

**IDEOLOGICAL DIALECTICS IN POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT
OF NIGERIAN NEWER DRAMAS: AN ANALYSIS OF SOJI
COLE'S *EMBERS***

Adewole Kehinde Balogun and Olaide Taofiq Nasir

Federal University Oye-Ekiti
Kehinde.balogun@fuoye.edu.ng,
08137107811, +234 803 388 5404

Abstract

The contemporary Nigerian socio-political situation has created an imbalance where the ruling class oppresses and suppresses the masses. Similarly, the bourgeoisie stifles the proletariat by creating unequal distribution of opportunities for the creation of wealth against the proletariat. Nigerian Playwrights have engaged profoundly the foregoing socio-political situation, by using drama as a means of communication. This research undertakes a comparative study of the political engagement in Soji Cole's newer play, *Embers*. It examines the ideological dialectics in Cole's *Embers* against the dramaturgic postulations of the first and second generations of Nigeria playwrights. Using the theoretical frameworks of Conflict Perspective, the study employs the summative content analysis of the selected text to gather relevant qualitative data. The study discovers in Cole's *Embers*, that the newer playwrights have become less ideologically inclined in political engagement, as they portray the proletariat as being more confrontational, angrier, more emotional and far more rebellious against inept leadership. As such, they earnestly yearn for a change for better leadership and are ready to destroy the current chaotic system in a hasty desire to achieve their rebellious but patriotic desires. Against this backdrop, it is recommended that politicians should guide against tendencies capable of making them fail the people. The masses should not only clamour for responsible and responsive leaders, they should act decisively through the polls by voting for politicians who are genuinely concerned about their plight

Keywords: Marxism, Bourgeoisie, Masses, Ideological, Anger.

Explanation of keywords:

- **Marxism**

- This is an ideology developed by Karl Max and Frederick Engels. Marxism is a broad concept but in the context of this study, it basically explains or assumes that the ruling class uses their privileged positions to suppress and oppress the working class. This assumption according to the two theorists, Marx and Engels, has created a kind of class consciousness which demands that the working class or masses must rebel constantly against the ruling class in order to resist continued oppression and denial of equal opportunities to wealth creation and distribution.

Bourgeoisie

The bourgeoisie in this context refers to the ruling class, the leaders, who also, in the context of this study are Nigerian politicians elected to govern as well as political appointees, holding such offices in trust for the Nigerian populace. They are so to say, the privileged class who have privileged to be at the corridors power.

Masses

The masses in this context used here are the Nigerian working class, as well as the dregs of the Nigerian society, the market women uneducated populace and others alike who are not part of the ruling class.

Ideological:

In the context of this study, ideological is an adjective modifying or describing the approach of the early Nigerian dramatists towards the political engagement of issues plaguing the Nigerian polity. In this context, it means that the earlier dramatists espoused ideologies in treating the political issues. Such ideologies as Marxism, Negritude, feminism and others.

Anger:

Anger in the context of this study denote an apparent expression of disapproval and disillusionment at the leadership failure of the ruling class or the bourgeoisie. This expression of this disillusionment is being exhibited by the masses.

Introduction

An overview of the development of Nigerian Theatre from its pristine nature as a traditional, ritual or festival theatre to the modern stage, up till the contemporary era, has shown that politics has been one of its central thematic engagements. This is so because politics is central to humanity and Theatre belongs to the humanities. Theatre and politics thus become inseparable human endeavours. A playwright becomes quite impactful on his society when he engages the political goings on in such society, especially when such engagement is tailored towards seeking a better society through critical assessment in his writing. Such radical playwright in his bid to create a world where socialism and communalism give equal distribution of wealth and opportunities to all citizens, takes up the gauntlet in his political engagement and attempts to get rid of the ugly and huge socio-economic chasm between the haves and haves-not or the proletariat and the bourgeois class in the Nigerian society.

A run-through of the political engagement by Nigerian playwrights in the foregoing leaving has been found to be steeped in ideological dialectics which had existed between the older generation of playwrights and newer generation. It is was against this background that Osofisan in his generation created dramas that provided profound counter-narratives to the Soyinka's generation. Such counter-narratives are exemplified in Osofisan's *No More the Wasted Breed* versus Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, and *Another Raft* versus Clark's *The Raft*, among other examples.

In *No more the wasted Breed*, Osofisan argues against Soyinka's existentialist submissions that the gods ultimately decide the fate of the carrier *Emma* who is fated to sacrifice his life by taking all their shame and dirt to drown in a river. Osofisan insists that since the gods exist for humans to venerate, humans should have a choice to decide their fate, whether to venerate a caring and concerned god or do otherwise, depending on what priority such god places on their existence. So, instead of imposing a fatal tragedy on his human characters, Osofisan forces Obatala, husband of the vexed Yemoja and Yoruba god of justice, to prevail on his wife to desist from bringing untold woes on humans whose actions pollute Yemoja's river. Osofisan makes humans realize that they indeed are the architects of their lives.

Same message reverberates in Osofisan's *Another Raft*, a counter-narrative to Clark's *The Raft*, where Osofisan refuses to make the sojourners on the raft perish but find a way to collaborate to ensure their safety as against Clark's existentialist position which imposes fatal doom, as decided by the gods for the sojourners in *The Raft*. Thus, while the Soyinkan generation in focus here tended towards celebrating the dynamics of African culture as counter-narratives to dispel imperialist interpretations of African worldview, the generation of the Osofisans in this respect, were more concerned about raising the consciousness of the suffering masses towards extricating themselves from the strong holds of oppressive rule and stifling capitalism crated by both the dictatorial leaders and bourgeoisie respectively.

On political engagement, Osofisan further disclosed other areas of divergence between his generation and that of Soyinkan era when he said:

clearly, the repertory that we inherited was no longer adequate. Our predecessors had admittedly established for us a viable and credible aesthetics both of dramaturgy and performance, but at the same time engaged they had also made conspicuous and formidable obstacles and complexities that were still in the way in the areas of language and communication. Because of this, their audience was for instance, necessarily elitist, limited to the upper class of educated elite (many of whom even complained still that Soyinka, for instance, was "incomprehensible" and too "complex"). But I and my contemporaries were eager to address outlets to the mass of the people, to share ideas with them, and provoke them into active self-re-examination. (8-9).

Profound manifestations of Osofisan's positions here are found in his plays such as *Once Upon four Robbers*, *Farewell to a Cannibal rage* and *Morountodun* which were plays with intensive proposition of Marxist ideologies in addressing the political challenges of the nation. Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, *Hopes of the Living Dead* and *Holding Talks* among others also come as classical examples

of Osofisan's position. So also does Bode Sowande's *Farewell to Babylon* is an example of the foregoing position.

However, the second generation of Nigerian playwrights did not only deploy Marxist ideological stance in political engagement, in Sowande's dialectics, we found a fusion of the spiritual essence and revolutionary aesthetics. Sowande in his major plays, which include in particular, his trilogy, i.e *The Night Before*, *Farewell to Bayblon* and *Flamingo*, espouses twin ideologies of spiritual regeneration cum Marxist revolutionary ideals through his characters as portrayed in Onitan and Moniran, who are two main revolutionary figures in the trilogy.

Saint Gbilekaa corroborates the foregoing assertion while comparing Kole Omotosho's purely Marxist ideologically bent theatre with Sowande's : “

...both Sowande and Omotosho aim at a popular theatre to conscientise the wretched of the earth for a mass social revolution, in spite of the fact that their theatre captures the political and economic contradictions in Nigeria since independence, and in spite of the fact that both playwrights explain the suffering of the masses through a theory of exploitation by the bourgeois class of which they are also members, Sowande's gaze is not as steady as Omotosho's. while the latter's fixation or vision is not tampered with by any ethical considerations in the spiritual and metaphysical sense, the former sees the necessity for a certain kind of dualism in the attainment of a socialist state. Sowande sees in his alternative society a marriage between egalitarian and spiritual essences. (153).

The third generation of Nigerian playwrights, to which Ahmed Yerima, Rasaki Ojo Bakare, Olu Obafemi, Esiaba Irobi and others belonged, toed same path with the Second generation by delving deeply into Marxist ideologies to raise the consciousness of the masses with a view to propel them to take their destinies in their own hands. They also showed a tendency towards accommodating other radical, post-

structuralist ideologies which involve deconstruction and cultural materialism among others.

Yerima's counter-narrative to Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* is located in his, *Abobaku*, in which he presents two characters that reject the existentialist norm of being a societal scapegoat but who end up paying dearly for their defiance. Same way, Bakare, in his play, *The gods and Scavengers*, counter-narrates the motif of submitting to fate as espoused by Ola Rotimi in his play, *The gods are not to blame*. Bakare challenges the proletariat to take their destiny in their own hands and dethrone oppressive political\bourgeois class and refuse some dictates of some gods who are rarely concerned about their well-being.

The third generation of Nigerian playwrights has also nursed the contemporary playwrights who includes among others, Sunny Odo, Sam Ukala, Jonathan Desen Mbachaga, Soji Cole, Abdulrashhed Adeoye, Emmy Udegu, Sola Balogun, Laide Nasir, and Tosin Tume. These playwrights have moved beyond engaging the political class with Marxist ideologies to experimenting with Post-structuralist propositions which include feminisms, psychoanalysis, and globalization among others. It should be noted that the political environment that characterized each of these generations have determined, to a large extent, the nature of dramaturgical visions and missions by playwrights. For instance, the need to get rid of the oppressive and exploitative practices of colonial masters had birthed staged dramas of the Hubert Ogunde era. Egwugwu Illah explicates on the mission and vision of the pre-independence Nigerian indigenous drama as represented by Ogunde when he said:

"In the early 30s, typified by Ogunde's theatre, the ideological project in the drama was raising popular consciousness against colonialism. From *Bread and Bullet* to *Worsen than Crime*, Ogunde wanted to show that colonial rule and exploitation was worse than crime. And for this, he had running battles with the colonial authorities, leading to his incarceration in Jos ...it is evident from the acclaim that Ogunde received from the Nationalist elite, especially Nnamdi Azikiwe's *West African Pilot*, that the ideological project in the drama of this period, was to develop a counter hegemonic cultural consciousness for the decolonizing process." (6).

Also, the need to reassert African culture and imprint it into world consciousness as explicated by Osofisan, necessitated the existentialist dramas of both Soyinka and Clark. This was just as the need for female visibility in politics, corporate world and clamour for other equal rights in matrimony, work places among others, had given birth to the dramas of Efua Sutherland, Flora Nwapa and later Tess Onwueme, Omolara Ogundipe and such other African feminist playwrights.

The political maladministration by the military occasioned by corrupt practices of earlier civilian leaders who misused the opportunity for self-rule handed down to them by colonial masters, led to the Marxist war waged in the dramas of Osofisan and his contemporaries who chose to raise the consciousness of the masses to rebel against oppressive, suppressive and exploitative practices and actions of the bourgeoisie and unscrupulous, corrupt politicians, in order to bring about an egalitarian Nigerian society.

Sadly, such political incompetence, insensitivity on the part of political leaders and a lack of political will to effect positive changes for meaningful and visible socioeconomic development and growth continue to preoccupy contemporary playwrights' engagement with the political class.

This necessities Osofisan's submission on why the theatre must be political and why dramatists must engage the political class and carry on this assignment critically, hence, he says:

...history has trapped us: and not only by the force of tradition, but also by the kind of governments we have been saddled with since independence. It has trapped us by the treachery and travesties of the ruling classes that have succeeded the colonial powers and which continue to hold our people under siege, and by the crying needs of the suffering majority of the populace. Our theatre is condemned to be political, and so by that very fact of it's political involvement, to be 'subversive' of the current entrenched interests. The fact is simply that if we must change our societies, if the theatre must fulfill its vocation as an agent of progress, the dramatists who create it have no option but to pith their camp in the side

of the common people, and against the admittedly formidable agents of the ruling classes.(70-71).

While agreeing with Osofisan's foregoing Marxist position recommending that the dramatist should raise the consciousness of the masses against oppressive agents of the ruling classes, it is noteworthy that the dramatists must also enjoin the masses to not only rebel against the ruling classes by condemning their oppression, intimidation and suppression, but also by aspiring to take over power from these ruling classes by way of voting massively against them during the seasonal polls and replacing the bad leaders with members of the proletariat class, who understands the pain, plight, and needs of the common man and is in a better position to attend to such needs when given the opportunity.

The current culture of vote selling and buying which gives politicians easy access to positions of authorities and undue advantage to siphon public treasury at the expense of the masses must be kicked against by the masses. The dramatists in contemporary Nigeria must now go beyond inspiring the masses to cross examine his pitiable situation and criticize the ruling class as Osofisan and others have espoused in their plays which were propositions decipherable for the political situation of the times they wrote.

Today, the dramatists must raise the masses' consciousness making them realize the fact that they have a lion's share of the blame on their woes, that they really are the cause of the untold hardship, widening gulf between them and the ruling class in terms of socio-economic empowerment and that the masses can no longer continue to live in a fool's paradise by accepting financial and other forms of inducement that only provide temporary excitement and allow the unscrupulous, corrupt and inept politicians remain in power and perpetuate the widespread of poverty, unemployment and insecurity that have engulfed the Nigerian state in contemporary times.

This implies that the playwright himself must now be a rebel in engaging the political space. Iyourwuese Hagher, writing on the writer who also can be a playwright, as a rebel says:

Writers everywhere threaten the oppressive status quo, even when everybody in the society is bent on protecting it. This is the why in the Soviet Union; desperate attempts

were made to control writers. Such attempts always fail, and the writer, like Prometheus, or in our local myths, Ogun or Alom is always triumphant, in bringing greater knowledge, and the "uncreated conscience" of the race into being (41).

In the same stream of thought, Osundare also posits that *a writer has no alternative to being in constant conflict with oppression...and that his words must be nagging, unremitting serving as the guilty conscience of the king and inciting the masses to revolt.* (7). Playwrights who write in the line of the aforementioned thought, usually create authorial voices expressed through significant characters in their dramatic renditions. Bakare chose the authorial voice expressed by Dr. *Akitikori Onaofunogbegunguneja*, to speak against the ills in the Ivory Tower's system, caricatured by Maria Pinto University in his play, *Once upon a Tower*.

Akitikori is the rebel, representing the playwright, Bakare, who is a writer writing the play as a rebel. Other rebellious/playwrights included Soyinka as exemplified in many of his works, one of which is the *Beautification of Area Boys*, Osofisan as shown in his *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*, among other plays. In... *Cannibal Rage*, Osofisan rebels against the usual practice of thuggery, violence and corruption bedeviling the nation's political space. It is in this light that Osundare also posits that *"a writer has no alternative to being in constant with oppression... and that his words must be nagging, unremitting serving as the guilty conscience of the king and inciting the masses to revolt.* :(7).

Indeed, it is pertinent to submit that, over the time, Nigerian playwrights of the Marxist leaning have had no alternative than to pitch their tents with the masses and rebel against oppressive tendencies of the capitalist, rulers and politicians whose activities have always created for the masses hostile and stifling environment inimical to growth and development.

Conflict Perspective Theory

This sociological tool of enquiry in scholarship has its roots from Karl Marx writing on the class struggle between capitalists and the

proletariat. (This, 17). In this area, it shares a resemblance with Marxism in drama studies.

Conflict perspective is one of three major theoretical perspectives of the sociologists, the two others are the structural functionalism and symbiotic interactionism.

Conflict perspective has evolved to counter the narrative of structural functionalism that society must maintain a kind of stability, status quo, which may or are usually unpalatable to other class of same society whose role are equally germane to socio-development. Conflict perspective rather argues that there must be change in such status quo for equity and justice.

According to Thio:

Structural functionalism holds that each member or class of the society has roles that are interdependent and that " out of each of these interdependent parts come a stable social order. If something happens, to disrupt the social order, its parts will adjust in a way that produces a new stable order.(15)

Such perspective has developed from the writing of Spencer and Durkheim. Meanwhile, in the views of Marx on conflict perspective, conflict between economic classes was the key force in society (17).

The onus of the conflict perspective theoretical postulation is succinctly summed up in Thio's explication when says that: *...The conflict perspective leads sociologists to ask questions such as " which groups are more powerful and which are weaker? How do powerful groups benefit from the existing social order, and how are the weaker groups hurt?..(17).*

Political engagement in Soji Cole's *Embers*

Embers is primarily the playwright's earnest response to issues surrounding insecurity and the lack of political will to tackle the challenge in Nigeria.

The contemporariness of the play is evident in the fact that it is a critical portrayal of the insurgent activities of the dreaded religious/terrorist seat called Boko Haram. The insurgent activities

became pronounced during the Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's tenure as President of Nigeria, from the 2009 to 2014.

A significant pointer to this fact is a major strike by the terrorist group that shook the nation to her marrows in 2014; it is a scary abduction of 276 teenage girls from the Government Girls Secondary School, in Chibok, in Borno State. That historic but tragic incident marked the emergence of a more devious dimension of the activities of the dreaded seat as it was a major diversion from its initial indiscriminate bombings of churches, market stalls, offices and other public arenas to send several innocent souls into their untimely graves.

The adoption of the Chibok girls and several other successful adoptions by the Boko Haram terrorist seat till date, which included those of our young boys and other girls, is a strong indication that the terrorists are determined to destroy Nigeria's future if not stopped on time. In his attempt to expose and dissect the root causes of this one major challenge of the nation, Cole in *Embers*, x-trays several other underlining issues/challenges and failures that characterize our system and bedevil that nation. He presents these other challenges as root causes to bigger issues such as the palpable insecurity.

Cole's apt response is borne out of genuine concern and patriotic zeal to engage the unpalatable issues bedeviling our father land. The play succeeds immensely in x-traying the various phases and spots of the socio-political challenges in our nation which eventually culminate in dire straits. The challenges include broken homes, poverty, irresponsible parenting, and corruption of public servants in virtually all sectors of the country. Others include government's insensitivity to the plight of the teeming masses, greed, selfishness, inordinate ambition, electoral frauds, disunity, nepotism, tribalism, religious hypocrisy, government hypocrisy and irresponsibility among others.

While the play dissects the foregoing challenges/failures, it succeeds in putting a larger blame for their existence on leadership as has been offered by selfish, greedy, garrulous, insensitive and unscrupulous elements that people our polity. This study shall attempt textual exegesis of *Embers* with copious highlights of the foregoing challenges. But before delving into the textual exegesis, let us consider first the synopsis of the play.

Embers tells the story of an Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) camp somewhere in the northern part of the country in our contemporary time.

The play pictures series of imaginary daily occurrences inside such camp. The characters in focus are victims of the destructive activities of the insurgents, who are only very young girls and a middle aged woman by name Talatu. The young girls are Atai, the government spy although a victim of insurgence, as well as Idayat and Memunah who have been indoctrinated by the Boko Haram seat when they were captured after the attacks on their villages and killing of their parents, siblings and men.

Talatu, appears both a victim and a survivor. She is old and experienced enough to give hope to the young girls who have become depressed and traumatized after having witnessed the horror of violence, mindless killings, and destruction of their homes, siblings and parents. She tells the girls stories of her past life, her triumphs, travails, and failures but she tells such stories and spices them with messages of hope with a view to I spite them to pursue a better life and future for themselves.

Unknown to Talatu, the girls belong to different secret camps and have different missions on the camp. There are those brought in into the camp as spies of government whose duty is to give privileged information about those who are also spies of the enemy, which is the Boko Haram seat. While Atai belongs to the former, Idayat and Memunah are part of the latter group. Talatu remains innocent and neutral. Atai tells on Memunah and she is raped to death by soldiers whose duty is to protect the victims and initiate proper investigation into suspects such as Memunah when they are caught. Idayat confesses to an innocent Talatu at the eleventh hour that she belongs to the camp of insurgents who are also spying on government with a destructive aim to strike when the rare opportunity presents itself.

Embers presents a confusing and hopeless situation where nothing sensible or progressive would be achieved in the fight against insurgence because the system has largely been compromised. This is because the security sector, as represented by the soldiers and the camp commander have failed in their duty as they delight more in taking advantage of the young girls and women they are duty bound to protect. They kill and maim their men who are their husbands and brothers. The soldiers abandon their duty to protect the young girls, children and women who are victims of the mindless war and equally fail to bring to book culprits of insurgence by handing them over to the authorities for proper investigation and prosecution so as to get to the root of the

insecurity challenges and solve the problems. Thus, rather than toe the honourable and patriotic path of service, the soldiers revel in extra judicial killings of the suspects and mindless rape of the female victims. They therefore create an impression that they are equally terrorists in state uniforms.

Given this hopeless situation, the only remedy as demanded by the indoctrinated girls is to self-destruct the whole system so that perhaps, a new generation can spring up from the debris. Hence, Cole ensures that the hunters become haunted, Idayat's camp gains upper hand as they eventually succeed in blowing up the IDP camp and that is even done when several politicians, who are their primary target, are present in the camp for a ceremony which turns out to be their ruin in an eventual orgy of violence that makes the politicians pay dearly for their sins.

The play is divided into three main parts, each given titles that are quite symbolic and poetic. Movement one, entitled: **Testimony**, introduces the victims, as they unearth in different narratives their world of misery, desolation, pains and faint hope among others. Victims of insurgence who survived the arson, mindless abductions and killings by the terrorist group narrate their ordeal one after the other to present the gory picture of a situation of palpable hopelessness that characterize their world.

The second part is entitled: **Discovery**. This is the part the bubble begins to burst as the real identity of some of the girls, who secretly belong to the terrorists group, are revealed. Particularly, Memunah. There is also a vivid portrayal of the disillusionment of the soldiers against the corrupt system and their pains and frustrations about a system that has nothing progressive to offer them. The second movement also exposes, through the various dialogues by the soldiers, the palpable corruption in the Nigerian system as discernible in virtually all sectors, i.e. the Executive, Judiciary and Legislature. This part also satirizes the insensitivity, greed, hypocrisy, selfishness and apparent failures of politicians.

The third and final movement tagged: **Smithereens**, is the climax of the dramatic rendition. It reveals more shocking details about the true identities of the girls, Atai is revealed eventually as a traitor while Idayat and Memunah are exposed as terrorists. But the tragic end of the play is heart rending as Idayat and her accomplices in the same

terrorist camp, succeed in blowing up the camp with the guilty politicians, hypocritical soldiers and sadly, other innocent victim of insurgence. Then tragic end of the play thus give a central message that evil triumphs where good is neglected and the system is replete with negative exactions.

Greed, selfishness and corruption as roots of bad leadership in *Embers*

Greed has forced many leaders to become more self-centered and corrupt. The untamed craze to covet and amass wealth for personal aggrandizement and the satisfaction of insatiable lust, instead of advancing the progress of the society, has pushed leaders to becoming vampires sucking deep into the lean flesh of the masses.

Leaders and many who are privileged to be in government divert monies, social amenities and welfare packages meant to alleviate the suffering of the masses and provide them with socio-economic security and fulfilment, for personal use. They leave the masses to grope in dark alleys of poverty and squalor and wait for crumbs from them in form of inducements to secure votes during elections and perpetuate continued insensitive leadership in government. The consequences of such corrupt practices are massive unemployment for the teeming Nigerian youths and graduates, lack of lasting, effective and adequate social amenities, and general disillusionment among the citizenry.

The foregoing are x-trayed in *Embers* through many of the characters, i.e the disillusioned soldiers employed to protect the people but who end up molesting and terrorizing them, the unfortunate girls and women who fall victims of deprivation, rape and several other assaults from both their predators, Boko Haram insurgents and supposed protectors, who some bad elements in the army. They are also the agents of government who covet eighty percent of relief materials for victims of insurgents in the IDP camps among others. Thus we have dialogues in the play that decry these issues, yearning for urgent attention by government to address them.

After she had revealed to the young girls how she was once sexually assaulted by Bayero, one of the soldiers detailed by the government to protect them from the marauding Boko Haram insurgents, Talatu was dumbfounded and angry to listen to emotional outbursts from the young, supposedly innocent girls who vent their

anger on a repulsive system that rapes their humanity, thus the following dialogue ensues:

MEMUNAH: You see. You see what I mean any time I say that life in the forest with...

TALATU: No! Don't say that my daughter. The hassle we experience here is no reason to compare it with life in captivity.

IDAYAT: Goggo, the hassle here is like being in captivity. How do we define a life of freedom when it bears all the signs of captivity? The real Boko Haram is here, not in the forest of Sambisa. They are here with us every day. They live with you and me! The Boko Harams are those Government people who brought ten bags of rice to the camp and announced in the news that they came with hundred. The Boko Harams are those Camp Officers who steal seven out of those ten bags of rice and leave us with three to share for food. The Boko Harams are those in uniforms whose job is to keep us safe here but drag out the girls every night to have a fill of their lusty...

TALATU: Stop it, Idayat! Stop it! Those soldiers must not hear what you are saying!

IDAYAT: Goggo, I am sorry. I think the option is simple. The system has to destroy itself to regenerate.

TALATU: Leave that to the politicians, girl!

MEMUNAH: The politicians will keep destroying us, Goggo. What we need now is a revolution. A sweeping revolution!

TALATU: Revolution also swallows the good. Like war, it can also destroy the innocents.

IDAYAT: The innocents can be bystanders and watch as the revolution sweeps.

TALATU: Everything turns to fuel when fire rages. Let us continue to hope and pray to Allah for change.

MEMUNAH: That's a lazy approach. Even God gets tired of too much hymn. (*Embers, 15-17*)

The consequences of bad leadership that produces disillusionment among the young generation is caricatured in this same movement with the expository dialogue among the soldiers themselves who register their displeasure for the ill-fated country. This is owing to massive unemployment because the economic sector has been raped by corrupt politicians and government officials. Thus the following incisive chats:

Intervening Scene

SANDBAG 2 (A more decorous conversation is going on between the two young soldiers. One is chewing on a cob of maize).

SOLDIER 4: If I had a choice after leaving the Polytechnic, I won't be here. I had to join the Army out of no choice. There was no job around. My girlfriend was behaving funny. I knew I had to make a choice, even if it appeared like a desperate choice.

SOLDIER 3: It's a shame. I had always dreamed of joining the Army. I did the examination for the Defense Academy three times. Three times I was not selected. I had to join the Army as a recruit. But I still love the job.

SOLDIER 4: I am only doing the job for the money. The pay is small but at least it is still something. I despise the profession every day.

SOLDIER 3: What would you have done?

SOLDIER 4: What would I have done? My certificate as an Electrical Engineer should have fetched me a better job.

SOLDIER 3: But the jobs are not there...

SOLDIER 4: The jobs are not there quite alright, but one still needs to keep one's dignity. I should have

done what my mates did after leaving school. They threw their expertise away and took jobs from the banks. I wanted to do things that pertain to what I learned in school. I didn't realize on time. Even the first class graduates are there in the banks counting the money that our thieving politicians have stolen! But they still have a well-paying job. I waited three years without a job. By the time reality came even the bank jobs were gone!

SOLDIER 3: And the universities keep graduating students every year without jobs around.

SOLDIER 4: Yes! Even the ones who will replace our thieving politicians are there in the universities getting their training. They quote all the ideologies to sway their fellow students while they loot the student union funds and run after the politicians to get some more.

And as if to echo the radical thoughts of the young girls, the soldiers too, mooted the idea of a sweeping revolution, instead of complacency and a false hope that some heavenly beings would salvage the situation. This is where Cole advocates for a Marxist overhauling of the system where the bourgeois, capitalist class would be rebelled against to save the suffering masses. Hence, the following dialogue:

SOLDIER 4: We need to save ourselves. God did not bring this hardship on us. We did. We lie to ourselves that we practice democracy. Let me tell you, it is all a game of lies. Democracy is a government of the cunning minority for the foolish majority. The politicians have always used and dumped us in the name of democracy. Every election they come to us to create that blazing montage of bright futures. We believe them. It's like adopting a cub, feeding it fresh meat every day so we shouldn't be surprised when the cub grows into a fierce lion that thirsts for fresh meat. It is danger. And that's our democracy. That's why nothing gets done every time. What happened

after we changed government? What happened after all the massive protests? Nothing!
I tell you nothing! The country continued as before; like a defiant baby would return to suckle her mother's breasts after a rebellious interregnum.
(*Embers*, 20-22)

Apparently critiquing Nigeria's Leadership failure in the same stream of thought as expressed by Soldier 4, erstwhile Biafra warlord, Odumegwu Ojukwu preached unity as elixir to many of the nation's woes in his book, "*Because I was Involved*". Ojukwu criticized the fact that Nigerian leaders' selfishness has led to disunity among the citizenry and more importantly failure of offering impactful governance. Ojukwu said:

When Nigerians cry out against previous leadership it is to the local elite that they refer to not to the one or two persons who happened to reach the Apex of the leadership pyramid. Our politicians, by and large, form a strong section of the local elite. They have been too pre-occupied with their personal problems to give an objective leadership to the nation. They are politicians in search of a programme. They are in fact politicasters: petty politicians, opportunists, humbugs and confident tricksters. (Ojukwu, 7)

Ojukwu's critical position brings us to yet another shortcoming of governance in Nigeria which is disunity. It is pertinent to note at this juncture that disunity is a major clog in the wheel of progress in this country.

Disunity as a hydra headed monster threatening the peaceful co-existence of the nation and tearing the heterogeneous people apart, has its several offsprings and antecedents which include nepotism/favouritism, ethnicism/tribalism, religious hypocrisy, government hypocrisy and irresponsibility. These other foregoing challenges of the nation are adequately caricatured in Cole's *Embers*.

Conclusion

The inhuman treatment of the masses by leaders as well as the oppressive tendencies of the bourgeois class against the Proles have created an imbalance in the society and those at the receiving end are the masses/Proles. While the leaders revel in opulence at the expense of the suffering masses, the bourgeoisie bathe in the euphoria of excessive material possession at the expense of the dying proles. The consequences of the foregoing imbalance is rebellion as championed by the disillusioned masses/Proles who vehemently rebel against the leaders and the bourgeoisie. This revolution breaks out and the ruling class as well as the Bourgeoisie are dethroned. This is the point being made in the critical assessment of the political engagement examined in the four plays in focus. It is simply the fact that should the ruling class fails consistently to provide impactful, resourceful, productive and humane leadership, those at the receiving end of such bad governance would rebel someday and displace them. In the same stream of thought, if the bourgeoisie continues to be insensitive to the yearnings for even distribution of the means of production and distribution of wealth and opportunities, the Proles would ruse against them and dismantle their hegemony.

The foregoing is the conclusion to be drawn from the findings in the critical assessment of the political engagement decipherable in the four plays in focus.

Recommendations

The contemporary political terrain in Nigeria, as reflected and portrayed in our critical textual exegesis of the four plays in focus, has created an imbalance against the masses, while the ruling class profits from the awful system. This has created a chaotic situation which can only be remedied by urgent action to appease the masses. Similarly, the bourgeoisie have cheated the Proles and rubbished their humanity to such an extent that the proletariat class has now become radical and rebellious against the system and its oppressive, capitalist class and willing to upturn it. So, there is an urgent need to overhaul the system and guarantee equal opportunities for all in a bid to ensure an egalitarian society.

Against this backdrop, the following recommendations are made, politicians should critically and sincerely re-examine themselves with a

view to have a change of attitude towards governance. They should strive to please the people by making good their electoral promises in form of manifestoes and guide against tendencies capable of making them fail the people. The masses should not only clamour for responsible and responsive leaders, they should act decisively through the polls by voting for politicians who are genuinely concerned about their plight, this way, they will get leaders who will deliver dividends of democracy.

There should be concerted efforts towards leadership and this should be considered as a symbiotic responsibility of both the leaders and the followers. Leaders must make conscious effort to understand the pulse of people so as to be aware of their expectations and yearnings. Government should not be far from the people they rule. Politics of bitterness, selfishness and greed should be discouraged through legislations that resist it, for example, we can have laws that would reduce the now bogus allowances, salaries and emoluments of our leaders so that the craze for public offices would be drastically reduced and only those with genuine intentions and desire to effect positive and progressive change would opt for leadership through the polls.

And lastly, our electoral system should be strengthened such that we have a full proof e-voting system which will eliminate rigging, electoral frauds and violence, vote buying among other ills that currently characterize our electoral system and inadvertently pave the way for unscrupulous elements to emerge as our leaders. A credible electoral system ensures that credible leaders emerge to give responsible and responsive leadership.

Works Cited

- Agbese, Dan. Illusions of a new Dawn in Ekpu Ray (eds). Moving in Circles. Ikeja: Mayfive Media Limited, 2012; 23-27.
- Achebe, Chinua. "An Image of Africa: And the Trouble with Nigeria". U.S.A. Penguin Group.
- Anagwonye, C. Ben. "Greatest Speeches of Historic Black Leaders". Nigeria. Mindex Publishing Company Limited, 2008.
- Agbese, Dan. Illusions of a new Dawn in Ekpu Ray (eds). Moving in Circles. Ikeja: Mayfive Media

- Limited, 2012; 23-27.
- Azimazi, M.J, PDP asks Buhari to Resign Over Rising Insecurity, Corruption. online: Guardian Press Limited, 2020, <https://guardian.ng/news/pdp-asks-buhari-to-resign-over-rising-insecurity-corruption/>
- Bamidele, L.O. "Literature and Sociology". Ibadan: Stirling-Horden, 2000.
- Balogun, O.K, The Withered Seed, Lagos: Centre of Praise Accademy, 2017.
- Benabai, B Dance of the Ghosts. Enugu:.CNC Publications, 2019
- Benedict, B, If Not... Enugu: ABIC Books & Equio Ltd, 2017
- Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's Dance, Drama and Theatre. AbdulRasheed A Adeoye etal (eds.). London: SPM Publications, 2014.
- Clark, Eburn. Hubert Ogunde: The Making of Nigerian Theatre. Ibadan: University Press PLC, 2008
- Cole, Soji. "Trauma Concepts in Contemporary African Drama and Film, being a PhD thesis in the Department of Theatre Arts submitted to the Postgraduate School, University of Ibadan, May 2016.
- Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A critical Source Book (eds) Ogunbiyi Yemi. Lagos. Tanus Books Limited , 2014
- Dada, Amos. D. To the Rescue (Say No to Corruption). Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2014; 9-12.
- Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A critical Source Book (eds) Ogunbiyi Yemi. Lagos. Tanus Books Limited , 2014
- Eagleton, Terry. Literary Theory: An Introduction. U.S.A: Blackwell Publishing, 2007; 110-130.
- Garuba S. presidency Attacks Transparency International over Nigeria's Poor Corruption Rating, online: Premium times,online, 2021, Presidency attacks Transparency International over Nigeria 's poor corruption rating <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/439283-presidency-attacks-transparency-international-over-nigerias-poor-corruption-rating.html#.Yd030COSQPw.whatsapp>

- Hagher, Iyorwuese. "Language, Expressions and Culture in the 21st Century: The Role of the Humanities" in *Weapons of Mass Destruction: Selected Speeches and Essays on Politics, Art and Leadership*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2004.
- Hsieh, Hsiu F., Shannon, Sarah.E. "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis" *Qualitative Health Research*. Vol 15. NO.9.1277-1288.2005.Print
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&url=https://www.researchgate.net/publication/7561647_Three_Approaches_to_Qualitative_Content_Analysis&ved=2ahUKEwivm8_th8PpAhVx8OAKHW-zBqMQFjAPegQIDBAx&usg=AOvVaw0QiT3aQiDByJEx1kLdoIeJ
- Jeyifo, Biodun. 'Representative' and unrepresentable modalities of the self: the gnostic, worldly and radical humanism of Wole Soyinka' in *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Post colonialism*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004; 1-40.
- Jeyifo, Biodun. 'Representative' and unrepresentable modalities of the self: the gnostic, worldly and radical humanism of Wole Soyinka' in *Wole Soyinka: Politics, Poetics and Post colonialism*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2004; 1-40.
- Literary Devices Editors. "Metaphor" *Literary Devices.net*. 2013. Web. 4 Nov. 2014.
- Mbachaga, Jonathan. "Political Theatre and the Leadership Question in Nigeria Drama: Statements in Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's *This Land Must Sacrifice*" in *Uncommon Artistry: Understanding*
- Nwabueze, Emeka. "Igbo Masquerade Drama and the Origin of Theatre: A comparative Synthesis, in *Visions and Re-Visions (Selected Discourses on Literary Criticism)*" Enugu. ABIC Books. 2011. Pages 59-70
- Nwabueze, E. *The World of the Play*. Vol 4. Enugu: ABIC Books & Equio Ltd, 2012.