
AFRREV LALIGENS

An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies

Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

Vol. 2 (1) February, 2013:209-222

ISSN: 2225-8604(Print)

ISSN 2227-5460 (Online)

**Advancement of Social Justice, Development and National
Security through Drama in Ola Rotimi's *If...A Tragedy of
the Ruled***

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Abstract

This paper examines how social justice, development, and national security could be advanced through drama from the perspective of Ola Rotimi's IF...a Tragedy of the Ruled. The paper adopts qualitative analysis as a methodology in determining the suitability of drama in the actualization our country's objectives in relation to development and national security. Drama is employed as an instrument of consciousness to the people and makes them aware of their responsibilities to the nation to ensure the sustenance of their communal survival. It is observed that the entire community is encouraged to work together in solidarity to achieve progress and self- reliance to free themselves from their oppressors. Within the drama, it is revealed that individual heroism is discouraged as being incapable of solving Nigeria's problems and so the communal heroism is the desirable as it ensures

development and guarantees collective security. The paper makes advocacy for a reduction in poverty which is crippling the lives of the people by the government to alleviate the hardship that is being experienced by the masses. Again, it is necessary that basic amenities such as food, water, shelter, education, health services, road and power should be made available to the people as a means of consolidating social security in the country. The point from this drama is that social justice, development and national security will advance if the majority of the citizenry are provided with basic necessities to sustain their lives.

Introduction

The history of human race as typified in the contemporary experience is replete with situations where drama has been used as vital instrument for entertainment, education, information and as a healing agent which brings succour to the afflicted. Moreover, theatrical experiences have also shown that drama in whatever form it is performed has remained a unifying factor and a tool for mass mobilization which the artist deploys as a mirror in examining the society for positive action. It has been observed that the dramatist from the written plays and the performances in the theatre galvanizes the masses to work towards the upliftment of their society and through satire discourages those who go against the aspirations of the people. So, the theatre artist from the classical Greek to Roman period and then to our contemporary world has been championing the cause for positive change in the society. The dramatist is an all time activist who never sleeps or folds his hands in silence while the society is engulfed in crisis but rather participates and gingers the people for mass action in order to bring into focus an enabling environment which creates the opportunity for the people to survive. This struggle has continued to be the preoccupation of the theatre artiste through history especially in Africa- Nigeria where the theatre has been used as an instrument for mass mobilization and for the cultural emancipation of the citizenry. It is this essential role of the artiste that prompted Utoh to assert that:

Nigerian playwrights have remained committed to the cause of social reforms. They use their plays as avenues to give expositions to the experiences, values and worldview of the Nigerian people. Through these expositions, the playwrights strive to achieve the social, political and moral purification which has consistently eluded the nation (133).

It is the belief of the artiste that through the theatre the people will be conscientised so as to be aware of the events taking place in their society especially the political issues which involve the struggle against their oppressors. Again Gbilekaa concurs with this vital essence of the theatre when he postulates that:

Theatre aims at influencing people's consciousness and attitudes, Nigerian playwrights aware of predominant social issues of contemporary concern, continue to tackle sensitive issues of national interest (2).

This form of mass mobilization entails the education of the people to enable them know their rights and what is expected of them in order to sustain their existence and become more relevant in the society particularly in their relationship within the political establishment to influence the decisions that affect them. This aspect of the theatre as a potent instrument of societal reawaking has been undertaken by many African artistes such as Soyinka, Nwabueze, Rotimi, Osofisan, Ngugi, Fugard, and Mbajioju. These artistes have championed the cause for the emancipation of the oppressed through their drama. Before proceeding further it is important to clarify some keywords such as social justice, and National Security which are the basis of this study.

Explication of Concept

Social Justice

It is important to examine the concept of social justice within the context of this study to enable us understand the point of focus. This is because justice is commonly used and applied with diversified meanings depending on the circumstances and the user. In the wisdom of Onuorah contained in the Citation of the 2008 Ogbakoha Lecture entitled "Of Customary Practices and Natural Justice"

Justice is a term that is very frequently used to the extent that its meaning and import are often taken for granted. Yet justice is a nebulous term, employed by various people and interests with different applications. It is often used to refer to what is morally right, fair and equitable. It is the belief that every individual and group is entitled to fair an equal rights and treatment. (1)

He goes further to highlight the condition on which justice could be achieved in our society. According to Onuorah

Justice is achieved when an unjust act is appropriately redressed and the victim adequately compensated. Justice also implies that an offender is held accountable for his offence and perhaps punished for such offences. (1)

This goes to show that utmost respect for the fundamental human rights vested on the citizenry is a precondition for the attainment of justice in the society. It then implies that anyone who is interested in having peace, progress and security should also be even more concerned in the enthronement of justice where the citizenry will be given an equal opportunity which guarantees their survival within the society.

Let us then look at social justice within the context of this study in relation to its relevance to the development of the society. This is necessary because social justice guarantees the rights of the citizenry and offers them the freedom to access the resources available in the society for the benefit of all. Within the social justice system every citizen is given the right to work to make a livelihood which profits will in turn be utilized as a contribution to the development as well as the sustenance of the national security. It is important to begin by referring to the originators of the ideas we use today in this discourse to highlight the fact that social justice as a concept which is still very relevant within our context and in the contemporary world comes into usage through the coinage of Jusuit Luigi Tapare hinged on the teachings of Thomas Aquinas and Anthonio Rosmini. It has since then become a vital instrument of governance in societal relationship among different segments of the society. According to Tapare

Social justice generally refers to the idea of creating a society or institution that is based on the principles of equality and solidarity, that understands and values human rights, and that recognizes the dignity of every human being. (1)

Again he goes on to emphasize that:

Social justice is based on the concept of human rights and equality and involves a greater degree of economic

egalitarianism through progressive taxation income redistribution, or even property redistribution. (1)

It follows that an equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation to the enjoyment of every citizen is fundamental to the attainment of social justice. When a segment of the country for example, the ruling class is enjoying the wealth of the nation while the others – the lower class is suffering in abject poverty, there is the tendency that there will be friction and division among the citizenry. This income dichotomy will in turn threaten national security which is based on the cooperation of the citizenry to operate within the law. This seems to have prompted John Rawls to identify some basic liberties that guarantee social justice which include:

- a. Freedom of thought
- b. Liberty of conscience as it affects relationships on the grounds of religions, philosophy, and morality.
- c. Political liberties (e.g. Representative democratic institutions, freedom of speech and the press, and freedom of assembly.
- d. Freedom of association
- e. Freedoms necessary for the liberty and integrity of the person (vis: Freedom from slavery, freedom of movement and a reasonable degree of freedom to choose one's occupation), and
- f. Rights and liberties covered by the rule of law.

From the ongoing, it is clear that the attainment of social justice and national security is achievable when the rights of the citizenry are guaranteed by the constitution as well as implemented by the government to ensure that every member contributes to the development of the country and the maintenance of national security.

National Security

Having looked at social justice, let us also examine the concept of national security as it relates to our study to enable us understand how they affect each other and the development of the country generally. It is pertinent to start by referring to the United States of America where national security has been given a top priority in line with its urgency as it affects their people, allies and partners in different parts of the world. This is necessary so that those

concerned with our national security in Nigeria can learn to accord security the priority it deserves in the country's effort to emancipate and establish itself as an independent nation. In the words of United States President Barack Obama National security is

The security of its citizens and ... allies and partners; a strong innovative, and growing... economy in an open international economic system that promotes opportunity and prosperity; Respect for universal values at home and around the world; and an international order advanced by ... leadership that promotes peace.

It is observed from this definition that the national security encompasses every aspect of a nation's aspirations ranging from security to the economy and consequently whoever that is in charge of government endeavours to maintain national security to discourage actions that threatens its survival.

In another vein, the Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopaedia defines national security as:

The requirement to maintain the survival of the state through the use of economic, diplomacy, power projection and political power... In order to possess national security, a nation needs to possess economic security, energy security, environmental security etc. (1)

This implies that a sound economic base backed by steady power supply that guarantees the empowerment of the citizenry to a secure means of livelihood is paramount to the attainment of national security and development which our country is desperately searching to fulfill in the task of nationhood. It has become necessary at this juncture to examine the issues that influence national security within the context of this study.

Unemployment: Insecurity

From this study, it has been observed that a country like Nigeria endowed with natural and human resources yet ironically populated by large numbers of unemployed youth and beggars roaming the streets in search of livelihood will not hope to be adequately protected as the threat of insecurity will emanate from within among those who are hungry and jobless. A typical example could be seen from Rotimi's drama under study entitled *If...* where

Adiagha (Mama Ukot) was forced to abandon her husband's residence in Port Harcourt for her father's home at Ekpene Ukpa with her only son Ukot due to family insecurity arising from the fact that her husband Akpan has not been able to provide the basic necessities for the sustenance of the marriage. She felt that the best option is to leave the marriage since her dreams of marriage have not been fulfilled through her husband. In her calculation, there is no need to continue with a failed marriage as far as she is concerned because it does not have the anticipated security to provide their basic needs particularly for her child Ukot. She laments her miserable condition and thus orders Ukot to be prepared to leave his father

You there- Ukot! Crazy as your father, I don't want to start looking for you the moment I' m ready to get out of this hell, understand! Off I will go! You bet me! And if you think your crazy father will have a kobo for your transport fare, you're just as crazy as that father of yours. On foot it will be for you! Foot! And alone from Port Harcourt here, all the way to Ekpene Ukpa! Bet it! (37)

From every indication she has lost hope in her marriage and the society which produces it. Adiagha in her lamentation of the failure of her country Nigeria symbolized by the ruling government observed that the greatness of a nation is measured based on the ability of the citizenry to feed themselves and not by singing and talking big grammar which her husband Akpan engages with Guevara and Banji. She retorts:

Everyday a return work; e eat; open book; e go butut, dey talk grammar with Che Guevara and Banji. De e go begin sing: Tio lele, tio lele ... Nigeria will be great! "Nigeria go great,, na by sing nahim country dey take great? Ebn? No be inside belle nahim person dey take know country wey great? Una answer now?

Indeed, it is the availability of food and other social amenities such as water, road, power, and health services that the greatness and standard of living of a country is measured. According Adiagha, a country like Nigeria with large population of beggars and hungry citizenry can neither be said to be great nor secured. This is because "a hungry man is an angry man" who can attack or be recruited by the enemies of the state and be used as an instrument of destabilization and threat to the nation

The country is in serious crisis when many of the employable youth are jobless with no means of earning a sustainable means of livelihood. This implies that they can do “anything” or any form of job whether “good or bad” as long as they get money from it to support their struggle for survival. Experience from this study has also shown that the jobless youth who live by uncertainty and frustration are threat to national security, government and neighbours. This seems to be the opinion canvassed by Imo State Deputy Governor Agbaso while expressing concern on the level of insecurity arising from unemployment in the country when he observed that;

The people must be kept busy. The poor people in our society are hungry. A hungry man does not sleep. As long as the hungry poor do not sleep, the rest of the country will never sleep. (7)

Agbaso’s observation corresponds with Esiemokhai's security strategy based on the provision of food for the populace. He insists that:

National security starts with food security because a hungry man is an angry man. The populace needs personal security from hoodlums, armed robbers, pen robbers and muggers. Job security is important so that citizens can live meaningful lives and secure their homes, children, wives, ageing parents and kiths and kin. (1)

Indeed the ruling class will be restless as long as the masses on the streets are not certain on how they can secure their means of existence. Many have therefore attributed the current security crisis threatening the country to the unemployment being experienced particularly in the North. This development prompted the former national security adviser Azazi at the Northern Transformation Impact Summit to assert that:

... There is massive unemployment all over Nigeria our Northern states are particularly hard hit. The 2011 national unemployment rate is 23.9%, but the rates are 60.6% in Yobe, 42% in Zamfara and 39.4% in Niger... Likewise, the North, in general, features lower per capita income, vis-à-vis other parts of the country. The North-west has the highest poverty rate in the nation; 71% of its people living below \$1 per day. (2)

Consequently, the jobless youth who live within the above area will find it difficult to survive and make a sustainable existence and owing to this, there is every tendency that many of them may be recruited as anti-government-people's agents by organizations working against the government. This situation is very unfortunate on the part of the government and their leaders for not being able to care for the citizens.

Education

It is important to note that education is at the centre of every human development and the bedrock of any progressive society as such it requires serious attention in relation to national security, social justice and development generally where the citizenry are given the opportunity to attain it through incentives from governments, humanitarian organisations and well meaning individuals. When the people are educated, they become aware of their responsibilities to the state especially as they relate to national security which ought to be the concern of everyone. National security is not a matter that is treated in isolation but rather relates to the level of progress and consciousness the people have attained in being aware of the events that take place in their environment through efficient information system. It is noted that any society which is mostly populated by illiterates will often find itself descending into anarchy due to the fact that many of the citizenry are manipulated and also used as agents to destabilize the state.

From the drama, we note that the intellectuals comprising the lawyers, doctors and teachers who live in the multi-tenanted building were ready to educate their co-tenants on the need to remain united in solidarity so as to be able to fight their common enemy- their landlord and other oppressors. They reminded the tenants the fact that once their solidarity is broken, the landlord will find it easier to deal with them on their individual capacities and defeat them. So, there is the need for them to work together to achieve their collective interest by voting for the candidate whom they feel will work to improve their lives. Hamidu insists that:

If the masses, the oppressed masses ... again for a change will use their votes as tools for their own freedom. If that fails, then mass-struggle becomes imperative ..., solidarity. The day our solidarity dissolves is the day our humanity ends and our worthlessness begins. ... Nobody should be deemed useless in a struggle against oppression. (15-16).

Through education, the tenants become aware of their situation and then recognize their landlord as a common enemy who represents the ruling party-PPP that is oppressing the people. In the drama, Papa re-echoes this in his words of encouragement to the tenants thus:

We must let the landlord know that we all here are one. If because we refuse to take oath to vote for him in the coming elections, this now is his way of punishing us, fair enough. But let him punish all of us. No exception. I see divide and rule tactics at work here and we must resist them at all cost. (13).

Once the people are divided, their security apparatuses will in turn disintegrate and affect development negatively. This seems to be the current situation obtainable in our country where the citizenry are divided along religious beliefs namely Islam and Christianity and is posing a serious security challenge which is threatening the unity of the country.

Politics: Leadership

From this study, it has been observed that when the members of the ruling class in government become more interested in making money for themselves, there is then the tendency for the masses to revolt against them in varied ways deemed beneficial to their needs and aspirations. Again, when public utilities are diverted to personal use, those who do not benefit will always find ways of protesting against those rulers oppressing them. This is the characteristics of the PPP which is the party in power in Rotimi's drama as seen from Banji perspective and words:

... The big shots are back in powers. All government production machines will henceforth become personal or party property. Nigeria we hail thee! What must we expect next? The return of Sirens and outriders! Kpu-kpu-kpu-kpu- Fieenn! All traffic stop for five hours! The rulers of the nation are flying to Alaska to ... urinate! Vuum (72)

The landlord in show of arrogance and raw power ordered the arrest of Garuba and even Betty by the police and also ordered them beaten by the tugs. This is to prove that he has the money and power to deal with them as he pleases to satisfy his political ambition. This angers Banji to the point of

attributing that this might have affected Onyema psychologically and eventually led to his death. He concludes that:

... The arrest and brutal manhandling of the common man proved – too revolting for his young mind to bear. He must have asked himself one question: does a boy like him honest and sensitive- does he stand a chance in a nation with no value for the dignity of man? A nation where money and position mean everything? What is the future of our children? Indeed where is the future of Africa herself? (80)

This is an abuse of political privilege by the ruling class symbolized by the landlord's oppressive manhandling of the tenants which should not be the case for a leader. The search for an ideal leader has been the preoccupation of Rotimi in this play. This is why he creates in the play heroes who identify with the people and live with the members of the community they represent.

The cancellation of Mama's scheduled flight due to the fact that members of PPP and their supporters are being conveyed to Lagos to celebrate their victory after the elections is very unpatriotic on the part on the party's leadership. The cancellation affected all domestic flights including that of Mama who was going for medical treatment. According to Banji:

Not only the Port Harcourt – Lagos flight. All domestic services are being grounded for two days. Why? To convey members and well-wishers of the PPP to Lagos to celebrate their victory (71)

It is noted that a good political leadership of the PPP ought to have given Mama and others in her condition a chance in the plane conveying party members to Lagos in order to enable them receive medical treatment they need urgently. A leadership that is people's oriented guarantees security of life and properties of the citizens which are the basis of national security.

Healthcare

The provision of a functional healthcare delivery system is a precondition for the attainment of social justice, national security and development in the country. From the perspective of the drama, it has been shown that it is only when the citizenry are healthy or physically fit that they can contribute

meaningfully to the sustenance of national security and development. As long as the majority of the citizenry are locked out of power and not provided with basic healthcare such as a well-equipped ambulance, drugs and other services to enhance their normal existence in the society, there is the tendency that health related problems and crisis will persist among the people. Fundamentally, social justice demands that the rights of the citizenry be given priority and this in turn means that they contribute to the sustenance of national security and development. In our drama *If...*, Onyema dies due to neglect on the part of sister Chinwe who was entrusted with his care but abandons him to accompany Mama to the airport and non availability of medical facility like the ambulance. On Onyema's death, Dr. Hamidu who tried to assist him lamented on the deplorable condition and expressed his frustration thus:

I've never felt so, useless in my goodam life. Allah! As a trained doctor, I'm useless here, and I'll never forgive this country for that. To think that there we were- in the streets, the boy gasping for life. All we needed was an oxygen mask. That's all. In a land where human life means something there would be telephones that work. In minutes a well equipped ambulance would be at your doorstep. But here ... how can you work and claim to be useful without the tools of your trade? How?

From Hamidu's experience with Onyema, it is difficult to provide an efficient healthcare delivery to the citizenry as long as the basic facilities are not made available. In this condition as long as Onyema had proved, the doctor became handicapped in the discharge of his duties of saving life owing to the fact that a functional ambulance which would have been used in reviving his life was not available at that critical moment. This is the condition many of our citizens confront on daily basis in their struggle to survive in their country. It is unfortunate when many of the citizens are allowed to die casually due to inadequate healthcare, there is the tendency that the national security and development will be affected negatively as many will certainly become unproductive as well as dependants without making any useful contribution to the advancement of the country.

Conclusion

Our concern in this paper has been on how the advancement of social justice, national security and development can be achieved through drama from the perspective of Rotimi's *If...*, a tragedy of the ruled. It is important to note that national security is a serious matter that is not treated in isolation but in relation to other factors such as food security, shelter, education, health, politics and economics. Other issues that should be given consideration are military, environmental security, poverty alleviation, power, natural resources, gainful employment, respect for human rights, freedom of expression and information, diplomacy, and working in line with other international organisations and multinational corporations for the attainment of a sustainable security which is people's oriented.

From this study, it has been shown for instance that it will be difficult to achieve social justice, national security and development in a country like Nigeria where majority of the citizens are uneducated, homeless and hungry. Many of the citizens in this category are readily available to be recruited and used by the enemies of the state for destabilization purposes and therefore, it is necessary for the government to provide basic education, food and housing schemes for the citizens especially for the low income earners. The government should also in partnership with the private sector create job opportunities for the masses to take them off the streets and enable them become productive in order to contribute to the national security and development. It is only when the people are educated, employed and sheltered that they can willingly work in cooperation with the security operatives to maintain peace. The health of the citizens is very important to the sustenance of national security and as such effort should be made to establish hospitals and health centres that are equipped to cater for the health needs of the citizenry. In the words of Esiemokhia:

A state must secure the health of its citizens by erecting adequate medical centres and hospitals. Then, it would have no reason to rush sick citizens to other nations that built suitable medical facilities for their own citizens. (1)

A situation where the citizens like the case of Onyema in the drama *If...* are allowed to die casually should be discouraged by the provision of a functional ambulance that will be at the service of every community. A country that is populated by healthy and economically empowered citizenry

will surely contribute to national security and development because they are encouraged by the state.

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