

REVOLUTIONARY IDEOLOGY IN NIGERIAN PLAYWRITING AND THE FATE OF A NATION IN CRISIS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECT PLAYS

Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh

&

Prisca Ifeoma Okeke

&

Uchenna Okafor

<http://www.ajol.info/index.php/cajmts> vl.13.2.5

Abstract

The paper interrogates the ever present revolutionary Ideology in Nigerian playwriting with a view to interpreting this concept as a fall out of the crisis of leadership and the debilitating state of the Nigerian society. In view of the fact that this concept is related to leadership as it deals with politics and the alienating effect of bad leadership on the populace, the paper critically studies the issues of leadership and the ensuing revolutionary ideology evolving from the lopsided relationship between the rulers and the ruled, the advantaged and the disadvantage, the privileged and the less privileged as dealt with in some randomly selected Nigerian plays. Emeka Nwabueze's A Parliament of Vultures and Esiaba Irobi's Nwokedi are used as paradigms to demonstrate revolution as the conceivable response of the masses to tactless leadership. The content analysis approach of the qualitative research methodology is employed in data collection and analysis. The Marxist Philosophy of a classless society appears to have furnished a firm base for the thematic and ideological outlook of the playwrights whose works have been used as case studies. The work in the final stance recommends good leadership as the riposte to revolutionary ideology, using playwriting as an apparatus for creating an atmosphere for the emergence of responsible and responsive leaders.

Key words: *Ideology, Revolutionary, Playwriting, Masses, Violence*

Introduction

Nigerian playwrights have understandably taken up the task of presenting the plight of the down trodden and exposing the socio-political and economic crisis arising from irresponsible and insensitive leadership in the nation. In human history revolutions have occurred as reactions to lopsided class structures, repression, socio-economic exclusion and marginalisation and foisting of oppressive leadership systems. The Arab spring which devastated Libya and Syria and the Niger Delta Militants are recent examples. Thus, African playwrights and other literati particularly in the social sciences, assert that government and their agents are to be held responsible for different revolutionary stances that bedevil the developing countries. Through literary works deliberate exertions have been made to enunciate the varying degrees of exploitation and injustice exerted on the masses by the ruling, privileged class. These literati are of the opinion that agitations, demonstrations, riots, youth restiveness as well as armed conflicts are the progeny of the revolutionary ideology of the beleaguered masses who feel short-changed in the scheme of things. Revolutionary actions are rocking Nigeria in all aforesaid forms undoubtedly because the masses believe that these are the only ways to brazen out the despotic leaders, alter the status quo and herald the desired change. Playwrights through their works advocate for a revolutionary action in the face of the challenges experienced in society. Often times the revolutionary ideology put out by well informed persons in society furnish ground for change. There is no doubt that Nigeria has witnessed scores of such in the course of its history.

Festus Iyayi a Nigeria writer notes in his books titled “*Violence*”, that the pervasiveness of crime and violence in our society are result of our leaders sequestering and repudiating their

citizens opportunities to actualize and realize their objectives and aspiration in life. He opines that;

...acts of violence are committed when a man is denied the opportunity of being educated, of getting a job, of feeding himself and the family properly, of getting medical attention cheaply, quickly and promptly (185).

Consequently foiling in the exasperated state of denied opportunities, unfulfilled ambitions, the revolutionary ideology in Nigerian playwriting purports to steam up the beleaguered masses to take revolutionary action or stance, throw caution to the winds and express themselves aggressively, calling on them to vent their vexation and frustration with the projection that their revolutionary actions will eventually lead socio-political and economic change. It is in this context that Nwadiuwe avers that;

...radical literature and theatre is anchored on the theory of Marxism with its accompanying concepts of mass hero, dramatization of revolution on stage and the conscientization of the masses to take up the gauntlet and overthrow the oppressive status quo especially by violent means (2005:151).

The society bedevilled with the oppression of the masses by the ruling class, as they are denied the opportunities to self actualization and improved livelihood are subjected to resort to taking revolutionary stance and expressing such view violently, since they deem it the means of creating change in the polity. Revolutionary playwrights through their works give voice to the masses, as they jolt them from passivity to activity. In an earlier paper, I had made the submission that

The role of the playwrights as the conscience of the nation especially a nation in crisis has given a militant, radical and political edge to Nigerian plays, as a force to articulate the yearning and aspirations

of the masses and combat oppressive forces with the aim of initiating lasting solution (126).

Revolutionary ideology abounds with the view that there is need for change in the socio-political system. It subscribes to thorough and complete alteration in the polity through the expression of revolutionary ideas, and the consequences of the changes in the system are extensive. Revolutionary ideology is demonstrated in Esiaba Irobi's "*Nwokedi*" in the Ekumeku's act of kidnapping Senator Arikpo and eventually killing Arikpo and Nwokedi Senior as they believe that their blood will purge the land of desecration perpetuated by them and their ilk. In the play also the playwright put out revolutionary ideology in the action taken by the Unemployed Youths Associated towards Senator Arikpo as he reports;

They have burnt my car and my life. They have butchered me like a sacrificial lamb. They tore my fresh limb to limb. (3).

Also reporting about his burnt house;

They Unemployed Youths Association (3)...they planted a bomb in the parlour and blew it into pieces. In-law they razed it to the ground to the very foundation (4).

They said I built it with stolen money, political money, corrupt money, the voters money, (4).

The burning of Arikpo's property, his killing and that of Nwokedi Senior by the Unemployed Youths Association and Ekumeku, send a clear signal that corrupt and insensitive political leaders who indulge in self- service instead of service to the people should not and will not be tolerated. Therefore, the masses take to violence to purge the society of such rotten eggs.

Revolutionary ideology is also projected a means of combating unjust the social order in Emeka Nwabueze's "*A Parliament of Vultures*" as the youths who are unable to stand the irresponsible, unresponsive and repressive comportment of those

whom they voted into office to represent them, marched against them in the words of the Chief of Protocol:

Hell abomination! Hell on earth!

Hell has descended on us...

Agitators have descended on us.

The presidential mansion is already on fire. We're undone! (75).

The playwright reports on the stage direction.

(More harsh song pierce the walls of the parliamentary building. The agitations are now singing solidarity songs. Shouts of "Down with Oppressors". "Death to Anarchy". "No more Squandermania" are now distinct... a group of militant youths rushed into the house, singing war songs. They arrested the honourable members and proceed to tie them up with ropes) (76).

The few illustrations of revolutionary ideology in the plays referred to, in this respect point towards the fact that revolutionary ideology is prevalent and thus is not to be shunned, since it is a viable means of initiating social change. Accordingly Harry Hagher maintains that

All plays bear the imprint of the environment and period in which they are created... (178).

This study in essence attempts to ascertain that, faced with the frustration of the inability to live a well meaning life, which is consequent upon government failure or sometimes, down-right refusal to live up to the expectations of the people and take astute action based on the non-violent and peaceful approaches; Revolutionary actions expressed through acts of aggression, non-compliance and confrontation by the beleaguered masses is bound to be the reaction. The study therefore, seeks to support Nwabueze and Irobi's recommendations and justification for revolutionary ideology as a viable means through which the down trodden can be awoken and motivated to take their liberation into their hands and overthrow the undesirable socio-political and economic system.

Revolutionary ideology evolves as a result of changes that occur in the society. There are conservative and revolutionary or radical approaches to social change. Marxism is a major theory that supports revolutionary approach to social change. Marx's theory of scientific socialism is inseparably linked with revolutionary practice (19). Violent revolutionary actions is required in the process of any social change because of the insistence of the exploiters to continue the exploitation of the masses. Marxism takes the idea that social change occurs because of the struggle between (the exploiters and exploited) these different classes within society who are under contradiction against each other. Thus, Marxism maintains that social change through violent revolutionary action demands;

Revolutionary unit of all working class people irrespective of their religion, nationality and race, the formation of the local working class as an embodiment of the revolutionary will (Institute of Social Science, 335)

The thematic and ideological perspective articulated by the playwrights whose works have been analysed as case studies therefore, derive from Marxist approach to social change. The Marxist Ideology about class struggle is unarguably a common philosophical drift that runs through the two plays, "*A Parliament of vultures*" and "*Nwokedi*".

Marxism is a theory about political and economic changes in society on account of the opposition between the two dominant social classes. Identifying social and economic factors as crucial denominators of relationship in society. The conflict theory as developed by Karl Marx examines the relationship in terms of basic inequalities between the privileged rich- the bourgeoisie and the masses referred to as the proletariat. The bourgeoisie who are also capitalists are in a position to dominate and exploit the masses since they control the means of wealth production thus oppress and suppress the working class who work to reach the means of

production. Within this class struggle emanates the various violent revolutionary actions that bedevil society.

Following Marxist theory, Henslin reiterates that

In each society some small group controls the means of production and exploits those who do not. In industrialized societies, the struggle is between the bourgeoisie the small group of capitalist who own the means to produce wealth and proletariat the mass of workers exploited by the bourgeoisie. The capitalists also control politics so that when workers rebel the capitalists are able to call on the powers of the state to control them (27)

Marxian theory obviously furnishes a stand for the collective ideology articulated in the two plays. In quoting Robert Merton, Henslin maintains that. “the feeling of discontent by the exploitation of the oppressed and marginalized masses by the privileged class elicits in the masses varying responses which one best favoured is rebellion”. The ruling class who are running around town with more than enough to spend, while the poor masses live in abject poverty unconsciously, ingrain in the masses revolutionary ideology, the need for radical change, thus a violent pursuit to achieve change.

Achebe in his statement for extrapolation of Robert Rothberg, a renowned literati on terrorism, states that a state such as Nigeria is overwhelmed or consumed by revolutionary ideology and actions when such a state,” is unable to perform its duties (to its citizens) on several levels”. He further explained that revolutionary actions to effect change take place when the masses realize that the system has been exploiting and depriving them of their rights and opportunities. He states that;

Economic deprivation and corruption produce and exacerbate financial and social inequities in a

population which in turn fuels political instability. Within this environment, extremists of all kinds particularly religious zealots and other political mischief makers find a foothold to recruit supporters and sympathizers to help them launch terrorists attacks and wreak havoc on the lives of ordinary citizens (250).

Revolutionary playwrights and many literati insist that government is to be blamed for the various spates of revolutionary ideologies and actions that have continued to bedevil the society. Accordingly Iyayi submits that:

....acts of violence is committed when a man is denied the opportunity of being educated, of getting a job, and of feeding himself, his family properly, of getting medical attention cheaply, quickly and promptly. We often do not realize that it is the society, the type of economic and hence, the political system which we are operating in our country today that brutalized the individual and raped his manhood. We often do not realize that when such men of poor and limited opportunities react, they are only in a certain measure with violence {185}.

Revolutionary ideology is just a principle that prefers thorough and complete socio-political change. It is a distinct departure from what is considered "usual" or "normal" and is liable to societal happenings. A revolutionary must be courageous, bold, discerning and able to say "no" when others vote otherwise. Late Gani Fawehimi, Beko Ramson-Kuti and at present Femi Falana, a Lagos based human rights lawyer, Josephine Odumakin among others, operate in this mould to bring about equity and social justice in the society. Revolutionaries are at times labeled rebels. Rebels according to Lauer and Lauer, become... "radicals, pressing

for structural changes in what they believe is debilitating economic system”.

According to Irobi... ‘‘a rebel is the man who says no’’. The man who says ‘‘It’s enough! Who refuses to conform to a rotten authority and threatens the establishment, shakes up the creaky system...’’

Nigerian Playwrights and Revolutionary Ideology

Playwriting in Nigeria has actually evolved with the socio-political fruition of the nation. From the colonial period till date, a conscious effort has been made by playwrights and indeed all creative writers to address the socio-political dilemma of the nation. In this wise, Danny Lindfords opines that

West African writers have moved from obsessive concerns with the residual effects of colonialism in black Africa to a preoccupation with more universal themes rooted in specific contemporary realities (26).

Socialist literature gained ground in post independence Nigeria as a result of the many socio-political and economic maladies that the nation has been plunged into because of bad leadership, squandermania and the irresponsible, insensitive and avaricious deportment of those piloting the affairs of the nation. Earlier playwriting reflected certain socio-political issues but not with much commitment, hence, the crop of playwrights who are Marxian in their theory and ideology emerged. Obviously, playwriting has been responsive to the winds of change that sweep across each era, thus one can say that the present situation calls for playwrights whose commitments are centred on the exposition of the alienation tendencies that typify the relationship between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. Therefore one can easily assert that the revolutionary ideology in Nigerian playwriting is a reaction to the leadership crisis in the nation. A study of some Nigerian plays

reveal revolutionary thematic concerns. Plays such as San Ukala's '*Placenta of Death*', '*Akpakaland*', reflect the dichotomy between the 'haves' and 'have nots', exposing the chasm that exist between the leadership class and the poor masses, the upper and lower class. Presenting the struggle of the common man to liberate themselves from the shackles of oppression. Irobi's '*Hangmen also Die*', '*Nwokedi*'; Nwabueze's '*A Parliament of Vultures*', Ososifan's '*Once Upon Four Robbers*' and Mbajiorgu's '*Wake Up Everyone*', all have embedded in them revolutionary ideologies. Obafemi's '*Dark Nights Are Over*', Bakare Ojo Rasaki's '*This land Must Sacrifice*' and '*Once upon a Tower*' all comment on bad leadership both at the political and Ivory Towers. Effiong Johnson's '*Frog At Noon*', '*The Fight Has Just Begun*' and '*Not Without Bones*', tackle the question of leadership. The work of Tony Duruaku '*Cash Prize and Silhouettes*' comments on the impact of capitalism and the question of leadership. These works all call for the masses to put an end to exploitative, unresponsive, irresponsible and oppressive leadership by marching against and pulling down the status -quo through violence.

Revolutionary ideology in playwriting has been a means of responding to the immediate socio-political environments which have experienced instabilities that have often truncated the people's dream. Obafemi sees the situation of the poor masses of Africa as what he calls, "deprivation and absurdities that afflict the have nots" (14) and asserts that the playwrights are expected to;

deal with the urgent particular, topical contemporary social problems with the aim of raising popular awareness of a positive revolutionary alternative to the present social malaise(115).

Afolayan Adesoke quoting Victin states that, revolutionary ideology is "realistic and they describe life as it is" (118). Commenting on the leadership failure in Nigeria, Ibagere and Omoera avows that the leaders;

Perpetuate themselves in power through intimidation, oppression and outright rape of justice. Only a bloody revolution can salvage the country from the doldrums of retrogression it has found itself (3).

The playwright as an integral part of the society cannot be expected to be detached from the political dynamics of the Nigerian society. In the two plays which are critically analysed for this study, the playwrights throw their lot with the masses and the exploited class by condemning bad leadership. This is supported by the words of Charity Angya that “plays have always been written based on the writer’s understanding of society and its needs (2005). The playwright's quest for a utopian society has continued to propel him/her to recreate the Nigerian society in plays using strong metaphors which highlight the politics and system that has left Nigeria destitute, divided, desolate and deformed.

Nigeria's Leadership Saga and Revolutionary Ideology in Esiaba Irobi's *Nwokedi* and Emeka Nwabueze's *Parliament of Vultures*

Nwokedi portrays the struggle of the common man to emancipate himself and the society from the grips of callous, corrupt, irresponsible and unresponsive government through violence. The play opens with the arrival of Senator Arikpo to his in-laws’ house with inflicted cuts and bruises. He narrates his ordeal to his mother-in-law, Mrs. Nwokedi of how the Association of Unemployed Youth in his town (Ugep) on warning him not to contest for second term in office, owing to the fact that he failed to fulfil his campaign promises set about to burn down his house, ambush him, burn his car and butcher him with broken glasses, machetes and axes.

Meanwhile, the village is in a charged atmosphere as they prepare for the Ekpe festival that is usually lead by Ekumeku, Nwokedi’s age group. The festival is a feast in which a blood

sacrificed is made at the dusk of the last day of the year in order to usher in a new year, the slaughtering of the sacrificial animal is done by Nwokedi, thus, Ekumeku and the villagers await his return from his service in the National Youth Corps. Mrs. Nwokedi also narrates her husband loss to Ozoemena Nwakamma at the polls in the last election to Arikpo and also warns him of possible aggressive reaction from Nwokedi, when he learns of her sister and nephews demise in an inferno six months ago but promises to handle it, hoping that her husband who has gone to Lagos to appeal in the court for his loss in the polls will be back before her son. Nwokedi, there in Bakalori where he is serving had a scuffle with the soldiers as he expresses his detest for the existing system. Thus, he refuses to conform with the rules. He advocates for revolution and later leaves for his home town without being discharged. On getting home Nwokedi learns about his twin sister and nephews' demise. Observing the ashes which is supposed to be their remains, he doubts that it really is, accusing the brother-in-law of using his wife and children for ritual sacrifice. Subtle indications show that Arikpo was actually lying about the actual cause of the death of his wife and children. Nwokedi threatens to use Arikpo's blood to purge the land of the socio-political desecration he and his ilk have been committing. Nwokedi's father returns from Lagos with no result and is given a false information by his wife of his opponent relinquishing the parliamentary seat to him. He engages in an argument with his son where he tries to excuse away his generation's woeful failure to successfully pilot the affairs of the state. Finally, Nwokedi leaves for the festival and as sacrificial animals to purge the year and usher in a new year, slaughters his father and his brother-in-law.

A *Parliament of Vultures* is an exposition of the unwholesome goings-on in the Nigeria legislative government. The play depicts the canker worm eating up the system as the law making body of the polity. Madam Omeaku, once a restaurateur finds herself in the parliament. She and her cohorts, Mr. Brown,

Habamero, Reverend Jossy, and Prof. amongst others cease the opportunity to loot the nation's treasury recklessly. All efforts by Dr Parkers and Mr. Otobo to check their actions and call them to order is to no avail as the duo are even framed-up and locked up in prison. This action brings about a violent reaction as the youths take laws into their hands to end the political oppression and wanton looting of the nation's treasury.

As we have noted, *Nwokedi* is a play which depicts the tussle between the rulers and the ruled. It reveals the revolutionary actions, violent expressions that the poor masses adopt in the face of the leadership's class oppression and inattentiveness to the plight of their subjects. The playwright Presents a clear picture that the spate of violence and revolutionary stance and action that bedevil Africa and indeed Nigeria is a progeny of the violent action of the leaders in failing to give a meaningful life to the people in the society, especially the Youth. Irobi reconciles in the play, purposeful revolutionary zeal and selfless social commitment as captured in the character of Nwokedi, who is a force that encourages and propels Ekumeku into action and also bears the social responsibility of slaying the sacrificial animal (which is symbolic) to purge the land of the ills of the passing year and usher in a new year.

The first revolutionary move in the play is narrated by Senator Arikpo who is covered in blood, cuts and bruises as a result of the confrontation he had with the Unemployed Youths Association and reports his ordeal to his mother-in-law as she attends to his wounds;

Arikpo: My own people (bitterly). They have burnt my car and burnt my life. They have butchered me like a sacrificial animal. They have torn my flesh limb from limb. What you are looking at is a pillar of ashes. . .

My house. My new house at Ugep. What the house cost me is my secret... But now, in-law, that

splendid house that magnificent house with all its beauty has been burnt. Burnt to ashes.

Mrs. Nwokedi: Who are they?

Arikpo: (stands in rage)The Unemployed Youths Association.

Mrs. Nwokedi: Who are they?

Arikpo: The Devil's own brigade! A miserable mob of jobless young men and women. A menace of unemployed chimpanzees. A harvest of political illiterates. Nonentities. Pieces of dirt. Most of them graduated from the Universities. Others from Polytechnics. Louts who cannot find jobs for themselves...(3)

They planted a bomb in the parlour and blew it into pieces. In-law they razed it to the ground to the very foundations.

Mrs. Nwokedi: Why?

Arikpo: They said I built it with stolen money, political money, corrupt money, the voters money...(4)

The above dialogue shed light on the reason why Africa, indeed Nigeria is characterized by violence with different militant groups unleashing terror at one time or the other. Arikpo represents the African leaders whose callous and avaricious deportment leave violence running in the African soil in varying magnitude. A situation whereby the leadership class live in mind boggling opulence, while the masses live in abject poverty. The inability of the government to provide and cater for the needs of its citizens and the leadership class living fat off the resources that are meant to be distributed equitably for the good of every citizen, breed violence as the masses who are denied of what should rightfully be theirs move for a change.

The masses demand for a change when not heeded, is backed up with revolutionary action and violence. This is also revealed in the conversation between Arikpo and Mrs. Nwokedi;

Arikpo: They said I did not perform in my first term of office.... That as a senator I should have made laws which would abolish unemployment in this nation (4). . . For this leprous reason mother-in-law, for that senseless reason they wrote me a letter ordering me not to run for a second term of office. ... In the final paragraph, they said I should not campaign this political season.

Mrs. Nwokedi: And did you campaign?

Arikpo: Why not? I ignored their lousy letter and campaigned... But what happened before I got back to my house? It had been shattered from wall to wall, brick to brick. No single block was standing. In-law, when I saw the debris of my labour, I wept... I crawled into the car to drive to the police station but somewhere near Ugep township Cemetery, the hooligans waylaid me. They smashed my windscreen with a thousand stones. Dragged me out and dealt me these cuts with pieces of broken glass. Some used daggers. others machetes. This wound (points to his head) was carved with an axe.

This draws inference from the words of Esiaba in an interview with Nnorom Azuonye that the younger generation must set the music of words aside and try the machine gun. It is instructive to note that with the reference to 'bomb' in the play, one can easily point out that the spates of bombings during the military

regime of General Abacha by civil right campaigners, the proliferation of militant groupings which took the nation of Nigeria in endless round of bomb explosions are just as predicted in the play. The attacks on politicians during campaigns recorded in the 2015 elections, especially those who were incumbents are situations likened to the above dialogue.

Arikpo's insistence to contest in the election after being warned gives an insight into the indifference of the ruling class towards the demands of the people. It aptly exposes how Nigeria is replete with massive corruption of the ruling class desperate to hold on to power at all cost, thus engaging in electoral malpractices, rigging and all forms of anti-social practices.

The untamed arrogance and brazen acquisition of wealth by the ruling class is portrayed in the play as Arikpo relays the magnificence of his burnt house.

Arikpo: My house ... The doors are sliding doors. The floor was filed with Italian carrera marble. The walls were sprayed with terra cotta. The roof was brittle asbestos. The ceiling made of brisket. And the parlour? The parlour was rugged with velvet. There were twenty-five bed rooms; it was a duplex. Seven bathrooms and seven toilets. Every room was air-conditioned. Every window was glazed with silicon. The chairs were imported from France. The tables were chromeplated. The side stools were silver coated ... (3).

The above dialogue captures that the Nigerian ruling class live in overwhelming affluence while the masses live in squalor and abject poverty due to deprivation and denial. This results to the struggle by the masses for an equitable distribution of the nation's resources.

Revolutionary action is also depicted in the play within the play in which Mrs. Nwokedi relays to Arikpo how her husband lost his position in the parliament to an unemployed man who graduated five years ago with a degree in Political Science. Like a true revolutionary Nwokedi campaigns against his father and advocates for change. Hear Mrs. Nwokedi as she uses Arikpo as a prototype of Nwokedi Senior, the brand of corrupt leaders.

Mrs. Nwokedi: Standing beside me is a distinguished rogue, a political obscenity, a resourceful liar who thinks he can come here every four years and commandose us into selling our destiny to him. Before you, Ekumeku, is a high-degree thief, a confidence trickster, a carapace tortoise whose grey-haired generation had ruptured our future and left us floundering in the wind like yellow leaves in harmattan. This same crook standing here, this vegetable who calls himself my father, summoned us like this four years ago He promised us electric light, pipe borne water and tarred roads. Did he not?(11)

Ekumeku: He did.

Mrs. Nwokedi: Where are the cables to bring the light, where are the electric poles, where are the taps, where are roads not to talk of the tar? To you the Ekumeku. He promised jobs. Did he not?

Ekumeku: He said that once we vote him into the parliament he would make sure that every young man in this village gets a job. But as you can see, our job in this village is still to look for jobs(11)

Nwokedi Senior is a portrayal of the Nigeria ruling class who make promises to the masses to vote them into offices but turn around to bite the fingers that fed them; by ignoring the plight of the people and redeeming none of their promises to the people, yet return again with such promises. The promise of the “Second Niger Bridge” by President Goodluck Jonathan’s administration is a typical example. The playwright advocates for a revolutionary action, a break out from the veil of deceit that the ruling class adorn their words to the masses with. Hear Nwokedi:

Shall we squat here with folded arms and watch our lives shrivel like cocoyams between the paws of a disembodied entity, a trousered ape who has no dream for anybody including himself.... My generation, we are the only alternatives.(11)

Through Nwokedi’s oratory and age-grade vanguard Osisoma is free from the clutches of his father. The above dialogue present the youths as those laden with the responsibility to effect change in the polity.

The play is brazen with revolutionary ideology and the tussle between the rulers and the ruled, the class conflict in which the youths represent the oppressed in search of a way out is also expressed in the play in the skirmish between Nwokedi and Awado. Awado represent the ruling class who subjugate the ruled to their dictates, the government officials who use their positions to intimidate the masses. Nwokedi being a true revolutionary refuses to be subjugated by the Awado. As a true revolutionary, he challenged his authority.

Awado: Kneel down or I go call my sergeants to discipline you with bulala. Kneel down!

Nwokedi: What for?

Awado: For indiscipline. I say kneel down.

Nwokedi: You are wasting your time.

Awado: Kneel down.

Nwokedi: I would rather die on my feet than live on my knees.(27)

Nwokedi makes a revolutionary call, calling for a unified struggle for freedom. To be freed from the clutches of oppression, to shake up the cycle of conformism and herald a change in the polity. Hear Nwokedi:

Run? Why should I run? Why? This is our moment. When we must gather our strength and energies into the demands of a revolution. This is the moment when what makes us young men and women must muster us to the last and supreme sacrifice. The supreme action. The greatest decision. This is the moment of revolt. We must cross the threshold now. All of us!(28)

The playwright shows in the play how the ruling class see their positions as opportunities to enrich themselves with what is meant for the development and betterment of the whole populace. This is captured in the flashback on Nwokedi's days in the University, where he killed the capone of his cult group for looting the stockade after they engaged in a battle. Hear the dialogue between Nwokedi and Dafinone:

Dafinone: ... you syphilistic seadog incited the other gentlemen of fortune to mutiny against me

Nwokedi: Why?

Dafinone: Cause I melted the gold in the stockade. Melted it to mould my scimitar. I had the right. I was capone!. I was capone! I was capon! (40).

In the play *Nwokedi*, the playwright states that for every revolution that there is a price to pay and it is with blood and that brings about the change when Nwokedi says; "because it is blood that renews the earth" (45).

Like most revolutionaries and human rights activists Nwokedi is undeterred nor discouraged even after he is manhandled by soldiers. The stage direction reports. "The soldier pummel Nwokedi with blows, then swings him like a sack of groundnut about to be hurled into a lorry. After some more kicks and blows, they bear him out like a sacrificial ram about to be slaughtered" (33). What comes to mind is the arrest, intimidation, torture and untold dehumanization which the revolutionaries suffer in the hands of the ruling class. Gani Fawehmi, Femi Falana, and other human rights activists all suffered greatly in the hands of the military government.

The highest point of revolutionary ideology and action in the play is demonstrated in the preparation and celebration of the Ekpe Festival. Ekpe is a festival that marks the end of the farming year and usually the blood of an animal is to purge the land and usher in a new year. Ekpe in the play is metaphorical, it marks the end of the old decadence and corrupt political order and an introduction of a new order which the Ekumeku now represent. For the new order to take off, the nation needs to be purged of the old order and their corrupt practices. Cleaning the land now not with the blood of animals but by wiping such generation of irresponsible and callous ruling class out of political existence. The playwright through Nwokedi accuses the ruling class of irresponsibility, incompetency and inefficiency in piloting the affairs of the nation, thereby leaving the nation's treasury looted, providing the masses with no social amenities, no job or means of livelihood for the youths, thus depraving the masses and pushing them to resort to taking revolutionary actions and violence. Hear Nwokedi as he accuses Arikpo who portrays the ruling class:

My generation gave you the future to hold in trust for us. You turned it into handkerchief, used it to wipe the mucus of greed dripping from your wretched nostrils. After that you rumpled it, crumpled our future and squeezed it into your

pocket. But your pocket was full of holes. So our future fell out to the ground. And with your leprous feet, you quarried it into dust. Arikpo, that is why this matchet must spill your blood today. (73)

In the play Ekumeku's growing might in politics as Nwokedi senior is toppled at the polls by a member of Ekumeku is a dialectics of change. The Ekumeku and the Unemployed Youths Association represent the poor masses. Nwokedi's revolutionary intent is achieved as he slays both his father and Arikpo, thus this amounts to a total overthrow of the old order of ruling class which Senator Arikpo and Nwokedi Senior represent. A new leadership is enthroned in Osisoma as the Ekumeku takes up the mantle of leadership.

The Ekumeku and the Unemployed Youths Association represent the poor masses who are oppressed. The portraiture of violence in the play reminds one of many of such in Nigeria today, the many militant groups- Niger-Delta Militants, Egbesu Boys, OPC, Boko Haram and the most troubling of all, the Herds Men. Violence as expressed in the play reveals terror as a mask worn by the oppressed to confront a society whose hostility emasculates and demeans them.

The play, *Parliament of Vultures* depicts the state of the Nigerian political arena that is characterized by charlatans, who have little or no knowledge of such responsibility. The play exposes the varying graft practices within the political circle such as; giving out of contract and political positions to allies for huge kick-backs, fraud and falsification of vital documents including educational qualifications to gain important offices, corruption and misappropriation of public funds. Madam Omeaku a restaurateur turned politician, finds herself at the corridors of power as a parliamentarian without the slightest knowledge of what is expected of her in such a position. With the sole aim of self aggrandizement, she and her cohorts, Habamero, Reverend Jossy, Bob Brown, Prof amongst others, like Vultures feast on the nation's resources, like

predators attacking their prey mercilessly, dismembered the resources meant of the masses.

The play captures the underbelly of the Nigerian political system, where the leaders see themselves not as leaders called to serve the people but as people on self-service. The above assertion is captured in the words of Brown.

Brown: Mr. Chairman, this parliament does not purport to represent anybody. It represents itself...(59)

The playwright establishes in the above statement, how our leaders having such conception forget the purpose of being voted into office, they sit as bench warmers as they run the country's economy to the ground by making policies that suit them, leaving the poor masses in deprivation and hunger which are the timers that set off the bomb of violence.

The playwright uses the play to show that the political situation of Nigeria is in the doldrums because the affairs of state are piloted by mediocres who are not knowledgeable, therefore cannot astutely run the affairs of the nation for the development of the society and the betterment of the common man. Madam Omeaku, an illiterate restaurateur turns parliamentarian is used by the playwright to drive home this point. This quickly casts our minds back to the case of Patricia Etteh, a hair dresser abroad, who came back and became the speaker of the house in 2007, but was later removed for spending millions on renovation of her official quarters and purchasing of cars.

Reverend Jossy, Prof are also presented by the playwright to expose the bare face deceit and incompetence that the Nigerian leadership class exude. Hear the words of Brown as he explains to Madam Omeaku.

Madam: ...What about the reverend minister?

Brown: (Waves his right hand)...We called him reverend during the campaigns because we thought that the title would purchase us some

credibility from the voters. And it worked!
...(4).

Oh, do you think the professor is really one?

Madam: You mean Prof?

Brown: Yea, Prof. Prof. He was a factory worker in London. We asked him to take the title in order to make our party look intellectual ... He doesn't have a certificate.(5)

This brings to mind Nigerian politicians who have been exposed to have forged certificate. The playwright bewails on this situation and its resounding disastrous effect. Listen to Omeaku:

Who could have believed that a road side food seller would become one of the law makers of our country?

Your success in the polls is the final undertaker that will bury this nation.

The playwright also brings to light the issue of electoral malpractice, which is prevalent in our society. According to Brown; ... the Returning Officer was my classmate. It wasn't difficult for me to negotiate the right figures with him as I did in your own case (14).

The playwright shows that the corrupt practices during elections are also carried on with as they get into their political offices. This leads to embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, nepotism and so many other ill-practices. Hear the words of Habamero:

By the powers invested on me as speaker of the House and Chairman of this assembly, I approve the sum of two million naira for each member as inconvenience allowance.

Madam: How much can we play around with? I mean the vote for the party.

Habamero: Judging from the importance of such business, I'll say about a hundred million.

The graft practices are also demonstrated in the play as the parliamentarians allot important positions that go a long way to affect the economic development of the nation to their incompetent cronies and allies in order receive kick back. Thus leaving economic development in the hands of their selfish pawns, and then through them they callously short-change, exploit and feed fat on the sweat of tax payers, denying the poor masses the opportunity to have any form of good life. The playwright articulates why and how corruption, nepotism and graft practices have eaten deeply into the leadership circle. He attributed this to the polity's inability to probe and punish those who are culpable.

The playwright sheds light on the ineptitude of Nigerian leaders whose unaccountability and insensitivity, demean and deprave the masses, who in turn retaliate through violence to save themselves from the enormity of such inhumanity. In the play, the presidential visit to the House and the Press conference shows the extent to which the ruling class in Nigeria ride roughshod on the people, with no slightest empathy towards the plight of the masses. Listen to the President in *A Parliament of Vultures*:

The president is a busy man. He has no time to listen to disgruntled elements who complain about everything whether good or bad. They are merely men and women who are jealous of those whose bread God has buttered by placing them in positions of power and authority and of course, the good things that go with them. (raises his voice) And I'm making it clear to every member of this nation that I'll deal very ruthlessly with anybody accused of such offence (63).

Indubitably, the above interpolation denote the crop of leaders in Africa, who will never assent to criticism, constructive or not. It brings to mind the military regime when the press are gagged and some jailed for commenting on the activities of the government. In Burundi protesters were fired at for moving against the

government on his decision to go for a third term in office. Femi Falana led protest for government to rescind on its policy of subsidy removal received a violent pushback from the authorities. Further on the playwright's view on the insensitivity and unaccountability of the leaders the play captures how leaders express no interest in enforcing policies that with affect positively and improve the living condition of the people leaving the people dissatisfied, aggrieved to act and be heard and seen. This is aptly captured in the President's reply to the 2nd and 3rd journalists.

2nd Journalist: Your Excellency, as a person who cares for the interest of the masses, how do you intend to curb inflation?

President: Inflation is the result of people, buying too much, thereby giving the traders opportunity to hike prices. If things are too expensive your anger should be directed at the trader not the President.(65)

3rd Journalist: Mr. President masses of this country are suffering because of food scarcity. Does Your Excellency have any programmes to curb food scarcity in the nation?

President: Food Scarcity? No. there is no food scarcity in this country. ..As for the problem of the masses which you mentioned, the problem with them is lack of planning and eating too much. They should cut their coat according to their cloth. If a person can afford only one meal a day, let him go ahead and eat it and not rub shoulders with those who can afford to eat four or five times a day. If he cannot afford any meal for the day, let him wait because tomorrow is another day. All fingers are not equal (65).

The playwright extols the revolutionaries in our society who no matter the challenges they face stick out their necks to save the lot of the people. They are the lone voices for the multitude of the voiceless. Dr. Parkers is an example of such as he condemns the parliamentarians plan to throw an unnecessary party “where nice things must flow” all in the name of inaugurating the parliament. Dr. Parkers decries the waste of fund; saying:

Mr. Chairman, such colossal waste of public funds is unnecessary. I don't see any reason for it. The value of our currency is very low, the masses are suffering, civil servants in some states have not been paid their salaries for upwards of six months. I move that it be completely erased from the programme (42).

Otobo the only parliamentarian who also believes in service to the people says:

Supported. Besides, the House should concentrate on winning the credibility of the people after many years of misrule. We shall not always think of ourselves...(42)

The playwright expresses the dangers and hurdles the revolutionaries amongst the ruling class encounter as they pursue their ideology of positive change for the masses and attempts to show how they could stand undeterred or discouraged in the face of it all as demonstrated by Dr. Parkers.

Parkers: This is ridiculous! I weep for this nation.

Habamero: If one considers the way a widow weeps the corpse of the husband will never be buried.

Otobo: This is getting unbearable. Lets walk out this parliament.(50)

Parkers: No, my good friend. You'll be dancing into their tune, if you do so. They want to frustrate us out of this parliament. But I

won't let them succeed I'll continue to take the insults in the interest of the Nation.(51)

Otobo: You are wasting your time with these people. If I were you, I would check out like most intellectuals have done. They don't even care about brain drain. Look at our universities. What is the quality of intellectuals there? In this dungeon we call a nation, intellect is a curse? If I were you, I'll checkout of this den.

Parkers: And achieve what? Mere individual satisfaction. My consideration is for the nation ... (51).

Dr Parkers stops at nothing in fighting for the enthronement of equity and just distribution of the nation's wealth among the people and thus continues to insist that the right people who will ensure the growth and development of the nation are given opportunity to serve. Hear him;

. . . My Chairman I'm still pleading on behalf of the good citizens of this country who are competent but who don't have members of the parliament pleading on their behalf...(52)

Nwabueze paints a picture of the fate which the human rights activists suffer. Dr. Parkers and Otobo denote the human rights activists in our society, who the leaders of this country have incarcerated, intimidated and tortured at one time or the other. Dr. Parkers and Otobo just like Gani Fawehimi, Femi Falana, Dele Giwa, Nosa Igiebor of Tell Magazine, Ken Sora Wiwa and many others were arrested and tortured by the government. Amongst them are those who were eventually executed by the government. The same would have been the fate of Dr. Parkers and Otobo as Habamero gleefully addresses the house:

They are still in detention without trial. They will be charged with treasonable felony. Their trial will start

as soon as other accomplices are apprehended and a tribunal set up to ensure that they don't escape execution.

When pushed to the wall, people are bound to react, so that at the denouement of the play, we see the Youths (undergraduates and unemployed youths) take their destinies in their hands and revolt as a step towards saving themselves, the society and those who have been fighting their causes.

The playwright uses the play to subtly warn the leadership class of the possible violent reactions that may erupt as a result of the sustained oppression of the masses. The parliamentarians just like the Nigerian leaders believe that they have the people in their pockets, and therefore continue to play 'gods' with the future of the people. Perhaps President Nkurunziza of Burundi never knew that such uprising will erupt when he declared his intention to run for a third tenure in office which the people believed to be unconstitutional. Perhaps, the President: Ben Ali of Tunisia, Mubarak of Egypt, Gadaffi of Libya never envisaged that there was going to be an Arab spring. Same could be said of the parliamentarians, who amid devising more malevolent plot to deploy on the masses are eroded by the flood of revolution.

Conclusion

It is deduced from the analysis of the plays, *Nwokedi* and *A Parliament of Vultures*, that revolutionary actions and violence are the offshoot of oppressive, irresponsible, exploitative and insensitive leadership and political systems which are existent in Nigeria. The ruling class, being mindful of the fact that the masses, are complacent to the deprivation they are being subjected to, do nothing to alleviate their situations. Such demeanour perhaps contributes to the ineptitude of the Nigerian leaders, who leave the office with no legacy but disrepute to posterity. They see no reason to be perturbed by the actions of the masses, even when they take to the streets, because they believe that eventually the masses will

recoil and turn to God to judge and bring the erring leaders to justice. This is aptly captured in *A Parliament of Vultures* where Reverend Jossy says that; “Africa is the domain of men and women who interpret every situation into which you place them as ordained by God”. Mrs. Nwokedi's words to her son also expresses this; “If you kill him now, what will you gain? Son, leave vengeance to God.... God will act on our behalf. But there is no gainsaying the fact that the appalling state of the nation leaves the masses with no other option than to recourse to violence and revolutionary action to effect change in the status quo. It is obvious that the two plays have drawn inference from the Karl Marx interpolation which is the standpoints of Irobi and Nwabueze, that oppression will end when the masses rise up and usher in a revolution that will create a classless utopian society.

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2012.
- Adejimu-Bepo, ‘Diran. *Rape of the Last Sultan*. Ibadan. Kraft Books Limited. 2010
- Agbese, Dan. “Team Men”. *Newswatch* (Lagos) Nov. 18, 2002: P. 11
- Amodu, Taiwo and Folasade-Koy, Adetutu. “NASS: SENATORS, REPS TO RECEIVE N9BN ALLOWANCES”. *DAILYSun Newspaper* (Abuja), June 16, 2015:P. 3
- Angya, C.. “Will there be peace: Images of war and brutality in Wole Soyinka’s *Madmen and Specialists*”. *Nigerian Theatre Journal* 8.1 2005: 143-149.
- Azuonye, Nnorom. “*My E-conversation with Esiaba Irobi*”. www.sentinelpoetry.org.uk. Accessed February12,2015.
- Bernth, Lindfors. “Politics, Culture, and Literary Form”. *African Literature :An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Singapore: SPi Publisher Private Ltd 2007: 28-29.

- Dandaura, Eman. *Hagher: "The Playwright – Documentarist as A Nation Builder"*. *Theatre Experience: A Journal of Contemporary Theatre Practice*. 1.1(2002):177-201
- Gbilekaa, Saint. *Radical Theatre in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Caltop Publications (Nigeria) Limited, 1997.
- Gonye, Jairos and Moyo, Thamsanqa. "African nationalist transformational leaders: Opportunities, possibilities and pitfalls in African fiction and politics". *Journal of African Studies and Development*. www.academicjournals.org/JASD . Accessed February 13, 2015.
- Ibagere, Elo and Omoera, Osakue. *Nigeria Constitutional Development and Political Dynamics*. www.krepublishers.com/02-Journals/ . Accessed March 16, 2015.
- Irobi, Esiaba. *Nwokedi*. Enugu: ABIC Books and Equipment Ltd, 1991.
- Iyayi, Festus. *Violence*. Ikeja: Longman Nigeria PLC, 1979.
- Kilete, Molly. "Another Bomb Rocks Abuja". *DAILY Sun* (Abuja), June 26, 2014:P. 3
- Nwabueze, Emeka. *A Parliament of Vultures*. Enugu: ABIC Books and Equipment Ltd, 2000.
- Nwosu, Canice. "Alienation and Violence as Alternatives to the Oppressed in Esiaba Irobi's Hangmen Also Die". *Theatre Studies Review*. 2005: 16-17.
- Ododo, Sunnie. *Hard Choice*. United Kingdom: Alpha Crowns Publishers, 2012.
- Olufemi, Afoyebe. "EFCC, ICPC are toothless anti-graft agencies – Melaiye". *Punch* (Abuja), December 10, 2013:P. 7
- Utoh-Ezeajugh Tracie. "Theatre and contemporary Realities: The Dynamics of Social Change in Nigerian Plays". *Theatre Experience: A Journal of Contemporary Theatre Practice* 1.1. 2002: 125-135

AUTHORS' NAMES AND ADDRESSES

Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, *PhD*

Department of Theatre and Film Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

&

Prisca Ifeoma Okeke

Department of Theatre and Film Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

&

Uchenna Okafor

Department of Theatre and Film Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria