its cover design, the narrative point of view, which is in complete sympathy with the author's ethnic group; all these betray a sentiment that is subjective, that diminishes the author's declared intension. It is the classic case of the author wanting to do one

thing and the book doing quite another. The way the book is hastily put together confirms our conclusion that the ethnic agenda was more important to the author than any other consideration, including aesthetics.

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