

## **Ideology and the Writer's Commitment to National Development: Profiling the Nigerian Soldier in Isidore Okpewho's 'The Last Duty and Festus Iyayi's Heroes'**

**Authors :** Edwin Onwuka, Segun Omidiora, Eugenia Abiodun-Eniaiyekan

**Abstract :** The Nigerian military is often the subject of active critical inquiries having played significant roles in Nigeria's national development. However, the soldier is one of the most vilified characters in Nigeria's imaginative literature, be it in poetry, drama or prose fiction. In the main, the characterization of soldiers is predictable because of their entrenched stereotype as oppressors, tyrants, bullies, rapists, despots, killers or at best law-breakers subject to no authority outside the military institution. In most novels, the soldier's personality is associated with force and violence; still, few have defied the norm to portray soldiers that go against the grain of notoriety. Such novels have characterized the Nigerian soldier positively as a civil, thinking and human personality in relating to civil society. To a great extent, two major impetuses that influence literary representation of characters and institutions in African literature are ideology and commitment, and one necessarily impacts on the other in shaping the artistic vision of the writer. Using two war novels therefore as templates, this paper argues that the ideology that drives the Nigerian writer's socio-cultural commitment to national development shapes their portrayal of the Nigerian soldier in imaginative literature. A major objective of this study, therefore, is to show through close textual analysis that the writers' ideologies influence their perception and characterization of the Nigerian soldier in Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* and Festus Iyayi's *Heroes*, two representative novels of both persuasions described above. New Historicism is the critical framework applied in this study and its conclusion is that the Nigerian writer's characterization of the soldier is influenced by his ideological perception of the military in the policy against the backdrop of their past socio-political activities.

**Keywords :** commitment, ideology, national development, new historicism, Nigerian soldier

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