

Nigerian Dramatists and the Postcolonial Dreams: Poetics of Ethnic Unity in Diversity

Yemi Atanda

Department of Performing Arts,
Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye,
Ogun State, Nigeria

Email: yemiatandaa@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3263-1379>

Abstract

This study examines the ideological persuasions of the pioneer Nigerian dramatists given their penchant to edifying the former British colony. Drawing on primary and secondary data, the study contends that contemporary Nigerian playwrights are steep in their 'social commitments' to aspire for a better and unified nation, in the face of ethnic diversities. It critically analyses, John Iwuh's *Birthright* and Barclays Ayakoroma's *Castle in the Air*, using Ngugi wa Thiong'O's conceptualization of Liberation and Abiola Irele's *Alienation* as a conceptual footing to demonstrate the exceptional social visions in the selected plays. In doing this, the study unpacks the boundary crossing between aesthetic, social-political and cultural realities to reconfigure the fractious environment for the holistic integrated and a better postcolonial Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigerian dramatists, Drama, Dreams, Postcolonial Nigeria, Ethnic unity in diversity.

Introduction

This article considers dreams of writers in their social vision to reconfigure self-identity crisis besetting Nigeria, almost immediately after independence within the appropriate postcolonial discourses. In doing this, the paper examines the works of the selected dramatists in the post war era, to see how the political rulers - the politicians and the military's

top brass have failed, or still failing to curtail, even in the Fourth Republic (1999-till date), the humongous socio-political torpor and economic festering within the diametric national polity. In this dimension, the idea is to study the efforts of the playwrights in their aspirations to find peace and unity in the diversities “to make work an organic function of their countries history” (Obafemi, 2007, p. vi). For the generations of writers have been depicting some thematic concerns; taking appropriate creative space in seeking revolutionary change of the irrefutable condensed narcissistic experience. The physical and psychological traumas have had impact on the psyche of the nation and the citizenry within the ambience of shared experience, since the conflicting copious events that culminated into the fratricidal carnage of the Nigerian Civil War and its post effects. It is through this range of dysfunctional situation that Nigerian writers are steep in their ‘social commitments’ to dream and aspire for a better and unified nation, even within her spurious unity in diversity.

This notion of ‘unity’ becomes reverent from “Aristophanes to Achebe, Chaucer to Coetzee, Shakespeare to Soyinka, literary artists have been consummately concerned about what happens in the society (sic), in as much as writers do not operate in a social vacuum” Opeyemi (2021, p. 236). The duty of the writers to their immediate society finds its meaning in the assertion of Jean-Paul Sartre (1967) which opines that no writer can be ignorant of the world and that no one may obliquely say in the manner of art-for art-sake that he/she is unconcerned, or ignorant of what the world is. More so, every writer is committed to one ideological nuance just as Mphahlele (1972) corroborates Sartre that “every writer is committed to something beyond his art, to a criticism of life and to a statement of value that is not purely aesthetic” (see Opeyemi 2021, p. 236).

The younger generation playwrights like John Iwuh’s *Birthright* and Barclays Ayakoroma’s *Castle in the Air*, as the focus of this study, demonstrates their exceptional vision to seeking for ameliorating self-identity crisis in the postcolonial time. As member of the audience, or as their critic, a work of art is a ‘myth’ or ‘mystique’ engaging us through the dramatic action, characterization and language, “our sensibilities are enlivened by imaginary characters and we become engaged in their conflicts. Our thoughts and emotions are never so detached from theirs that we can remain ‘objective’ in our feelings for them and in our judgments” (Martin, 1996, pp.97-106). John Iwuh’s tragic drama draws us from the communal horrendous experience of the traumatic violence of

the civil war to the individual psychotic postwar effects that in a way make us gasps for the humanity left in us.

While Barclays Ayakoroma's play is a tragi-comedy that spins domestic crisis of dreams and desires within the larger frame of identity crisis that besets the ethnic odious and paranoid that characterized the nature of socio-religious problematics in postcolonial Nigeria. So, "any explanation or designation that erases the self-identity of culpable and complicit agents" (Ochonu, 2021, p.8); in the face of religious bigotry and for self-appropriation is anti-human development and against unity in diversity within the nature of true nationhood. The play, *Castle in the Air*, is comic because it throws audience into the throbs of laughter by sheer individual conflicting muddled and confused egocentric inflections, while it is tragic because of the failure to find a nation within the fragmented and dysfunctional ethnic nationalities that besieges the need for clear vision to drive a nation. In all of this, it is imperative to look at what Richard Paul Knowles says that "rather they involve a number of related strategies of assimilation, of 'understanding,' and of inclusion" (Knowles, 1998, p.190); that we should consider what unites rather than what divides humanity, so that no one is defined by his/her ethnic or regional representation or religious/political affiliations. Drawing on primary and secondary data, it is noted that through this range of dysfunctional situation that Nigerian writers are steep in their "social commitments" to aspire for a better and unified nation, even within her laborious diversities. And the study attempts to critically analyze, using "liberation" by Ngugi wa Thiongo and "pathology of alienation" by Abiola Irele as conceptual framework, the works of selected playwrights of younger generation, John Iwuh's *Birthright* and Barclays Ayakoroma's *Castle in the Air*, to demonstrate their exceptional vision in seeking for self-identity in the postcolonial time.

The Nature of Dreams and Postcolonial Discourse

The struggles for the independence by the nationalists across Africa, shortly after the Second World War, were so tensed. The dream then, within the concept of this research, is understood as 'social vision' even with its attendant pit-falls, was to attain independence so as to accentuate self-rule across Africa, Nigeria inclusive. However, for many nations in the continent, the dreams for self-rules were soon deflated as the result of the morbid nature of state affairs amongst others were corruptions, ethnic rivalry and suspicions, religious sentiment and bigotry reigned supreme. So, consequently, "writers were also drawn to anguish and

disillusionment" Obafemi (2007, p.9). It has become insidious for the Nigerian writers, considering the "cathartic impacts" of the horrendous events in the postcolonial Nigeria that culminated into "fratricidal carnage" (9) of the Nigerian Civil War, to converse with the power in creative dialogue. Many of the first-generation writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Christopher Okigbo, John-Pepper Clark got into partisan involvement one way or the other as Olu Obafemi observed:

As a result of the war, and their partisan involvements in it, frontline Nigerian writers (Soyinka, Achebe, Clark, Okigbo, Amadi, Ekwensi) suffered directly and wrote with deep tortured feelings revealing changes in the ways of looking at the world as a whole. From their experiences in the war, Nigerian writers felt the urgent need to go beyond descriptions of the horrors of war to spread general enlightenment and sow seed of spiritual and social regeneration in their community after the disorientation and dislocation caused by the war. (Obafemi, 2007, p. 10)

From the post-civil war, without imagining the generational gulf amongst the Nigerian playwrights; they have postured a common dream that "have sought to unite a hitherto divided and divisive populace by forging a national theatre along inclusive, democratic lines", (Over, 2004, p. 21). I read paradigmatic sense into the drives of William Over in his essay that the Nigerian playwrights in forms and contents of their dramatic oeuvres without considering generational gulf and ideological persuasions in their 'boundary crossings', have resolved in their dreams "as they seek a truly united national culture in the postcolonial era" (21). In doing this, they have been "at once aesthetic and political as they face, on the one hand, a fractions social environment and, on the other hand, a positive environment" (21). While they dream for a virile, prosperous and a united nation, they depict to warn even from the wake of the independence, Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of Forest*, like Chinua Achebe's *Man of the People*, become so prophetic for disillusioned communal ethos, till date. Thus, they seek to redefine their thematic relevance, socio-dramatic visions, within their divergent views and convergent dreams for holistic integration of a nation that is so distrustful along ethnic and religious divides. This aim is to affirm the "positive values of justice, equality, fairness, freedom, and sensitivity as ideals to promote peace in society" (Ojeide, 2012, p.53).

Writers in their literary political engagement pique a dream as teachers for essence of rejuvenation, in doing this they raise concerns and confront power militating against their society. In Achebe's view, as I interpret it for the purpose of this paper; it is important to liberate the minds of Africans and advocate confrontation with imperialism and neocolonialism from 'within' and 'without' to accentuate self-identity within the larger view of postcolonial experience as he says that "to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement", (see Olaniyan & Quayson, 2007, p.105). The consequence of this liberation will enable a fertile mind be equipped with sound reasoning to grow in his/her consciousness to contend and confront such debilitating forces that aimed at alienating 'other' by the bankrupt and myopic 'self' within the larger frame of dictatorial and dysfunctional political and economic problems in the postcolonial experience. In the mode of such production of knowledge of liberation, Biodun Jeyifo finds pertinent sense in the assertion made by Ngugi wa Thiongo that "his ideal scholar would place 'truth' in the service of national liberation and the construction of social order that favors the mass of urban workers and rural at the base of the socio-economic pyramid in neo-colonial Africa", (see Jeyifo, 2007, p.433). It is therefore, imperative for the African writers to 'fight' against the growth of class consciousness in the neocolonial Nigeria and dictatorial tendencies that have eaten deep like cankerworms into the 'luster fabric' of development and taken over the reins of governance in Nigeria.

The liberation as Ngugi surmises freedom from neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism within the prism of neo-liberal tendentious capitalism in the postcolonial experiences in Africa in general, and Nigeria specifically, should reconstruct social order as part of the dreams of the writers. This becomes imperative because of "frustrations, their direct, personal and cultural clashes with conquering culture, and their fears, hope, and dreams about the future and their own identities" (www.nku.edu). We need to understand, therefore, what drives intent to decolonizing the minds of Africans, even beyond the linguistic paralysis that has become counter discourse in trends and troves amongst postcolonial theorists. To Ngugi, language is crucial. It is the vehicle that carries the features of imperial oppression, which has become strong post-colonial counter discourse. His vision, no doubt is to "effectively tackle" (Adeoti, 2016 p.2), the continued imperialist and colonialist tendencies that have been noted to becoming a new cloak as subjugating agencies in

the postcolonial experiences in Africa. This notion, as Gbemisola Adeoti discovers, is not only in Ngugi wa Thion'o's essays, but in his novels and plays as an essential African writer, a re-visional motif to tackle and confound "Africa's developmental predicaments and neo-colonial" (2) even neo-imperial subjugations. He goes further to accentuate the re-visioning motif in Ngugi's wa Thiong'o's both critical and creative corpus to raise consciousness and perhaps to take action against all forms of oppressions, exploitations, ethnic bigotry, social and economic inequality, environmental, religious and gender disparity as we find in nearly all the African nations:

The articulated vision...runs through the corpus of Ngugi's creative works, especially the novels and plays. It is also trenchantly canvassed in his critical commentaries and scholarly essays. From a conviction that the anti-colonial struggles and political independence of the 1950s to the 1970s have not resulted in true liberation of the continent. Ngugi uses his narrative and performative aesthetics to address the subsisting issues of economic exploitation and political marginalization of the working people by the minority bourgeois elite. (Adeoti, 2016, p. 3)

Considering the suffix 'neo' in neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism, which means 'new imperialism' and 'new colonialism', it points to that fact the foundation of the continued subjugation of the Africa continent as depicted in the neo-colonial and postcolonial hues and cries in the works of African novelists, playwrights and poets, which Adeoti calls the "(un)vanishing past". This was laid in the colonial era which is constantly rearing its ugly features in everyday encounters in the works of both old and young writers in Africa in their depiction of racial archetypes, ethnic hegemony, religious bigotry, socio-political debauchery, economic dependency, gender disparity and the nature of neo-liberalism amongst African elite. In all of this, you find out that the minority elite are more united, against the 'wretched of the earth' in Fanonian paradigm, as you find in the plays of Femi Osofisan and Olu Obafemi in their radical realist revolutionary plays in which they wish for socialist democratic order, as the elite using their whim and caprices against the powerless masses. Even, amongst the critical realists of older generation writers and younger writers like John Iwuh and Barclays Ayakoroma, we find the common social vision, despite ideological

difference from the radical ideologues and the critical ideologues, in the virtues of unity in diversity in Africa, especially in Nigeria. In their “common dream”, it is discovered that there is a “concerted” indication to fight against any form of neo-colonialism of any disguise. The writers want the new elites in power in the ex-colonies, since after the independence, who have been, at various stages, alienating ordinary people and the working class, to design a strong significant modus operandi of developing economies, education, social infrastructures, socio-cultures and political identity that appear to be “under pressures of globalization” (Ashcroft, et’ al, 2007, p.50). Then, a question arises, does drama change a bad governance to a good governance? No. It will not. It only points directions to a better change as a social art.

Nigeria of today is nastiest than what it was at the dawn of independence. The people are becoming more and crushingly alienated within the matrices of social economic and political dysfunctional schemes that oppress them. Our playwrights are conscious of this. They know that the root of the alienation in the postcolonial experience is far flung deep into the history of the colonial intrepid, yet the nation is caught up in the web of globalization; for the political leaders are willing tools in the hands of the modern imperialism. In their allocution of “modern expression in literature and ideology has developed from a primary concern with pathology of alienation as inscribed in our experience as a colonized people” (Irele, 2007, p. 600). No doubt, the Nigerian state has failed and all indices of a supposed united strong nation have collapsed in the face of debilitating political and socio-economic dysfunctions and insecurity. John Campbell, the former US envoy to Nigeria who has authored a book titled *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink* (2010) recently tweets that “in an upcoming foreign policy piece, Dr. Robert Rotberg and I will argue that Nigeria is a failed state” (cited Olagunju, “Monday Line”, *Nigerian Tribune*, 2022, p. 34). Campbell’s feeling is the feeling of all; it is the affirmation of the collective fear is discernible! Boko Haram has ravaged the entire North East and North West and North Central; they are gradually encroaching Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), and the seat of power is apparently in panic, while Fulani herdsmen and bandits are kidnapping students, villagers, even urban dwellers in all the states of the nation and armed struggle is pervading every nook and cranny; Nigeria is not at peace with herself. The nation had never been so divided along ethnic divides than as it is now. This orgy has one way or the other prompted playwrights in their “creative struggles, they convey dialectical social

change in sociological orientation" (Yerima and Atanda, 2021, p.334), in form of dialoging with the state on stage to constantly pronging the power to find recourse for change of social life for better. The struggle of the writers is in tandem to Abiola Irele's perception as posited by Tejumola Olaniyan that "his laments and historicizes the widespread collapse of states" (see Olaniyan, 2019, pp.113-125), where one finds "unemployed citizens, women and other economically and politically marginalized group against their continuous exploitation by politicians and local business elite who are agents of foreign capital" (Adeoti, 2016, p.4).

We could fathom hope beyond this nihilist pervasive atmosphere in the country by focusing on the optimistic creative vision in the plays of John Iwuh, *Birtright* and Barclays Ayakoroma's *Castle in the Air*? In Iwuh's *Birtright*, the real victims of the Nigerian Civil War are not just the soldiers, but the common people represented by Ijeogu. This man loses everything including his mental being for the society to regain her meta-sanity. It is ironical and paradoxical! So, in a society, where everyone is doomed due to the propensity of the pathological alienation, such society is on the path of self-destruction in order to redeem itself, just like in the universe of *The Village Lamb*, another play by John Iwuh. The graphic painting of such self-destructive scenario is done by Ahmed Yerima in his foreword to the play thus:

Birtright is a play about loss. From two angles, John Iwuh tells us first about how war made societies dysfunctional, made life un-safe and made even the gods we worship useless. On the other hand, the element of loss comes into disenchantment and total destruction of family values, and those streams of fellowship that ties humanity together. (Yerima, 2016, p. vii)

This scenario is too depressing and degenerative psychologically, for a progressive generation to be led by renegades; only that for such generation to willfully raise its voice to be heard is difficult. Then in such situation, we may come to term with Tejumola Olaniyan in his critical perception of Irele's 'pathology of alienation' to be both negative and positive in paradoxical understanding of nature of dream in man to discover self-identity "is to embrace our imposed realm of necessity so as to wrest from it a realm of freedom, since the business of living must go on, as collective self-affirmation" (Olaniyan, 2007, p.5). This is on the line of duty by writers as we find in *Castles in the Air* by Barclays Ayakoroma

that decries and wrestles greed and selfishness, ethnic prejudices and religious and traditional identity crisis that are endemic in political and socio-cultural dysfunctional climates in postcolonial Nigeria. All of these result in what Ihidero (2020) refers to as postcolonial anxiety.

The Poetics of Ethnic Diversity in *Birthright*

There have been so many accounts of the horrendous experience of the Nigerian Civil War from so many perspectives (Kirk Greene, 1971; U.N Akpan, 1971; Suzanna Cronje, 1972; Olusegun Obasanjo, 1980; Oluleye Olutoye, 1985; Ademoyega, 1985, Wole Soyinka, 1971; Chimamanda Adichie, 2006 and many others). The account given by John Iwuh, is stemmed from excruciating feelings of the vanquished, as the playwright experienced who was then a teenager. In this stale tale, the social and political events that lead to war are not really known by rural dwellers, they just believe that some individuals, the elite in the urban centers, out of personal aggrandizement and some personal differences, drag them into fighting war they know little about. This notion is a pejorative self-identity and the collective nausea of the war that makes children become orphans, wives are widows and fathers lose their youths or become disabling to the vagaries of the war. The structure of the play is in three acts: War, Vanquish and Retribution. In the first act, the members of the community bear and suffer from the anguish of the war ranging as they meet at the aladimma-the community village square, to discuss this and mourn its effects. No one is actually spared. Wives lose their husbands to war and cry over the deaths of their ravaged children, children are drafted to it and parents seeing their daughters turning to prostitution in war camps; the entire community is in disarray, just as the narrator says that "darkness falls; people fall as leaves from withering trees" (13). Just as Lutfi Hamadi asserts that Edward Said "believes that the consequences of colonialism are still persisting in the form of chaos, coups, corruption, civil wars, and bloodshed, which permeates many ex-colonies" (Hamadi, p. 1)

The metaphor of 'withering' becomes the despondent dysfunctional socio-political and economic situation which leaves the entire people disillusioned. In this situation, people become pathologically alienated in the sense that genocide ravages the entire community because the routes of the food supply has been blocked, children, therefore, die of hunger. Yet, the community still finds reason to meet to discuss a way out. At the rehabilitation center, manned by a Reverend Father, clothes and foods supply, through various and tedious means, are brought into the

camp to safe and protect children suffering from the acute kwashiorkor. Not only that, it becomes the responsibility of all to find succor to the afflicted. For instance, Yagazie, wife of Obidike, the great hunter, is allowed to sit with community leaders, just because her husband is rendered demobilized by war, such another instance is the family of Maduabu, who is drafted to war straight from the wedding hall, is totally destroyed. Now his wife is killed and a search party is able to find her leg for her to be buried in whole, while caring and nurturing for their twins becomes communal responsibility as Ichie says thus: "Ndi-Ala Kwenu. Nze pardon me for coming late. We are still searching for body parts from the bomb that dropped between the stream and the market yesterday" (17).

While the war of attrition is going on in the entire Obodonile- the country (Nigeria), which is actually against the Ndi-Ala, the Biafra, yet the internal squabbles are brewing iridescently inform of gender crisis for political leadership. Nwaka, the villain, is at the center of this crisis. Nwaka is a ruthless ambitious individual who only sees an opportunity in the crisis besetting his society for his personal gains just like the elite in the urban center who led the entire nation into the avoidable war due mainly to their individual aggrandizement. To corroborate this view, Dare Babarinsa paints the picture of the egoistic rendering between the two principal actors of the Nigerian Civil War thus:

Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu, the Lagos boy who had been appointed military governor of the Eastern Region by General Ironsi, saw himself as the counterpoise to Gowon. He believed that Gowon did not do enough to protect the people of Eastern Region, who were resident in the Northern Region, from mindless violence, later to be known as the pogrom (read Babarinsa, *The Guardian*, 2021 p.45)

Nwaka is depicted like an archetypal postcolonial nationalist who derives pleasure in inflicting ogre of pains and tribulations on others without minding the pit-fall of 'grenade and landmines' on the path to climb the ladder of leadership. He does not really mind what befall his community, or any 'other' apart from 'self' in as much his dreams and desires are realized. He fans the ember of discord in the entire community for the internal dissensions, despite the war from without on the traditional aladinma (community) people's forum. If not for the wisdom and good farsighted community leader like Nze, Alima, the wife of Okehi

would have been killed by Akalefu, who intends to revisit the perceived crime of ethnic and culture difference on Alima- a northerner and a Muslim who is married to an easterner and a Christian. The playwright here reinvents the sad memories of the Nigerian Civil War that was engendered by so many conflicting facts amongst ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, shortly after the nation's independence. Nze becomes the authorial voice in his quintessential demand for peace and unity. He says that Alima has lived with them as their 'wife' in African communal sense, for more than ten years and by marital consanguinity she is one of them (23), therefore, there is need to understand what postcolonial theorists call "epistemic other" (Ashcroft, et.al., p.22). The reality in this is to create sense of alterity in a multi-ethnic culture and to enhance "philosophic concerns" for culture difference and otherness. This notion is against Akalefu who holds vengeance on the death of his two sisters killed in the pogrom in the Northern Region by Alima's Ndi-Ugwu. Okehi counters this, that his family is a victim as well, why then Akalefu wants to kill his wife just because of the war? That he has lost two children due to genocide visited on the hapless children as the result of the war and that "kwashiorkor threatens a third one, is that not enough torment, I ask?" (23).

The second act is subtitled "vanquish" which ambivalently re-echoes the mantra of 'No Victor, No Vanquished' by the General Gowon's federal government immediately after the war in 1970 to create a sense of socio-political co-habitation, economic equal opportunity and unity to all Nigerians. To what extent is this in Nigeria? I shall respond to this question in due course. The war just ended, but people are still traumatized. The climax of the dramatic action is epitomized by the gruesome killing of the community leader, Nze. Also, it draws the skewed and pathetic picture of the authentic victims of the war- children, women and ordinary village folks whom do not ordinarily understand the reasons the leaders in the urban space drag them to war in the first place, as said earlier. In the centre of this is Ijeogu, the protagonist, the archetypal victim upon whose shoulders the burden of the war rests. At the opening part of the play, he alleges Nwaka, his antagonist, of betraying him by ensuring his third son, Enchendu be drafted into the war. He decides to be in the camp to replace his son who is undergoing training. The action becomes imperative for the fact the he could not afford to be left naked. Because, his wife is late, two sons are already lost to the war and his only two daughters are serving as sexual objects to satisfy the emotional and phallic

drives of the soldiers in order to eke out crumbs for self-survival. The cumulating effect of all this, results to his mental deterioration- this begins to show in his attitude, illogical thoughts, uncoordinated words and actions. He is overtly disillusioned psychotically and begins phantomlike suicide. So, the play vitiates on the triad level of dark consciousness of the war to the political fantasy of the vanquished and recapitulates to schizophrenia and finally, suicide as we shall soon discover.

Meanwhile, no place for vacuum in life. Life itself is a continuum. The community must not be left rudderless, Achumba becomes the new Nze. Many of their able-bodied sons perished in the war, some return disabled, while others find themselves in the ebb of the urban tides to begin again. It is the village and its people that are victims again. Yet, women still find reasons to sing, "happy survival, happy survival" (39), the desire to be liberated begins to be assured, and again to be sure that future lies ahead, therefore, they must be happy to survive experience of atrocious war. In postcolonial discourse, ambivalence draws the picture of binary opposite in the sense of the antithetical relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. Those are the genuine victims of the Nigerian Civil War historically continue to feel the traumatic pang of pains within the matrices of time and space, and they know that they are the vanquished, unfortunately, they are still happy. Ambivalence is a term first "developed in psychoanalysis to describe a continual fluctuation between wanting one thing and wanting its opposite. It also refers to a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an object, person or action" (Young, 1995, p.161). In the context of this narrative, people are sad, but happy; it is a psychological motive to taunt the petulant leaders who deceive them that there is no vanquished. They know they are! Their display of happiness makes Achumba to feel and see hope in tomorrow as he says, it is good to see that people still have some energy left to rejoice. Such as the Narrator equally says thus: "so they rejoice. Peace today gives tomorrow the chance for development" (39). The Nigerian Civil War had come and gone; yet after decades 'war' is still on, the nation is so divided, but the Igbo, after the civil war, interred all cries and whispers of secession, coming back in resurgent mode of renewed self-determination like Yoruba, another ethnic nationality of the southwest, Nigeria, as they demand for Oduduwa Republic; it appears all they desire from Nigeria is fair treatment, sense of equity and justice-so that dream of development shall manifest in the midst of poetic ethnic diversity. To the extent that demands become cacophonous, while some self-determination agitators are

demanding self-rule, some want restructuring and the political elite are of the opinion that the unity of the country, Nigeria, is not negotiable.

The moment of retribution is at hand. Nwaka is a petulant ambitious individual without regard for ethical gender equipoise. He demonstrates this from the exposition of the play, when Yagazie, Obidike's wife, is allowed to sit amongst elders of the Aladima – the community, to deliberate on the crucial matters of the raging war, she is bemoaned by Nwaka, but only extend regards for her, not on self-account, but as a marital appendage to her husband. While Yagazie renders song of lamentations and ritual performance as the passage of rite for her dead husband, she is poignant to say that the Aladima only recognizes her as a mere shadow of her husband without a voice. This notion to Nwaka becomes askance and melancholically uncharitable, because he feels she should count herself lucky to be a docile observer in the midst of elders, on the account of the respect Aladima has for her husband, Obidike. Gender struggles and demeaning value Nwaka has for female gender meets a stiff -dead-end, when he is vigorously campaigning for political leadership against Uredia, another widow who is equally a victim of war. Uredia, an educated woman, leads a radical group of women for gender equal rights, and vigorously campaign to emerge a new leader in the new democratic dispensation, this is taken as an affront and a virulent bane for Nwaka's ideal pathology of alienation in a patriarchy.

Finally, Nwaka could not get the support of women for his dream to become a political leader of his people, including his wife, Maradie. She has joined the radical group of women led by Uredia, his political staunch opponent. He could not even be sure of securing the support of his men folks for impending democratic dispensation. It is at this confounded time that confusion sets in for Nwaka. Ironically, however, Ijeogu, whom Nwaka despises is discovered to have put his younger wife in the family line. While Nwaka is busy causing confusions and generating crisis in the community for his appropriated skewed dream. Ijeogu is seen loitering around Nwaka's house. Now cat is let out of the bag that he has impregnated Nwanyimma, Nwaka's younger wife. Ijeogu, on the other hand, becomes so despondent and wrenched in mire of psychosis, having lost all he loves, but now naked; he makes his choice. Ijeogu laments that "life is all about making choices. As for me, if it's not my birthright to live, then it's my birthright to die" (74) and at the end, Ijeogu is seen dangling in the noose, when Nwaka who is running after Ijeogu in order to kill him sees him hanging down, having known that the man he calls "vegetable",

he is not actually one, but 'virile', "he slumps on both knees in exhaustion" (7).

Ethnic Diversity of Love in *Castle in the Air*

In *Castles in the Air*, ethnic bigotry becomes the central motif that drives the will power of greed in the men in the society of the play to accentuate self-identity, while women play low on the dream of building castle in the air based on their variant degree of wants; yet ethnic difference clothed in religious sentiment makes love traumatized. In the context of this dramatic action, ethnicity is hereby referred to as the variation in religion, culture, language, social indices, traditions and world view of other ethnic groups within a national boundary. Each character has his or her dream. Alhaji Mustapha is a businessman living outside his ethnic region in the South-South, Nigeria. He wants their son, Aminu, in the persuasive patriarchal sense of understanding with his wife, Hajia Binta, to marry Hausa/Fulani lady, not a 'stranger'. By this, they are both sure that ethnic difference and religious disparity shall be tamed. They cannot continue to tolerate Aminu with his randy lifestyle. It is in the atmosphere of reprimanding him that a letter is brought in through courier services from Alhaji Usman Gana, Aminu's maternal uncle, a wealthy businessman. They had been expecting to hear from Alhaji Gana to come to their financial aid to support their business. However, this letter turns out to becoming an agency of catalyst that triggers off their individual dreams and initiates the tension besetting the domestic front. The language of the letter is so spurious in tone and suspicious in intent; for Aminu to marry and have a son within a year with compensation of ten million naira! Obviously, it is beyond human agency to assuredly manifest within the stipulated time and condition.

While this hoax is on, Chief Emotari along with his young niece, Stella, pay a visit to the Mustaphas. By instance of momentous sight, it is noted that Aminu and Stella are not just meeting for the first time, and Chief Emotari suspects this, hence he would not want Stella to be left alone in the company of Aminu. This is a signification of a disapproving frown to a young lady, Stella who is seen about to take a moral and cultural misstep. May be for his own personal agenda. This reason being that, he would want Stella to marry a commissioner, a member of the executive cabinet to the Governor with whom an arrangement already being made for Stella to become a commissioner in the second tenure of the governor, but not to a "stranger". This pack exudes the image of political "god-

fatherism" or financial backer which is a common gesture in democratic allurements in Nigeria. The twist in the simple plot of tragi-comic, *Castle in the Air*, is an adaptation of an Indian playwright, Kuldeep Sondhi's play titled *With Strings*, is the gift from Alhaji Gana. The alluring of the intended gift of ten million naira introduces the dramatic conflict that seemingly puts apart the family of Alhaji Mustapha and that of Emotari's, a family friend of long-standing years. It is in the intense debates about the right of individual to make a decision of whom to marry, having come to term that Aminu and Stella are in love, then, other sundry issues like traditional prejudices come to fore, it is clear to all than meet the eye. Chief Emotari will neither allow his niece to marry Aminu, the son of his friend, nor would Alhaji Mustapha approve Aminu to marry Stella. On the other hand, Stella, who is home for summer holiday from an institution in the United Kingdom would never be attenuated to any condition as string attachment to her marital life with Aminu. The play, *Castle in the Air* spins tragi-comedy in domestic crisis of dreams and desires within the larger frame of identity-crisis that besets the ethnic odious and paranoid that characterized the nature of socio-religious problematic of mixed marriages between various ethnic groups in postcolonial Nigeria

Nigeria has been so divided today far more than she had ever been so divided in the line of self-appropriation of any kind in culture, religion, language and social engagements. Each part, especially in the southern region of the country: South West, South East and South South and Benue State in the North Central region are all clamoring for restructuring, not only in political configurations, but in economic terms. And the clamors hit brick walls resonantly, each part desire to have her own 'banana' republic as they are ranting for secession. It is not out of place that the deafening noise punctuates the earlobes of Niyi Osundare, a Nigerian revolutionary poet who says in his poem titled *this house must not fall*- "his house must not fall/Though brick after brick/ It creaks like a hapless shack/ weighted down by History's burden" (Osundare, *Premium Times*, June 6 35). The hoax that ensues at the domestic squabbles in twisted tongues between the two disparate families of Alhaji Mustapha and that of Chief Emotari over the romantic entanglement between two young individuals in persons of Aminu, a Moslem and Stella, a Christian, has deep ontological precepts and so rooted in religious and tribal sentiments than one can imagine, irrespective of their social and economic bonds. The parents say no, but the children insist yes! This scenario is well captured in delirious image of decentering as Niyi

Osuundare (2021) goes further to say that “bumbling bedlam of tribes and tongues... /Eating each other’s spleen/Shibboleth-shouters at hell-gate,/Incapable of hearing” (p.35). It is at this juncture when sanity has lost in the wind and words grow wings and fly beyond the borders of reason that a courier brings in another letter. What is in it?

Letter is being used by the playwright as a symbolic fulcrum of dramatic action and inaction. It serves as a catalyst of the rising action within the simple plot structure, and it is another letter from the same source, now serving as an image of restitution to resolving the conflict in the falling action. The content of that letter says that Alhaji Gana whose gesture of benevolence sparks off the ecstatic dreams of building castle in the air by the Mustaphas, especially Aminu’s father, and partly Aminu himself; with an agonizing condition that goes with it that Aminu should marry and have a son within a year, has just died of cardiac arrest. Now, dreams fly into the wind! The playwright in resolving this domestic crisis in comic tone, has its imping on national traumatic psyche by gesture of reconciling all to love, to bring to bear on what Niyi Osundare says thus:

Every nation is nothing
If not a-work-in-progress
Re-thought, Re-shaped, Re-calibrated
In answer to noble necessity and moral
Imperative {Osundare, 2021 p.35}

Conclusion

The study has examined the aspirations of the postcolonial Nigerian playwrights to edifying their immediate society. In doing this, the two plays selected; John Iwuh’s *Birthright* and Barclay Ayakoroma’s *Castle in the Air*, have been critically examined and it was discovered that playwrights in their aspirations to find peace and unity in diversities suggest ways to make things work an organic function of their country’s history. In this regard, John Iwuh’s and Barclays Ayakoroma’s plays have demonstrated their exceptional visions to seeking for ameliorating self-identity-crisis in the postcolonial time. It has been established in this work that John Iwuh’s tragic drama draws us from the communal horrendous experience of the traumatic violence of the civil war to the individual psychotic postwar effects that in a way make us gasps for the humanity left in us; as being moved to verge of total annihilation. While Barclays Ayakoroma’s play is a tragic-comedy that spins domestic crisis of dreams and desires within the larger frame of identity-crisis that besets the ethnic

odious and paranoid that characterized the nature of socio-religious problematic in postcolonial Nigeria. This study has unpacked the boundary crossing between aesthetic, social-political and cultural realities to reconfigure the fractious environment for the holistic integrated postcolonial society for the purpose of unity in ethnic diversity in a way that may not has been suggested for a better nation.

References

- Adeoti, G. (2016). Demystifying the future in Africa's (un) vanishing past: A study of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's novels. *African Development*, XI (2), 1-22.
- Achebe, C. (2007). The novelist as teacher. In T. Olaniyan & A. Quayson (Eds.), *African literature: An anthology of criticism and theory*(pp.105-117). London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Ayakoroma, B. (2020). *Castle in the air*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited.
- Babarinsa, D. (3 June 2021). Even God will do it. *The Guardian*, p.45
- Bill, A. et.al. (2007). *Post-colonial studies: The key concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Ihidero, V.O. (2020). Postcolonial anxieties and the politics of identities in Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart*. *Nigerian Theatre Journal (NTJ)*, 20(1).
- Irele, A. 2007). In praise of alienation. In T. Olaniyan & A. Quayson (Eds.), *African literature: An anthology of criticism and theory* (pp.600-614). London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Iwuh, J. (2006). *Birthright*. Osogbo: AYF Publisher.
- Jeyifo, B. (2007). The nature of things: Arrested deconization and critical theory. In T. Olaniyan & A. Quayson (Eds.), *African literature: An anthology of criticism and theory* (pp.433-448). London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Knowles, R. P. (1998). From dream to machine: Peter Brook, Rober Lepage, and the contemporary Shakespearean director as (post) modernist. *Theatre Journal*, 50 (2), 189-206.
- Martin, R. A. (1996). The nature of tragedy in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. *South Atlantic Review*, 61(4), 97-106.
- Mphahlele, E. (1972). *Voices in the whirlwind and other essays*. Dares Salam: Tanzania Publishing House.
- Obafemi, O. (2007). *Nigerian writers on the Nigerian Civil*. Ilorin: J. Olu Olatiregun (Nig.) Company in conjunction with Christy-David Publishing Group.
- Ochonu, M. (2021). Slave theology, and anti-blacks in the Arab world. *Research Africa Review*, 5(1), 8-15.
- Olagunju, L. (31 May 2021). Igbo, Nigeria and the month of May. *Nigerian Tribune*, p.34.
- Olaniyan, T. (2019). The literary critic as political as political sociologist: Abiola Irele and the postcolonial state in Africa. *Journal of African Literature Association*, 14 (1), 113-125.

- Ojaide, T. (2012). *Contemporary African literature: New approaches*. North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press.
- Opeyemi, A. (2021). Africa must future: Strategies for societal transformation in Olu Obafemi's *Running Dreams* and *Dark Times Are Over?*" In D. Oni & S. E. Ododo (Eds.), *Larger than his frame II: Further critical studies and reflections on Olu Obafemi* (pp.326-333). Lagos: National Theatre.
- Osundare, N. (6 June 2021). This house must not fall. *Premium Times*, p.35.
- Sartre, J. (1976). *What is literature?* Bernard Frechtman (Trans.). London: Methuen.
- wa Thiong'o, N. (1981). *Writers in politics*. London: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Yerima, A. & Atanda, Y. (2021). Beyond scuttled dreams: the antithesis of social conflicts in the plays of Olu Obafemi. In D. Oni & S. E. Ododo (Eds.), *Larger than his frame II: Further critical studies and reflections on Olu Obafemi* (pp.334-3347). Lagos: National Theatre.
- Young, R. J.C. (1995). *Colonial desire: Hybridity in theory, culture and race*. London: Routledge.
- www.nku.edu- Home page of the Northern Kentucky University, USA.