

The Role of the Creative Writer in National  
Transformation: Comments at the 1<sup>st</sup> ANBUKRAFT  
Opening Ceremony at Nnamdi Azikiwe University on  
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At the time my first novel, *Toads for Supper*, was published in 1965, the widely accepted role of the Creative Writer was to serve as the mirror of the society, held out by the Writer to enable the society see itself as it is, warts and all. In the course of my growth as a novelist, I saw my role as going beyond merely showing the mirror. I saw it as my role to assist in transforming the society. *Sunset at Dawn* (1976) rejected war as a viable option for national reconciliation and integration.

My 8<sup>th</sup> novel, *Our Children Are Coming!* (1990), launched out a major offensive against corruption, propounding the theory that a total overhaul of the political system was imperative if corruption is to be fought effectively. To eliminate fears of marginalization and sanitize the procedure for the emergence of our political leaders, the novel floated the principles of rotation of power at the various tiers of government. My 9<sup>th</sup> novel, *The Search* (1991), further developed the idea. It is gratifying to note that, 22 years later, Nigeria is on the threshold of entrenching the principle of rotation of designated political offices in the constitution.

*Our Children Are Coming!* also floated the idea of investigating the financial activities of key holders of public office, thereby heralding the emergence of EFCC and ICPC. *The search* (1991) came out with a recommendation of a fundamental change in the basis for creating States. It recommended ethnicity as the basis for State creation thereby reducing the number of states. Today, Nigeria is gradually moving towards South-East Zone (comprising Igbo speaking States) South-West Zone (comprising Yoruba speaking states) and so on.

I have given a few instances of my attempt to use the novel to transform society. It is legitimate to ask, with what result? How many Nigerians read the novels, to benefit from my ideas? The publishers of *Our Children Are Coming!* reported that a Bridge commander said he made it

compulsory reading for all adult members of their family. All that amounts to very little. The publishers of *The Search* were afraid to promote the novel during the military regime in power when it was published, convinced that I would be picked up or even eliminated.

The stark reality is that people hardly read as a leisure time activity. It is also true that books for leisure reading are not available in libraries and bookstores. Literary reviews in newspapers are hard to come by to let the reading public know what books are available. The culture of public reading is worth cultivating in Nigeria. A writer from Indonesia told me in 1987 that writers in his country made more money from gate fees at public readings of their writing than from book royalties. That is something to think about.