

Reflection 7

African creative writing and writing in general as an idea is one that comes fraught with baggage. In addition to the normal questions that are asked of any piece of writing and how it connects to its audience, African writing is sometimes seemingly expected to hold itself to a 'higher' standard. As Chinua Achebe states in his piece on the purpose of African writing, an African writer that 'avoids big social and political issues' is completely irrelevant. This thinking Achebe justifies by stating that the great issues Africa deals with it almost uniquely and thus African writing must operate by a different set of criteria. This later ties in with the idea from the individual perspective that 'artists' have a heightened sense of perception and thus cannot be 'unaware' of this injustice that happens around them. Because they are then 'aware', these writers must work for the 'just' causes of their people.

This debate is not one that is now antique but still very much alive and well. From the critics of various popular African art forms, including Nollywood and Afrobeats, we hear of this African creators' burden, to create something that engages with the socio-economic reality of the African continent as opposed to being 'unaware'. These arguments often come ingrained with the assumption that creation and in this case writing that engages these issues is not only of more intrinsic artistic and moral value but is also able to impart more value to African people. However, as Krings and Okome mention about the value of Nollywood and its novel creation of the conversation around African identity, a goal that had not been reached by the 'political' cinema of the day, these basic assumptions often need to be revisited and perhaps revised. Especially in today's day and age where the African existence itself can be leveraged as a means of resistance and self-affirmation, the question that evolves then becomes 'Must an African writer and creator at large who does not engage with these larger socio-economic issues be deemed irrelevant? And what does this say about about own biases however we choose to answer this question?'

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