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The Socio-Political and Moral Vision of Abubakar Gimba in Footprint

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Abstract

Abubakar Gimba's works, mainly novels and books on situation of the nation. This effort demonstrates the writer's sensitivity to national reconstruction and development through selfless concern and commitment to issues of Against this background national issues are strongly concerned with the problems of the Nigerian nation at various levels of manifestation. As a creative writer and critical analyst and commentator, Gimba's effort has singled him out as someone concerned with the multifaceted problems bedeviling Nigeria with a strong vision for national reconstruction and development. He mostly holds the view that for Nigeria to move forward, people must accept to be honest, transparent and just. In this article, one of Gimba's novels Footprints has been carefully examined in nRtional Importance. Footprints is set in a fictional country called Songhai. The image of Songhai in this novel is that of a country in perpetual quest for elusive stable socio-political order. According to Yusuf f(2000) and Daniel (2000), like Kokania in Trail of Sacrifice (1985), Songhai is also bedevilled by social dislocations manifested in strikes, boycotts, military coups, arrests and detention without trials, cruel interrogation, armed banditry, clamp Nm on what is perceived to be the radical media, shortage of essential commodities. Freguent power failure, riots, long queues in fuel stations as well as individual and lective frustrations. All these are manifestations of tyrannical rule as a result of military orpolitical inadequacies.

Introduction

Against the backdrop of Nigeria's socio-political challenges, Abubakar Gimba's works—particularly his novels—reflect a deep concern for national issues. As a creative writer, critical analyst, and commentator, Gimba has consistently demonstrated selfless commitment and sensitivity to the reconstruction and development of the Nigerian nation. His works, notably *Footprints*, reflect his strong vision for national transformation. He mostly holds the view that for Nigeria to move forward, people must embrace honesty, transparency, and justice.

This article critically examines Gimba's novel *Footprints* in light of its national significance.

Overview of *Footprints*

Footprints is set in a fictional country called Songhai. The image of Songhai in the novel is that of a country in perpetual quest for an elusive, stable socio-political order. According to Yusuf (2000) and Daniel (2000), Songhai, like Kokania in *Trail of Sacrifice* (1985), is plagued by social dislocations manifested in strikes, boycotts, military coups, arrests and detentions without trial, cruel interrogations, armed banditry, clampdowns on the radical media, shortages of essential commodities, frequent power failures, riots, long queues at fuel stations, and general frustrations. These are symptoms of tyrannical rule resulting from military or political inadequacies.

Abubakar (1998:15) sees the setting of the novel as a representation of Nigeria. He notes:

"The novel's setting is recognizably Nigeria evidenced in its acute scarcity of petrol, truncated transition programmes and incessant strikes. The land is rich and promising but lacks the maturing spirit of governance."

Plot and Conflict

The novel opens with a power tussle between the legislature and the President. The legislature demands a balanced national budget within a year, prompting the President to accuse them of bad faith and constitutional overreach. This stalemate intensifies the nation's instability, leading to mass strikes in support of either side and culminating in a complete breakdown of law

and order. Eventually, the military stages a coup, dissolves the cabinet, and suspends the constitution.

Gimba writes:

“The military took over power because of the perceived inadequacy of civilian rule. Since the ballot box is easily manipulatable, the bayonet has found the power stage tempting and irresistible” (p. 146).

Daniel (2000:37) further argues that *Footprints* mirrors the painful failure of Nigeria’s socio-political engineering in the post-Second Republic era (1983–1993). The novel captures the collective feelings of dependency, frustration, and disillusionment, especially through the voices of critical characters such as Jibrans, trade unionists, teachers, and students.

Themes and Issues Raised

1. Political Dysfunction and Leadership Crisis

The characters in *Footprints* critique Nigeria’s political class. Disputes between arms of government, political assassinations, dirty campaigns, and physical attacks are portrayed as detrimental to national unity. Politicians are depicted as self-serving individuals who treat politics as a commercial venture, aiming for personal gain rather than national development.

Jibran notes:

“The military did not create the problems of leadership. The lack of good leadership provided the moral alibi for them to intervene... If we had humble heroes—leaders who are selfless, honest, fair, firm, and fast in delivering justice—the military wouldn’t even think of coming on to the arena of power” (p. 281).

2. Corruption and Moral Decay

Corruption is a recurring theme, portrayed as a hydra-headed monster invading every aspect of society: the marketplace, education, youth, civil service, media, military, and religious

institutions. Gimba shows how these institutions, instead of serving as pillars of development, have become obstacles.

3. Shared Responsibility and Role of Citizens

Gimba believes that every citizen is a "shepherd" with responsibilities. He asserts that blame for national failure should not be placed on leaders alone; followers also contribute through dishonesty and lack of discipline.

Gimba (2002:7-8) states:

“We must not blame only our leaders. The followers also have their own problems. Many of them are not disciplined... the followership should cultivate the courage and honesty to do the correct thing.”

Nashaa, Haliyfab’s mother, also echoes this in the novel:

“We can’t heap all blames on our leadership... The followership is just as culpable” (p. 279).

4. Call for Re-orientation and Soul-Searching

Gimba advocates for national re-orientation. Jibran submits:

“Let’s remember that our leaders, civilian or military, were not carved out of stones or wood... This society produced them. The environment has to change for the fruits to remain fresh” (p. 282).

This calls for reflection and moral reassessment, urging both leaders and followers to contribute sincerely to national development.

Political Vision and Ideological Outlook

Gimba’s vision is further illustrated through metaphors like the "shepherd":

“Everyone of you is a shepherd and each of you shall be asked about his flock... No one is left out” (p. 285).

Kola (2003:234) reinforces this by stating that *Footprints* explores political empowerment and roles of institutions like the family, unions, and civic organizations.

The writer argues that privilege should not translate to abuse, particularly by those in uniform. Gimba highlights the misuse of power by law enforcement and military personnel, condemning their inhumane treatment of civilians.

Conclusion

Abubakar Gimba’s *Footprints* is a compelling socio-political commentary on Nigeria. Through vivid characterization, reflective dialogues, and moral assertions, Gimba exposes the dysfunctions in leadership and civic responsibilities. He emphasizes the need for moral uprightness, responsible leadership, and citizen involvement in national reconstruction.

Despite identifying systemic failures, Gimba offers hope through morally conscious characters like Jibrán, who embody Islamic and ethical values. These characters call for soul-searching and reformation, which are essential steps toward achieving a just and progressive society.

Ultimately, *Footprints* is a call to action—a demand for honest leadership, disciplined followership, and collective responsibility in shaping Nigeria’s future.

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