



LITERARY IMPACTS OF GOVERNANCE NARRATIVE METAPHORS ON SOCIAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract

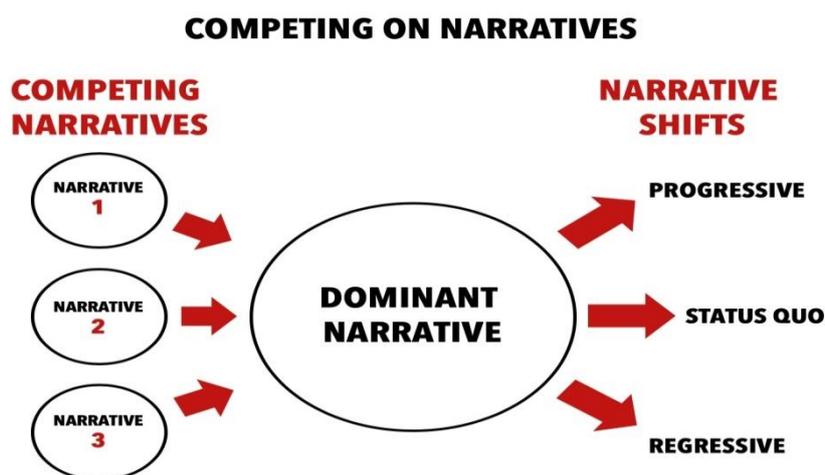
Narrative and literary-metaphor are literary forms and formats of literature employed by writers in scripting historical archives, mediating structural realities, intervening in socio-cultural contexts and moderating contemporary textual creativity. They are also employed by artistes in translating literary texts and interpreting them into contrived-reality, pseudo-reality and virtual-reality scenarios in our globalised post-modernist world. The intersections of popular democracy and government narrative metaphors amid the resource-curse dilemma, is the focus of this study. Governments globally derive from the people, and narrative literary elements guide the communication and interpretations of policies and determine how the people can be focused on these policies and goals. However, governance narrative elements and its metaphorical intents do not always serve noble purposes for the peoples' benefits and aspirations for nationhood, but can be altered, adjusted or contrived to serve other nefarious purposes in governance. This paper draws from the assertions of narrative theorists such as Todorov, Propp and Barthes to deliver an essay of the consequences of literary narratives within the context of mixed-metaphors and resource-curse dilemma that impinge upon good governance dynamics in Nigeria and Africa.

Keywords: Narrative-metaphor, Mixed-metaphors, Resource-curse, Governance, Popular-Democracy, Literary-forms

Introduction

Literature and literary metaphor forms are in themselves, the vehicles of propagating narratives within respective social constructs. Narrative elements authored or sponsored by the government are disseminated through the state-owned, "captive media" for the consumption of force-fed information, to an equally captive audience. The representation and dramatisation of social realities via writers' and artistes' literary narratives tend to create a normative ethos for society, and citizens could readily associate themselves with fictional and virtual or real-life characters created by poets, dramatists, novelists and playwrights. The narrative elements inherent in the media are adaptable and adoptable for several different purposes. Governments, particularly patrimonial, repressive ones in the underdeveloped countries of the mostly Global South have found in the media a powerful force for forcing their narratives upon the citizenry. With this understanding and the power at their disposal, the leaders of these countries propagate preferred doctrinal, prescriptive narratives, as well as colonise the mass media narratives and utilise them to maintain their captive audiences, in order to maintain their stranglehold on the populace. This is what the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in its review of literature on Public Governance Indicators - refers to as "state-capture". Repressive leaders become adept at the colonisation of the mass media narratives for creating and sustaining their self-serving narratives, thereby sustaining social inequalities, cliques or cabals of clientelism, and the divisive "divide-and-rule" ethos of "we versus they" that sustain them in power. It is not an understatement to assert that our individual, personal and corporate cum national lives are filled with kaleidoscopes of narratives. In fact, the whole context, content and extent of our respective lives are narratives in themselves. Different types and functions of narratives exist and these can be adapted to fulfill certain expectations within the populace. Indeed, there is a narrative for every "thing" and everything that exists or doesn't exist, for any concept and any philosophy, philology and ideology. However, it must be noted, studies of the concept of narratives are based on the appreciation of literature within respective socio-cultural contexts and as well borne in mind that literary interpretations are the tools of every form and type of narrative.

Narrative Theory - Another Look at the Functions of Literature in Society



Source: The Marketing Journal.

In Africa of yore, literature mainly served folkloric didactic, moral, entertainment, as well as belligerent functions. It was enough to teach good morals through folklore, myths, parables, panegyrics and other literary elements inherent in socio-cultural norms and ethos. This was done in order to suggest or compel adherence to social constructs, and at best, proffer deterrence to deliberate deviance of commonly accepted social norms. However, literature today serves far more profound socially-constructive and normative, as well as corrective functions. Literature and literary

scholars have posited and averred that literature serves not just didactic or moralising roles, but is a strong tool of social-advocacy, mass mobilisation, social regeneration, restructuring, as well as for liberating the minds of the people from the shackles of ignorance and subjugation (Odion 2009:56). Dramaturges like Ngugi, Osofisan, Soyinka, Achebe, Ekwensi, Camara Laye, Diop, Clark, Ekwensi and Senghor used their narratives to liberate the minds and bodies of Africans during the colonial era as well as in the immediate post-colonial and post-modernist decades. Such writers used literature to reform their respective societies. Through literature and the launching of literary narratives in texts, songs and publications, writers, dramatists and social critics were able to awaken the culture-specific sensibilities (nationalism), reform and rejig the narratives within their respective societies, and thus re-place them on the long forgotten, colonially-derailed path of social cohesion, progressiveness and constructive national consciousness, away from the morally-corrupting influences of colonialism and post-modernism. Yakubu (2015) in a study of Olu Obafemi's "Naira Has No Gender" and Femi Osofisan's "Morountodun" avers that "corruption is a manifestation of bad governance; and it is the main thematic preoccupation of the contemporary African literature". Again, Yakubu (2015) observes that "functionalism in African literature has a long pedigree. Commitment in African literature is about the social role of literature, and every serious literature plays this role." This, in essence must create a resort to examine literature, literary narrative in itself and narrative theory in order to determine the purpose and scope of literary narratives in African governance.

Narrative Theory

A narrative, in its basic form, is an event or set of events put together by someone with certain intents and presented to a specific audience using a particularly suitable medium within a set purpose and timeframe (Dahlstrom 2018). Narrative can be deftly adapted by the savvy for the purposes of propaganda and subversion. Therefore, Dahlstrom (2018) identifies three narrative concepts and their purposes – (a) information processing – used to process narrative and scientific information (b) sense-making – used to make sense of the world around us (c) external narrative messages – the extent to which messages can be persuasive and engaging. Cheong et al. (2012) aver that narrative is a "system of interrelated stories that share common elements and a rhetorical desire to resolve a conflict by structuring ordinance, expectations, and understandings."

Narrative Structure Theory

Narrative in itself is not reality, but it is woven around reality or crafted in a make-believe scenario to doctor reality and control the perceptions of the intended audience. Two forms of narrative are noticeable in practice – the noble and the ignoble forms. In its noble form, it helps the cause of the people or the led and thus the society at large, whereas in its ignoble form, it is detoured and denatured to serve the whims and selfish-interests of the leader or a clique of people who control the apparatus of state power. Several theories of narratives exist, depending on which type of audience and the area of focus the narrative is intended to address. This paper draws from the assertions of narrative theorists such as Todorov, Propp and Barthes, who all contributed to the current state of narrative theory. Tzvetan Todorov's (1960) Narrative structure theory is about how the narration in a story is created. In this theory, Todorov mentioned that there are 5 stages that a narrative will go through: these are: (1) **The narrative starts with an equilibrium** (2) **The disruption of the equilibrium** (3) **Recognition of equilibrium** (4) **Attempt to fix damage** (5) **Resolution/New equilibrium**.

While Propp asserts that stories are character-driven and that plots develop from the decisions and actions of characters and how they function in a story. He claimed characters could be classified into certain roles that progress a story.

Barthes's argument is that every sentence, even words in a literary work or text, when properly analysed possesses different meanings and shades of meanings, depending on several factors. Thus,

the author has no sovereignty over his own words (or images, sounds, etc.) that belong to the reader who interprets them. When we encounter a literary text... we need not ask ourselves what the author intended in his words but what the words themselves actually say. Text employ (sic) symbols which are deciphered by readers, and since function (sic) of the text is to be read, the author and process of writing is irrelevant.

Narrative supposedly follows a cause and effect format and is emotive in nature, intended to stimulate emotion and passion, and possibly, impulsive spontaneous actions and reactions, depending on the individual. Todorov sees a happy ending to every narrative, but sadly, this is not always the case in every narrative, because narratives can be hijacked for nefarious purposes by those who control media systems, media space and media access.

Narrative as Therapy

Writing can be a form of release – a release from the pressures and challenges of living. The need to tell a story - how you see it -, your political and ideological bent and the philosophies deriving from your social exigencies. The need to record your experiences for posterity is sometimes an overwhelming impulse; particularly when you have endured hardship, deprivation, incarceration, the loss of a dear one or persecution and even the excruciating grind of daily living. Many writers use writing as a psychological therapy to release bottled-up emotions, to codify and or encrypt information (as found in “The Thirty-nine Steps” and other cryptic writings) and to instruct their audiences in certain elements of being and nothingness. Thus, the need for a narrative theory and its further development into a narrative therapy became imperative.

Consequently, Cynthia Vinney (2019) implies that narrative therapy is a psychological approach that seeks to adjust the stories one tells about one’s life in order to bring about positive change and better mental health. It considers people the experts on their own lives and views them as separate from their problems. Narrative therapy was developed by social worker Michael White and family therapist David Epston in the 1980s. Narrative therapists believe people’s identities are shaped by the stories they tell about their lives. When those stories become focused on specific problems, the person often begins to view the problem as an inherent part of themselves. However, narrative therapy views people's problems as external to the individual and seeks to adjust the stories people tell about themselves in ways that let them see their problems this way too. White and Epston developed narrative therapy to be a non-pathologising form of therapy based on the following three ideas:

- **Narrative therapy respects each client.** Clients are treated as brave and free moral agent individuals who should be commended for recognising and working to address their issues. They are never viewed as deficient or inherently problematic.
- **Narrative therapy does not blame clients for their problems.** The client is not at fault for their problems and blame is not assigned to them or anyone else. Narrative therapy looks at people and their problems as separate.
- **Narrative therapy sees clients as experts on their own lives.** In narrative therapy, the therapist and the client are on equal footing, but it is the client who has intimate knowledge of his or her own life. As a result, therapy is meant to be a collaboration between the client and the therapist in which the therapist views the client as having all the capabilities, skills, and knowledge necessary to address their problems.

Narrative therapy’s stance is quite different from many other forms of therapy in which the therapist takes the lead. It can be uncomfortable and take a lot of practice for clients to successfully separate themselves from the reality of their problems.

In narrative therapy, modesty does not prevent us from blowing our own trumpets, because as the popular quip goes, “if you don’t blow your trumpet, who would?” The obvious answer is “somebody else would”! But if they do, they are most likely going to blow a disagreeable or discordant tune. Thus, narrative therapy urges us to tell our own story, not submit our lives to other peoples’ stories or succumb to their external narratives about ourselves.

Narrative Elements of Governance within the Resource-Curse Theory

Resource Curse Argument “Resource curse” according to (Niño & Le Billon, 2014) refers to the strong recurrent tendencies of adverse socio-economic and political conditions, and poverty prevalence in most resource-rich states as against the considerable performances of countries without such “benefits”. Since the mid-1980s, many studies have presented evidence to suggest that natural resource abundance, or at least an abundance of particular natural resources, leads to leadership crisis and is, in this sense, a curse rather than a blessing. (Olaiya and Adam 2020). In this light, Oyefusi (2007) established a link between resource-abundance and myriad political and socio-economic problems, (Olaiya, 2015) links natural resource-abundance with slow growth, greater inequality, and poverty for a more substantial majority of a country’s population, corruption of political institutions, and more fundamentally, an increased risk of civil conflict. Smith (1776, p. 262), argued that the proportion of unearned funds available in a country “necessarily determines the general character of the inhabitants as to industry or idleness”. He maintained that untold wealth is susceptible to creating “inferior ranks of people”, as well as a nation whose people are “in general idle, dissolute, and poor” (A. Smith, 1776, p. 262 , Wikipedia)

Good governance finds expression in the acceptable narratives and the expression of such by the citizens through available channels and media democracy. Conversely, the same channels or media are the readily available means of expressing angst about bad-governance or irresponsible-governance by the people. Drawing from this assertion, Askanius (2012, p. 16) avers that online video media like YouTube provides a remarkable platform of an emerging method for restructuring the terrain of politics and “exhibits the changing modes of political engagement in contemporary liberal democracies” through popular narrative elements. Further, Dawson (2016) opines that “video contents could reveal the state of the mind of a people while simultaneously signifying their “political standpoints”... video clips with political content, often posted with humorous or satirical intent” are a means for the public outcry against misrule and political socialisation... (p. 113). The ultimate goal and objective of governance narrative is to model attitudes, opinions, behaviours to influence the public’s perception and to make them act in a prescribed manner, in favour of the government of the day. (Wikipedia)

Competing Narratives of the People versus the Government

Competing narratives are like the graphic depiction of the Russian proverb (*glazni razbegayusia*), which refers to the situation of vertically swinging or runaway eyes when we are attracted to two equally attractive, but competing alternative spectacles. Competing narratives are rife in the governance/people relationships, and they are a constant source of potential strife in society. These arise due to partisan politics, ethno-tribal cleavages, ideological leanings, philosophical accretions and overall psychological states of minds, deriving from individual and governmental preferences. Governance refers to the formal and informal arrangements that determine how public decisions are made and how public actions are carried out from the perspective of maintaining a country’s constitutional values. Public administration is a constituent pillar of governance. Competing narratives always work within the concept of “hero” and “villain”, and participants in the narrative are either willing or coerced to tow a particularly line. As Craig Cormick (2019) sees it,

stories are about emotions over facts, and people respond much better to emotions than facts - and will openly reject facts if they do not align with their values... there are often competing narratives that exist, and different stories or framings from different interest groups... for many contentious issues there are many strongly competing narratives being told, that work hard to influence us in one direction or another... (Craig Cormick (2019).

Dahlstrom (2018) points out that the mass media also play a role in the decline of shared (forced), and therefore (false) narratives, stating that... “people are beginning to use the Internet as a way of connecting with others who share views that may differ from a culture’s (leader’s forced) shared narratives.” Of course, the same is true of governmental forced and false narratives.

In line with the concept of conflicting narratives and their effects, Dahlstrom (2018) refers to the controversy over the safety of vaccines as an example of how these two pathways compete –

Vaccine proponents... often rely on scientific evidence to communicate the message that vaccines are a safe and effective way to prevent disease, whereas members of the anti-vaccine movement often share stories about dangerous side-effects experienced by vaccinated children, which are processed as natural narratives. When this polarization occurs,... any additional facts received will be interpreted based on existing frameworks and used to support existing sense-making narratives.

Cheong et al. (2012) suggest that –

narrative offers a means of uniting culturally-provided templates,” which include histories, rumors, and other story forms... truth becomes less about facts and evidence... but... more about narrative fidelity (how well a story resonates with listeners as a result of their experiences and beliefs)... media platforms can be used by non-state actors to portray terrorists as either heroes or outlaws.

Literary Narratives in Nationalism and Nationalist Literature

Various types of narratives are in use within socio-cultural and governmental systems globally. Narrative elements include the literary, the textual, the social, the cinematic, the political, the commercial, the interactive, the synthetic narrative and the national security narrative, and these respectively find their uses in various contexts, depending on the purpose and intent of the user. The European narrative that African cultures, and consequently, her peoples were inferior during the colonial and post-colonial period gave birth to the pulsating quest to rehash the European-imposed narrative by African authors and scholars. The onus was on African authors to rewrite their alien-distorted history, rejig their bastardised culture, reform their outlawed monarchical/governmental systems and the commercial interests of their respectively balkanized countries. Thus, the brutalised and dehumanised peoples of Africa had to be re-humanised and re-dignified. Euro-centric concepts of democracy, modernism, postmodernism and capitalism had to be re-evaluated to fit in with the exigencies of African realities. The epic movies produced by Tunde Kelani in 1999 and 2002 - *Saworoide* and *Agogo-Èèwò*, respectively portray “the oxymoronic bearing on the cruel strain of politics on the people, which, as Bamgbose (2019) pointed out, portrays African post-colonial poems as the image of colonial experiences; and, in the words of Kalu and Falola (2019, p.1), are a reflection of the “daunting challenges in the socio-political and economic” phenomenon in African states and inherited exploitative tendency of the colonial days”. (in Olaiya and Adam, 2020).

Achebe, as an epigraph to his erudite work and bestselling novel “*Things Fall Apart*”, cited William Butler Yeats’ “*The Second Coming*” in his quest for emphasising the importance of the nationalisation of the African mind in the throes of colonialism,

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

Achebe, writing in 1959 using the literary narrative style, had the benefit of retrospection in depicting Nigerian society and British colonialism in the 1890s. Yet, Achebe’s allusion is not simply political, nor is it ironic on only one level. Yeats’s poem is about the Second Coming, a return and revelation of sorts.

In this vein of focusing and refocusing the narratives within the African perspective, nay within the Nigerian mind, Olaiya and Adam (2020) aver,

There have been the refocusing of African literature, though modest, as many would see it, from foreign language domination...while simultaneously reckoning with Chinua Achebe’s admonitions of the fruitlessness, if not helplessness, in an attempt to “abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication” among “hundreds of autonomous communities”.

Conclusion

African authors and writers were in the forefront of anti-colonialism and prevention of the despoliation of the African peoples, using their writings to awaken the nationalist consciousness of Africans. With the end of colonialism, the launching of neo-colonialism in the guise of globalisation and the New World Order, African governments and state-actors fell into the trap of running exclusive states like the erstwhile colonialists, running state structures and governance to the exclusion of the people. This has tended to truncate the dreams of Africans for better societies and progressive good governance, and thrown Africans and peoples of the Global South into a tangent of perpetual backwardness and reversal of fortunes in global statecraft. The stark realities of poor governance and irresponsible state-actors stare citizens of the Global South in the face daily, with the attendant lacks in infrastructure and opportunities for self-improvements and social advancements.

In view of the foregoing, this paper has been able to establish that literary narratives cum narrative metaphors form the bulwark of governance systems worldwide. How these narratives and their metaphorical exigencies are interpreted, applied and utilised by both individuals and the state-actors are analogous to the development strides of any given society or state. Governments and state-actors and their spin-doctors have taken it

upon themselves to tutor the society about itself, recommending via state-sponsored narratives how to live and function within the contrived state. The recipients who interpret and adopt or adapts to these narratives also determine the cohesiveness of the society or state. But much everyway depends as well upon the state-actors who control the media space, the media systems and the populace's access to the mass media, and therefore, the existing narratives with their inherent metaphors. State-actors across the Global South are found to be acting against the public good, contrary to expectations, a cause of social-disjuncture, lack of cohesive societies, leading to social strife, resulting in state-sponsored violence against the citizenry and ultimately culminate in insurrections against the state.

Recommendations

In a utopic sense, governments everywhere derive from the people and state-actors ought to work for the benefit of the citizens, or at least, for the public good of the vast majority of the people, but this is not always the case. The metaphorical view of governance and state-actors by the populace in the Global South is not a complimentary one. Rather, they are viewed not as the solution to societal and other problems, but as the problem itself, wherein simple things are made difficult, difficult things made complex and complex issues are made to become intractable. However, narrative therapy could play a critical role in mediating the psychological responses to the challenges of living within the intractable society – that is, how to live with oneself, and with others, within the contrived realities of the contrived society and the metaphorical resource-cursed-state. Also, governments and state-actors must reprise their roles as custodians of the people's trust and resources (particularly in Africa, with its abundant natural and human resources), and utilise these for the public good, creating a fair, just, equitable and peaceful society where nobody is left uncared for. Doing otherwise is deliberately placing citizens of the Global South smack under the resource-curse complex conundrum. To shirk this responsibility in favour of some narrow-minded, fatalistic cabalism and exclusive clientel-ism where state resources and benefits are shared among the few, to the exclusion of the vast majority, is to stoke the inevitable fires of separatist nationalism, an ever burgeoning threat to most states of the Global South.

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