

**THE DIALECTICS OF SETTING AND HUMOUR IN CHUKWUEMEKA IKE'S *TOADS  
FOR SUPPER, THE NAKED GODS AND THE POTTER'S WHEEL***

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## DEDICATION

To God Almighty, the divine essence and the giver of life before whose presence this work and I kneel in reverence.

To Edel and Pat.

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## ABSTRACT

The study identified the different types and uses of humour in Chukwuemeka Ike's *Toads for Supper*, *The Naked Gods* and *The Potter's Wheel*. It examined the interplay between the setting of particular scenes, events, encounters and humour in the novels. In addition, it discussed Ike's use of setting as an element which initiates the main backdrop for the stories. This was with a view to examining the impact the settings in the novels have on the characters and the choices they made as the stories unfolded.

The study made use of both primary and secondary sources of data collection. Primary source included a close reading of the three purposively selected novels based on their strength in illustrating and demonstrating the points relevant to the topic of the study. Secondary sources included books, journal articles and the internet. Henri Bergson's theory of humour was used as the theoretical framework for evaluating Ike's use of humour.

The research showed that Ike deployed humour for correcting certain human failings rather than for mere entertainment. It was also revealed that what was humorous in one setting might not be in another due to political, economic, social, geographical and cultural differences. The results also revealed that the characters were influenced and shaped by their settings; a character grew, changed and evolved as he grappled with the natural or social environment, especially when he alternated between the rural and urban settings where social and cultural orientations were different.

The study concluded that the impact of the settings on the characters was observed in the way that their attitudes and behaviours were altered under different customs and conventions and adopted different habits, fresh insights and new expectations at the end of the stories.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background To The Study

Chukwuemeka Ike is one of Africa's prolific writers and has contributed greatly to the social and political history of Nigeria over the past forty years, mainly through the prose genre. Preponderance of inordinate ambition, waywardness of young people, corruption, and pettiness of individuals in his works, show Ike's concern with the destiny of the Nigerian nation and the direction its youths are taking.

Ike's creative genius focuses mainly on contemporary themes which are specifically concerned with issues around the youth and academia. He "writes with pressing urgency about these issues, with the conviction that it is not the answers that matter but that the questions get asked."<sup>1</sup> Ike is particularly concerned with institutions such as political institutions, examination system, African cultural organizations and most prominently, the university or secondary schools.

These concerns are borne out of the wealth of experience from his administrative engagements in many governmental bodies. Ike was the Assistant Registrar and Student Affairs Officer at the University College, Ibadan for 3 years (1957-1960). He was also the Deputy Registrar of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka for another 3 years (1960-1963) and he eventually became the Registrar of the same University for 8 years (1963-1971). He equally held the international position of Registrar and Chief Executive of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) for another 8 years (1971-1979). He later became a visiting Professor at the

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<sup>1</sup> Kanchana Ugbabe, ed. "Introduction" in *Chukwuemeka Ike: A Critical Reader* (Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd, 2001), p.4.

University of Jos. He was also the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the Governing Council at the University of Benin and much later, the Pro-Chancellor of Anambra State University. All these administrative positions furnished him with insights into the moral decay and corruptive practices in the fabrics of Nigeria's social and political system.

Since Ike enjoyed the privilege of working in institutions and organizations, he had first-hand information on the social and psychological make-up of the youth and academics together with the politicking that goes on in many of these organizations. In fact, he readily admitted this fact when Ezenwa-Ohaeto hinted at it:

There is no doubt that if I had not been through the experience in the West African Examinations Council that I would never have thought of writing *The Chicken Chasers*. But *The Chicken Chasers* is actually more than my experience in the examinations Council. I was trying to take a look at the international public service world and so you find things that are applicable to many other international organizations like the Organization of African Unity or the Economic Community of West African States or the West African Examinations Council...however, my experience in the Council helped me to understand the politics that goes on.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Ike dissects the Nigerian society that he knows best with the sharp edges of humour in his novels. His intention is to expose the follies, vices, and weaknesses of individuals and the society at large so that corrections and amendments can be made. It is for this reason that Obi Iwuanyanwu observed that "Chukwuemeka Ike is primarily a social artist whose works strike deeper than farce, and are a comic criticism of life."<sup>3</sup>

Being a product of a cultural society that values words, his works combine proverbs, humour and satire which are a reflection of his Igbo cultural upbringing. Ike who is now the traditional ruler of Ndikelionwu was born on April 28 1931 in Ndikelionwu in Orumba North

<sup>2</sup> Ezenwa-Ohaeto. *Winging Words: Interviews with Nigerian Writers and Critics*, p.86.

<sup>3</sup> Obi Iwuanyanwu. "Chukwuemeka Ike's Socio-political vision in *The Search*" in *Chukwuemeka Ike: A Critical Reader*, Kanchana Ugbabe ed. p.97.

Local Government Area of Anambra State. He attended Government College, Umuahia, and graduated in 1950 and was admitted into the University College, Ibadan, where he studied History, English and Religious Studies after which he proceeded to Stanford University, California where he obtained his Master's degree.

Ike employs satire loaded with irony, caricature, songs, sarcasm, proverbs, incongruity, slapstick and a host of other literary devices to communicate his messages. What prompts Ike's satirical jabbing seems to emanate from the fact that he finds inexplicable absurdities and foolish vices in places where such are most unwelcomed. Hence his stories are usually located within specifically repeated settings. In the same interview previously quoted, he expressively stated that:

One of the things that is more disappointing is the realization that education had not done to most of the University people what I thought it could do to them; to inculcate a sense of humility, a sense of objectivity into them. One found people who are behaving as if all the academic qualifications they had obtained had not done for them what those qualifications ought to have done for them. They behave in times of stress as if they are just coming from the village. They tend to behave irrationally and this kind of thing is unsettling. There are people who behave in ways that you would not think possible when you consider the kind of education they have had and the kind of discipline that they have gone through. I also found that Universities are for instance involved in international issues, especially with reference to *The Naked Gods* which brought in the issue of foreign involvement with building universities in Nigeria.<sup>4</sup>

This explains Ike's concentration on setting his stories in the rural areas, university campuses and secondary schools. Nearly all Ike's novels - *The Naked Gods*, *The Potter's Wheel*, *Toads for Supper*, *The Bottled Leopard*, *Sunset at Dawn*, *Expo '77*, *Our Children Are Coming*, etc., have Igbo rural communities, campuses and secondary schools as their settings.

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<sup>4</sup>Op.cit., p.85.

It is as a result of the above observation that this research on humour, setting and the interplay between them in the three selected novels becomes very viable. Setting, which is a very important aspect of the novel or story, will be evaluated alongside humour to evaluate how they interact with each other socially. How the world is built around the characters

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