

**DRAMATURGY OF MARTYRDOM AND TENSION OF
POSTCOLONIAL SELF-RETRIEVAL IN ADINOYI OJO
ONUKABA'S *THE KILLING SWAMP* AND JUDE IDADA'S
*SANKARA***

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the imaginaries of viable and assertive nationhood in the face of fragmented, oppressive and tyrannical regimes that pervert post-independence and postcolonial African states. To do justice to this paper, the qualitative approach and critical textual analysis using postcolonial theoretical framework was adopted for this study. In the plays under review, Onukaba and Idada, conscript two contemporary revolutionary visionary leaders in the post-independence/postcolonial African politics; namely, Ken Saro-Wiwa and Thomas Sankara, to deliberate on the decadence that pervert African political consciousness, creating lessons for all. The two visionary leaders in context are metaphorically summoned to the court of history to reflect on socio-political reality of Africa's politics and governance. The two real-life personalities whose audacious stance against neocolonial African state created great political tension and struggles and thus they suffered martyrdom in their different efforts at national self-retrieval and struggle for true independent African nationhood. The two playwrights creatively endowed their protagonists with true heroic, democratic, nationalistic and populist revolutionary temperaments. The study while teaching a lesson to African politicians and people, concludes that postcolonial Africa is in dire need of revolutionary transformation from the neocolonialist and imperialist vestiges, despite the setbacks that have

been experienced over the years. The paper further postulates that a radical temperament such as depicted by the texts under review, remains relevant for birthing a viable African nationhood that will free Africa from the dungeon of slavery, and concludes that attention must be given to the pitfalls of those who have made such moves in the past and failed for the sake of correction and fresh paradigms in such patriotic pursuits.

Key words: Martyrdom, true nationhood, paradigm shift, postcolonial self-retrieval, revolutionary temperament, political consciousness, visionary leadership.

Introduction

The two Nigerian playwrights in the two separate enactments at two different national settings; namely, Adinoyi Onukaba and Jude Idada, recreate two important political facts and historical realities that are familiar in order to expose the crisis that beset postcolonial African socio-political and economic experience. The two plays are purposefully set to immortalise the two protagonists and the roles which they played in confronting forces of neo-colonialism and imperialism that obstruct the dream of true nationhood and patriotism in postcolonial African states. The texts depict true political reality and governance in Africa in order to illuminate the vision and actions of the two exemplary political exponents whose sacrificial lives remain what could be considered as a template or prerequisites for a radical development and transformation of the formerly colonised African states. The texts elicit the struggles and tension that characterise postcolonial encounter and transformational processes in Africa (Udoiwang and Udoette 2023). Using carefully selected and imaginatively woven plots, characterisation, storyline, dialogue, among others, the playwrights expose the fragmented and multifaceted socio-political power tussel that defines the independent African landscape. The actions of the characters in the texts are skillfully crafted and brilliantly positioned to simulate the possibility as well as show the difficulties that can come with the possibility of realising a true visionary leadership that can galvanise new and democratic governance in postcolonial African states. This has sadly been the bane of African society since the days of decolonisation. Indeed, the two enactments point to the fact that true democratisation remains a work in progress in most of African states even after years of independence. By the roles apportioned to the key-players in

the two enactments, there is a clear demonstration of a sense of purpose, doggedness, resilience compelled by passion, vision and patriotism for purposeful inclusion for visionary leaders that can be evaluated as essential template and prelude for radical transformation of the often misgoverned postcolonial Africa.

The terrains of the two enactments are closely configured with familiar geo-political landscape and verisimilitudes of postcolonial milieu, apparently grappling to attain self-assertiveness and actualisation and also saddled with the difficult demands for survival with the attendant setbacks. Every literature reflects the socio-political or historical realities of the society that births it, and this informs the themes, contexts and the basic colorations in terms of forms of the literary text. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu state that a good literature has an intended message(s) meant for the audience to absorb and learn a lesson, such a theme or messages are the lessons which the writer persuades or intends the audience to identify with and learn from (48). The momentum underlying the message in form of ideas, themes or moral lessons that the dramatists convey through their work which can be explicit or implicit does not fail to arouse the sensibilities of audience of the trajectories and travesties of postcolonial history and society. The performances help to preserve memories of our national and continental evolution, especially in the age of digitization, where socio-cultural memories seem to be waning faster than ever (Udoiwang and Akpan 2023). It is even more informing and insightful to rethink postcolonial encounters when such works involved are plays, because this arouses more immediate emotional appeal than other genres of literature. Affiah, Udoiwang and Offiong affirm that performance acts stimulate emotions, thought, suspense, amusement and compels participation of the audience, thus they became part of the cast on stage (13). A consideration of the momentum created in the ambience of the two texts compels the audience through the enormity of tension and suspense that tend to captivate, arrest and arouse the audience to awareness, empathy and possibly revolt.

In their very important work on postcolonial theorisation of literary production, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back* assert that the term “post-colonial” covers cultures affected by imperial domination from the moment of colonisation to the present day. This is because there is a continuum of European aggressive preoccupation in Africa throughout history (11).

The circumstances and events that arise from the two plays, synchronise with the extract captured above. The main events of the plays as devised and presented by the playwrights in their interrelated sequence manifest a continuum of imperialist domination that have been, and is still being perpetrated by indigenous leaders in Africa, a typically subjugated captive postcolonial state. Bressler gives details of this by stating that colonial subjugation and imperialist project can be problematised through the concept of “...universality, difference, nationalism, postmodernism, representation, resistance, ethnicity, feminism, language, education, history, place and production” ((201). If colonialism is defined as the exercise of control, subjugation and exploitation of one state by foreign powers as Webster Encyclopedia asserts, what happens to similar acts that are perpetuated mainly by internal powers albeit in collaboration, collusion with or by incitement of external forces? This we simply describe as internal colonialism, which of course, originates from the meddlesomeness of the main external colonising imperial powers. This is a practice that is still dominant in postmodern political economies of most third world countries, and this is the basis of colonial continuum that informs the essential dialectics of this work. Heeho Ryu (2020) argues that the oppressed could constitute a force to provide the framework through which colonised peoples can collectively dismantle colonial continual domination. This seems to be the reason for the agitations, struggles and clashes of interests between liberationist individuals and imperialist forces as depicted in the two plays.

This work highlights the ways in which the two texts demonstrate some aspects of post-colonialist tendencies, continuous efforts at decolonisation and manifestations of the resilient internal as well as fraternal colonialism, especially as it pertains to attempts by the protagonists who do not only personify resistance against imperialist divisiveness and servitude, but also stand as symbolic figures at demonstrating the ability to demystify power, by breaking the barriers of ethnic hegemony and attempting an overhauling of neo-colonialist temerities that beset formerly colonised African societies. Thus, Boehmer asserts that postcolonial texts are not writings that ‘came after’ independence, but that it is a body of literature that critically scrutinises colonial relationships and sets out to resist colonial perspectives. This includes a change of power, decolonisation and a reshaping of dominant meanings (3).

The extract above goes to buttress that imperialism did not end with the dissolution of British and other imperial powers in the dominated territories of the world. The writings and activist works of scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Achebe, Ngugi Wa-Thing'o, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, among others, depict diverse perspectives and interpretations to the debate which continue to bring the issue of colonial and postcolonial literary experiences to fruitful engagements. All are tailored towards the historical scrutiny of the different stages of colonial, neo-colonial and postcolonial cultural and literary heritages.

The drama texts of our interest here reverberate the illusion and disillusionment that continue to characterise the postcolonial African society. Historians, social chroniclers and other scholars agree that the pomp and pageantry that followed the official dissolution of colonial imperialism in Africa were short-lived. They metamorphosed after independence into variance of the same phenomenon of domination, exploitation, ethnicity, racism, divide-and-rule, discrimination, inequality, injustice in diverse manifestations, as well as entrenched organised criminality by the state. This development has brought about the spate of crisis and despair that still remain the defining nature of postcolonial society. Matthew Taiwo sums it up by saying that colonialism came with injustice, oppression, inhumanity and other unbearable despicable circumstances. This situation propelled Africans to clamour for independence so as to usher Africans into a land that is bereft of socio-political problems; but this expectation was dashed after independence. New problems such as corruption, exploitation, tyranny, nepotism and all sorts of violation of human rights abuses surfaced as soon as the imperialists stepped aside. The African writer therefore is saddled with the responsibility of educating the masses on these realities and suggesting measures they can take to ensure total emancipation (206).

Consequent on the above scenario, African writers like the two whose dramaturgy are being treated here, would hardly take the luxury of writing without bringing to the fore issues that are very relevant to the reasons of the prevalent socio-political problems and for exploring the means for remediating same, using literary strategies and forms that are at the disposal of such writers. Literary scholars employ different strategies to create the enabling awareness and awakening tools as a means to teach, counsel,

instruct and imbue their readers with sound knowledge about the prevalence of the socio-political problems bedeviling Africa. In this work, we explore the utility of metaphorical device in dissecting the vision and mind of the dramatists involved in engaging with and resolving the multifarious crisis that bug most of the postcolonial African states.

The Protagonists and Symbolism of the Dilemma of Postcolonial Self-Determination

The two political standard bearers in the two plays in context serve as guides and springboards or as the cynosures of the crisis and destinies that propel the two enactments in their separate circumstances. The dramatists craftily endowed them as standard bearers of radical vision and revolutionary qualities, and they also engaged in the dialogues as public intellectuals whose zeal are orientated towards the realisation of public good. It is however, paradoxical that despite their good intentions, both of them fall victims in their efforts to correct the ills that afflict their societies. This is the dilemma of most postcolonial societies. Nevertheless, history attests that their good deeds and revolutionary spirits live after them, but tragically they are martyred in the process without achieving success. They are silenced by the powers of their societies in collusion with the erstwhile imperial underhand. The audience do not in either of the dramatic situations fail to empathise and become submerged in their thought and actions, they also feel the pains they go through and see their tragic end as a major setback to the collective liberationist aspirations and dreams of making Africa great. As leaders and heroes in their respective societies and the two performances, they by implication, are saddled with the common fate of their societies. Thus, they embody the destinies of not only of themselves, but also the collective fate of their societies. By their status and responsibilities, their successes or greatness would replicate the same to the whole society, just as their fall or demise will naturally spell doom for the society whose fate or welfare they embody.

The two heroes being examined here are therefore symbolically synchronised as the metaphoric experience of African post-independence crossroads. This is mainly because of the death of visionary leadership which translates into the death of the anticipated post-independence renaissance of inclusiveness, of the rich and self-sustaining and powerful nationhood. Such important dream as it plays out in the two plays, just as in their real-life situation, has continually eluded postcolonial, post-

independence, and postmodern day African society. Every attempt at birthing such dream into reality has always ended in fiasco and a dead end. The struggle of the two heroes is synonymous with the struggle between good and evil, and if good does not triumph, the captive society they try to liberate will normally relapse into the former stereotype repressive and oppressive captive state condition against which the metaphoric protagonists fought with their lives to conquer. Therefore, refreshing our minds on the meaning of metaphor as employed in the present context, is necessary in the first instance.

The concept of metaphor for a work of art, as Burke asserts, can be taken as a literary device for seeing something in terms of something else (quoted in Cameron, 13). With metaphor, two things are compared and brought together in terms of their figuratively comparative value, quality or some kind of innate nature in which one serves as a picture to further accentuate the quality or meaning of the other. It is in the light of this that Tim Jensen states that by bringing these two unrelated elements into a comparison, metaphors add creativity and clarity to writing and speech and allows the readers and audience to see things from their different perspectives (1). Peter Drulak rightly points out that while trying to link the utility of metaphor with creative thinking and deepening insight, metaphors have the discourse potentials in a given speech community for the "reproduction of social reality" (3). Metaphor is a critical resource in communication and dialogue which is insightful, penetrative and reflective especially in political discussion when a phenomenon requires a more engaging analytic resolution. The two metaphoric protagonists being reviewed in this paper, personify the illuminants on the path of a people's struggle for true independence, justice, equity and fairness.

The argument in the context project well-articulated situations that could be drawn as a searchlight on issues of politics and leadership crisis, including wasted opportunities, squandered potentials and possibilities of activating and mustering fresh paradigm in the process of birthing sustainable roadmap for reconstruction and development of postcolonial African society. The result has remained unresponsive to change and unproductive since the so-called attainment of sovereignty from the former colonisers to the present day. Greg Ekeh avers that despite the naturally rich and endowed African societies they are still referred to as underdeveloped, developing, third world or even backward due to their low level rate of development; the misfortune responsible for this poorly

low rating of African continent has been traced mainly to poor leadership, and it is ironically in the determined fight against the phenomenon of bad and self-aggrandizing leadership that the protagonists in the two plays meet their tragic end (195).

There is no doubt that since the conviviality of flag-independence, most of postcolonial African states have continued to grapple with the misfortune and indeed, undoing of successive inept, sit-tight, corrupt and self-serving indigenous regimes, which from one country to the other ironically have continued to plunge their states into anarchy, resulting in widespread despair rather than meaningfully accelerating well-articulated developmental initiatives. Hence, they fail to ensure sustainable standards of living and development. There is no doubt that there have been attempts at changing the gloomy narratives of the African reality by those patriots who could not fold their hands and watch the steady drift of African continent into the precipice, but it is also well known in history of how such moves have often climaxed into tragedy.

The two heroic figures namely Saro-Wiwa and Sankara respectively projected as central personalities around whom the tension or crisis oscillate in the two plays could be used as a purposefully crafted metaphor for the simulation of every botched effort at a radical transformation of African societies from the old order of neo-colonial and neo-imperialist tendencies to purposeful societies. It is unfortunate that after independence, successive leaders in African countries have been noted more in the negative than in the positive side in the court of history, especially due to the curse of corruption, unmediated greed, inordinate ambition, ethnicity, religious bigotry and fixation that propel extremism and avarice. This condition accounts for the very endemic intensity of crises. To borrow from the words of Elleke Boehmer, it is the very condition of leadership cult or self-serving leadership phenomenon that has produced the conditions for Africa's delegitimization (105), in which circumstance the governed and the governors hardly share intimacy in any of the states in the African continent. A cursory glance across Africa net readily produces a sorry case of underdevelopment and poverty, ethnicity and menace of street children, depressed economies and extremism, ravaging wars and unspeakable poverty and human degradation, brought about by self-serving clueless, visionless and cultic leadership. This is the reason why the two leaders metaphorised on the stage of the two plays could be presented as exceptional, a clear departure, paradigm shifts from the doldrums and

stereotypes of African leadership phenomena which situates the concerns of this critical work.

African drama has come of age since its early stages of development, though it might be difficult to do a precise lineal demarcation of the ideological/historical underpinnings of its evolution, it has navigated through layers of kinesis and accidents of history- from the oral traditional forms with its repertoire of myths and legends, to the scribal literate epoch to the moments of cultural celebration, through the neo-European phase of development. This can be traced to the era of J.P. Clarks' *Ozidi*, Ola Rotimis' *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and Wole Soyinkas' *The Bacchae of Euripides*, they brought in the flavor of Greco-European adaptations to bear on the African stage and later the femi Osofisan's generation whose dramaturgy marks a radical departure from the tradition of the old order, and who himself has been known for his creative dexterity in bringing material of cultural or political history and the travesty of power tussle in African historical experience to bear on his theatre. In all this, it is obvious that the earlier generations of African dramatists never really tore the radical revolutionary path in their sensitivity and development as it has been observed in recent experience. Against this argument, Mohammed Bhadmus points out that "The absence of discernible ideological and revolutionary political commitment is a common flaw in the works of the pioneer dramatists. They engender what is categorised as literary or institutionalised drama and its attendant cultic, elitism around higher institutions (237). But in the present situation of theatre practice, the younger generation of scholar-playwrights tends to make a paradigmatic detour that tilts towards radical revolutionist angle to dramaturgy. In any case, despite the variegated issues in the thematic and social context, African drama in the contemporary context cannot fail to draw on the ethnocentric reformatting of forms and patterns or strategies by recurrently situating issues that are germane and vividly related to modern day socio-political realities. They also draw their aesthetic afflatus from the deep well of memory that society daily encounters and grapples with.

The plays that are analyzed in this context can be discerned as simulation or some kind of playback of the narrators' verbatim because the enactments are based on solid material trajectory of history that are drawn on tangible circumstances of which the assumed audiences are familiar with, and the actions so replayed here serve as memorial. It is in this regard that the two plays can be translated as a parable of African socio-political

tragedy. The fate that befalls the two protagonists in certain ways ignite sobering memory of post-independence African encounters. The basis of such understanding is that it could serve as a means of recall or as a medium of reflecting on the experience of a people or society in the past, present and future Africa.

The Texts, Contexts and the Parable of Postcolonial Reality and Valuable Lessons

Adinoyi Ojo Onukaba's play, *The Killing Swamp*, was published in 2009. This is about one and a half decades after the brutal extra-judicial execution of the Ogoni-born environmental activist and writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa, in whose liberationist vision, thoughts, activism and travails Onukaba situates the thematic antenna and narrative point of the enactment, *The Killing Swamp*. It is a historic play and the issues that propel the narration and actions are contemporaneous, refreshing and grounded on the complex socio-political tapestry of postcolonial history and society. In the author's note section of the publication, the playwright gives some preamble and insight into the circumstances that culminated into the extrajudicial execution of the personality that is recreated as the protagonist of this performance:

imagines the last hours of Ken Saro Wiwa...who was hanged with eight others... by Nigeria's military dictatorship on November 10, 1995... Ogoni, a minority ethnic group, have long been marginalized economically and politically through an unholy alliance between successive Nigerian government and multi-national oil companies. Operating with scant regards for basic environmental rules, these oil companies have wasted the rich fertile land from which the people of the Niger Delta have for ages eked out a living and polluted these creeks and rivers that have supplied them with drinking water and sea food.(3)

The Ogoni resistance movement against the Federal Government of Nigeria, the multi-national oil companies and the indigenous collaborators have existed for decades and the result concerning redress for the marginalised minority host communities was nothing to write home about

as the environment remained increasingly threatened through the recklessness of the imperialist oil investors while the indigenous people have little or nothing to benefit from oil exploration. They watch as their land, environment and means of livelihood received scanty or no government attention while other Nigerian cities and international communities enjoy the oil that is extracted from the area. It was in the midst of all these that the more radical group of indigenous resisters lead by Ken Saro-Wiwa spearheaded the protest against environmental degradation of the area without any recourse to developing the environment. While the Ogoni question of national exclusion and marginalisation remained unanswered, the local elites who are supposed to be the mouthpiece and hope of the underprivileged, offered themselves cheap for a token and became saboteurs. This created tension, upheavals and internal conflicts. The 'divide-and-rule' ploys of the antagonists or agent-provocateurs manipulated self-seekers of some community elites as noticed in this play to the detriment of the collective welfare and aspirations of the long-cheated, hapless marginalised Ogoni people. This is where the overawing neo-imperialist dictatorial military hegemony found occasion to create dissension and hang those they have been haunting for destruction.

To navigate the dialogue through a logical chart of the complex trajectory of the Ogoni versus the Nigerian state imbroglio, Onukaba crafted the play with rather few characters and dialogue. The four role players are Kenule- the protagonist, Asabe- Kenule's young and loving friend, "Major", the middle-aged army officer who is saddled with the responsibility of taking command to see to the execution of the protagonist, and Sergeant, the soldier that would give the command for the final act of executing the protagonist. It is the interlocking, intriguing and exchanging of dialogues, conversations, actions and out pouring of emotions and sentiments of the four characters that the onus of the action of the play unfolds and raps up in a tragic end of the day.

On the fateful day that Kenule, the protagonist is about to be hanged, the scene begins at dawn, in a gloomy scene and torture where the protagonist is being rough-handled by Sergeant who is the agent of state. He is seen dragging his captive to the waiting place of execution and Kenule is thrown to the ground and with great pain he screams at his tormentor to treat him like a human. His grouse against his executioner at this moment is that he is not afraid to pay the ultimate price that has been passed on him by the powerful dictator, but he asked that the execution be

made public because he is not convinced that the cause for which he is being condemned for by the kangaroo court of the military dictatorship to pay the supreme price is made public, an occasion for which he has put his life on the line. His exchange with the Sergeant is emotional, moving and instructive. An extract of the scene of his protest and exchange of words with Sergeant is captured as follows:

| KENULE:

(Protesting)...

You're not carrying a sack of yam for goodness sake. Don't be so rough...I'm the leader of a people, half a million strong. I deserve a proper sendoff: Sergeant this tragedy must be played out in the heart of this country: Not in this bush. My cause-our cause, I must say- is a national one: to excise from the heart of this sick and frail nation a malignant tumor; to remove this lump of injustice from the heart of this nation; eh?...I deserve the center stage for my immolation... (7-8).

When the character Major comes up on stage, further insight is thrown to the audience concerning the situation that has brought the protagonist to the final breadth of his protest against the Nigerian state. The dialogue that ensued with Major is expectedly antagonistic; and the altercations between them is richly coded in metaphorical statements that go further to buttress the prevalent atmosphere of bitterness in the protagonist, the audience, the nations, and indeed the international comity of nations who are the assumed audience of this travesty. When Major tells Kenule that his fate is being determined in accordance with the law of the land, the latter rejoins by stating that his trial and conviction was a mere show and he interjects thus: "What court? Was that a court?" (30). Kenule then goes on to present what looks like a speech, while making reference back to his defense during the show trial which he uses adjectives and phrases such as "sham", and "travesty of justice". He insists that the charges against him that found him guilty and deserving to be hanged are manipulated and false. Kenule's address to Major goes as follows:

I'm sure you heard what I told the judge... My Lord, the Nigerian nation is on trial here, its present rulers and those who assist them. Any nation which can do to the weak and the disadvantaged what the Nigerian nation has

done to my people loses any claim to independence and to freedom from outside influence. We are all on trial for denigrating our country and jeopardising the future of our children by our actions. ...There is no doubt in my mind that the ecological war waged in the Delta by the Nigerian government and the oil companies will never go unpunished. It is a crime against humanity. It is genocide (31). (Please indent citation)

His defense of his liberationist action and indeed, the travails of his people, which has resulted in his present fate is that he and his compatriots who are to be hanged are not guilty because they did not kill the four Ogoni elders that were murdered. He queries on what grounds the court declared them guilty and insists that it is about the oil and the injustice meted on his people that is the cause of their struggle and on which they are about to lose their lives. The extract below further illuminates Kenule's protest defense: it's all about oil. My actions and words have become a threat to the flow of oil from the Delta. I have woken up the docile people of the Delta. I have asked them to reclaim their land. I have told them to hold the oil companies accountable for the dead creeks and oily swamp. I have opened their eyes to the atrocities of the oil companies which have wasted their rich fertile land and polluted the creeks and rivers that supply them drinking water and sea food. I have exposed the criminal exploitation and marginalisation of the Delta people to the world...We have not been found guilty of murder. We have only been found guilty of obstructing the flow of oil from our soil (33). (Kindly indent this citation)

With the frequent arguments that take place between Kenule and his killers before his final silencing, the playwright skillfully imagines the gruesome atmosphere and dreary moments that the Niger Delta people is symbolised in Kenule (Saro-Wiwa); while the characters Major and Sergeant metaphorise the Nigerian state on one hand, Kenule and the not too openly emphasised nine others waiting to be hanged symbolise the oppressed, exploited, cheated and fatally fragmented Ogoni people.

The playwright skillfully probes to expose the true identity of the character Major, who is to give the final order for the execution of Kenule, which is ironically revealed to be Bera, Kenule's kinsman. This is the strategy used by the playwright to reveal the repercussions of the divide and rule tactics of the powers-that-be in collusion with the multinational oil companies. The playwright also exposes the intrigues of infighting and

internal maneuverings among the struggling Ogoni people that became the albatross that aided to ruin the vision of the collective struggle for the survival of Ogonis and indeed the Niger Delta ethnic minority people, which Ken Saro Wiwa symbolises. Indeed, the aphorism taken from the mouth of the protagonist while addressing Major, also known as Bera, and others of his paid kinsmen that have been set against each other through the orchestrated manipulations of the Nigerian military dictatorship and the oil multi-national corporations, through whose instigations the protagonist and his kinsmen are now under captivity, is quite revealing. Kenule aware of such perfidy states thus:

The ruin of a nation begins in the homes of its people. Brothers killing brothers...Bera, It is said that when you harbour bitterness, happiness docks elsewhere. You are hurting yourself by trying to get even with me. How much did they pay you for this? (75).

These lines above let out the dangers of the differences when some people struggle to free themselves from the quagmire of ruinous, oppressive, tyrannical and unjust systems. The onus of the parting words by the protagonist before the enactment climaxes in the final execution sheds light on the sequence of notable events and the fault lines that mark the Ogoni liberation movement for true nationhood, justice and equity which paradoxically, puts the hero of such struggle in grave danger, while the aims, aspirations and objectives of the struggle is not realised, and sadly ends in a tragedy.

The Dramatist and the Imagery of Sankara's Heroism and Martyrdom

The second text analysed Jude Idada's *Sankara*. It is configured around yet another historic reality in the chequered narrative of African political experience. Again, the playwright's note, described as "faction" clarifies his artistic situation of the play *Sankara*, the introduction, and opening pages of the text goes as follows:

I call it a work of faction because I have taken real life events and real-life characters and woven a dramatic tale, knitted together by well-researched information, excerpts of real speeches made by Captain Thomas Sankara, and

imagined motivations and actions of all the characters contained therein.... Although it is based on historic and contemporaneous recollections, it does not portend to be devoid of artistic license as it threads together these collections by constraining events in the last hundred hours of the life of Thomas Sankara into four interchangeable locations and around six characters (*Sankara v*).

The play *Sankara*, like most historical works of art, especially in postcolonial representation, reflects the socio-historical ambience of the universe in the playwright's imagination and creative composition. The characters in the play are: the hero, Thomas Sankara being postured as the Head of State of Burkina Faso and the protagonist of the play; Blaise Compaore, is the key antagonist, and obviously is bought over and remote-guided by the enticing hands of the imperialists former colonial power that colonised what is known as Burkina Faso today, who is also the Deputy Head of State of Burkina Faso and presumably a bosom friend of Thomas Sankara; known as Valerie Giroud, a brilliant French journalist; Gilbert Diendere, we also have a Major in Burkinabe Army and Commander of the Army Training Center; and Miriam Sankara, wife of Sankara and Traore Alouna, a political aide of Sankara and member of the People's Revolution Military Cabinet. It is recollected that the play takes place around the official residence of the Head of State and Deputy Head of State, and somewhere else in the capital city, Ouagadougou, lasting from or between October 10 to 15. In the author's preliminary notes, the events around the activities, heroic mission leading to what could be seen as the pitfall to the final demise of the ill-fated hero Thomas Sankara were unraveled, until the tragic climax of events, when Thomas Sankara, the revolutionary leader is brutally assassinated.

The performance proper opens with Sankara seated, as he renders the revolutionary anthem with lyrics that capture the liberationist resolve to the contending issues, recalling the lingering epochs of a people's historic struggles, travails and resilience which, in the given situation, have fired the present momentum towards liberation and movement for true freedom from the shackles of colonial imperialism in collaboration with their African puppets. The song that the protagonist, Sankara sings is historically intriguing:

Against the humiliating bondage of a thousand years
Rapacity came from afar to subjugate them for a thousand
years
Against the cynical malice in a shape
Of neo-colonialism and its petty servants
Many gave in and certain others resisted.
But the frustrations, the successes, the sweat, the blood
Have fortified our courageous people and fertilised its
Heroic struggle (*Sankara 2*).

The above lyrics reflect a revolutionary anthem that is intended to encourage a patriotic obligation and elucidation of national unity, spirit, sacrifice, patriotism, resilience and courage in the citizenry for a possible liberation of the people from imperialist bondage. Naturally, the action of the hero-protagonist is supposedly a symbol of his vision, aspirations and ideals of the revolutionary movement ignited by him. It was adopted during his presidency in a decree issued on 2 August, 1984 which eventually took effect from 4 August, 1984, at the first anniversary of his accession to power, after overthrowing the neo-imperialist regime in Burkina Faso. The protagonist remains the trailblazer or the touch-bearer as well as a role model of the revolution envisioned as the moment of paradigm shift from servitude to true nationhood. The heroes of the revolution Sankara leads, envision the revolution as a means of liberating the collective destiny of Burkinabes from the neo-colonial, neo-imperial yoke and despondency to total freedom of the people. Part of the lasting legacy of Sankara is his resolve and attempt to demystify governance from the cultic perception, and for the first time, bringing government closer to the people. His down-to-earth leadership style in Burkina Faso, represents a paradigmatic shift from the neo-colonial orthodoxies of postcolonial stereotypes to a democratic government.

The protagonist's vision and commitment to the revolutionary change in Burkina Faso through utterances and actions, seeks to demystify governance and make it a collective legacy for the good of the people. When the character Valerie, a French born journalist, interviews Sankara about his style of leadership and points out to him that his own approach was a departure from the normal, and at the very mention of the phrase "Your government...", Sankara quickly interjects in protests:

Not my government. The revolution. This is not about Thomas Sakara. It is about the people of Burkina Faso, the land of upright men. It is about Africa. It is about freeing ourselves from the yoke of slavery to our colonial masters; the imperialists who seek to give us freedom and independence in name only (7).

Thomas Sankara, an acclaimed man of integrity, who sought to make his people free from injustice and international imperialist oppression with his pseudo-revolutionary policies, was influenced by Marxian and egalitarian ideas (Carina Ray: 2024, Botchway, De-Valera N. Y. M., et al., Murrey, Amber, et al.), In his speech captured above, he so eloquently reject the beggarly, unassertive and self-interiorizing model of African leaders, who only serve as stooges to imperialist powers and former colonial masters that still continue to remote control African states, long after the attainment of independence. He tries to distance himself from such crop of inept African leaders by instituting revolutionary ventures that focus on eradicating corruption, imperial domination, desertification, environmental degradation as he encourages increase in literacy, healthcare policies and project his country positively to international comity of nations.

Continuing with his conversation with Valerie, Sankara pungently hits the nail at head when he says:

I told you that apart from Jerry Rawlings of Ghana and one or two other African leaders, the rest of them have proven to be a bunch of cowards and co-conspirators with the imperialists from the West. Look at what they did to me when I asked for us to speak with one voice concerning our requests for the West to cancel African debts. ...they laughed at me behind my back and called me a lunatic. And now with the same people who hold us in economic bondage, they discuss how to silence me and put my people back in slavery. So, I have been forced to make a decision. ...I will shock them (15). (Please indent)

Going by what the playwright puts in Sankara's mouth which is guided by life, politics, history, legacies and his identified lifestyle, there is no mincing words that the protagonist in Idada's *Sankara*, reflects the latter's real-life human figure footage as a leader and the trajectory of his leadership cannot be controverted. He was a confirmed legendary hero, a democratic and Pan-African proponent who resonated populist interest that berated factions, saboteurs, and finally his assassination. Like any other

human being, he had his weak points which his political opponents used against him in his government to create factions. Some of his interests, political ideas, style of leadership and system of government which brought about a lot of arrests, killings, human rights violations based on whims and caprices which didn't go well with some people, became his Achilles heels.

The intent of the playwright is to recreate as much as possible, the real-life situation of the protagonist. His vision and activism for an egalitarian society in the post-independence/postcolonial state of his country, especially as he was influenced by Marxian ideas, is a panacea for accelerated development, national or historical self-recovery and true nationhood. By toeing such contemporary 'unorthodox' path to development, he stepped on the toes of both local and international imperialists and their cohorts, who would rather not mind that the people remain at the sub-servitude for their obvious gains against the people's exploitation and subjugation.

He frowned at the caste system in his society which he considered inimical to human freedom and equality of all, regardless of social status. He opted for an egalitarian world-order, and pitched his ideals against the demands of the existing caste system, while calling for reparation for the injustice of European merchants on accounts of slavery against African ancestors. The excerpt below points to this fact:

SANKARA: In the caste system, here in this country, we are the bottom of the pot, the

most disadvantaged. You are what you get when the Mossi tribes marry the Fulani tribes—two great tribes who look down on the offspring of their cross-breeding. It is this looking down on castes and saying one is better than the other that keeps Africa so divided and easy to conquer; that is why I have fought to destroy the caste system. Everyone is equal before God (49-50).

In the tension that builds up to the final moment, Mariam, Sankara's wife, having got wind of the plot by Sankara's deputy- Blaise Compaore, as the main renegade that would betray Sankara and take over government, she seeks audience with him. This is because Sankara would not see reason why his associate in the revolutionary movement would turn round to harm him, but he is not afraid to die whatever the case may be for the cause and struggle to liberate his people. Although Blaise denies being involved in

such a plot, Mariam expresses her fears, and the information in the statement is historically pointing to underscore how efforts towards revolutionary actions for liberation in the past had been betrayed, even as Blaise denies any such plot to overthrow the revolutionary government. Miriam's statement is instructive:

BLAISE: Thomas is not going to die.

MARIAM: Look at what they did to Lumumba, to Murtala, to Biko, to Sadat, Modlane, to Olympio, to Malcolm X, to Martin Luther King Jnr, to Che Guevara. Blaise, the enemy does not fight with half measures, they eliminate completely. They'll rather a martyr, than an overthrown Sankara (70).

When Sankara finally realises that the rumour of treachery could be real, he addresses Blaise Compaore stating that he is ready to die but that he is not ignorant of his role, nor that of the imperialist conspirators who have soiled their hands in their bid to eliminate him and truncate the revolutionary path to true independence and nationhood in African states. In Sankara's own words:

I know that whatever is going to happen to me, you, Gilbert, Henry, Jean Baptiste, Foccart, Boigny, Mitterrand, Chirac and all the rest of them have decided it a long time ago, ...So, you see, I have never had the power to save myself, even if you pretend that I do. I love you, brother, and as Judas did before you, go do what you must do (100).

Sankara's statement rendered at the concluding part of the play, points out that much of the revolutionary moves that is aimed at turning the table in favour of the common people and for true independence to take place, as always meets with treachery, betrayal and sabotage by the very people that are supposed to be entrusted with the task of revolutionary change. Just as Saro-Wiwa in *The Killing Swamp* was betrayed by his kinsmen, so is Sankara being betrayed and eventually assassinated by his close compatriots and associates, that are supposed to be his brother with whom they grew up together, shared vision and trusted each other. We can see that the two plays aptly illustrate the bumpy road to true self-actualisation,

correct nationhood and sustainable development in African evolutionary politics.

Conclusion

The analysis of the two plays done so far points at the complex trajectory of post-independence, postcolonial socio-political experience, and shows how creative literary writers draw on history to interrogate the socio-political, economic and historical realities of African experience. It is very intriguing that the two dramatists use their respective protagonists as tools to re-enact history and the difficulties that are usually encountered by visionary leaders in their efforts to transform the formerly colonised African countries from the shackles of neo-colonial, post-colonial dependency, imperialist control and ploys of internal collaborators. By recreating the two key leaders to these dramatic spheres, the vision, aspirations of visionary African leaders are engaged on stage, and their heroism as well as human flaws are re-examined which also serve as teaching aids to their audience. The momentum created in the two dramatic situations serves to unravel the Achilles heels of the activists as well as the cruelty of the anti-democratic heroes who collaborate with the enemies of the people to truncate the visions, aspirations and strategies enunciated as roadmaps to viable development and nationhood in the sphere of the two performances. The study concludes that good literature do not only entertain, but also serves as a gate way to the past, present and future, and helps to preserve our culture, encourages critical thinking, teaches moral lessons to solve problems in order to live in a better world.

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