

CHANGE IDEOLOGY IN FEMI OSOFISAN'S *ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS*

Aondowase Boh
Benue State University

Abstract

*Over the years, Nigeria has been clamouring for the desired change that would serve as a spring board for socio-political and economic development of the nation. For the desired change to be possible, everybody needs to be involved in one way or the other. Moreover, issues that retard progress and development in the society must be done away with. It was in this guise that the then military government of General Yakubu Gowon in a bid to fight social ills and crime in Nigeria promulgated a decree that, armed robbers should be punished by public execution. This was meant to deter would -be armed robbers from the act. While this decree lasted other people in the nation were also involved in heinous crimes against the nation. Osofisan's dislike of what was going on in the nation made him to voice his opinion through the medium of drama. In **Once upon Four Robbers**, he decries the killing of armed robbers through public execution. He goes further to proffer solutions that would bring progress and development in the country. He submitted that, all and sundry must be change agents if Nigeria must progress and develop. This paper, therefore, analyses the change ideology of Osofisan as presented in **Once upon Four Robbers** in managing the development challenges of Nigeria. Marxist and postcolonial theories are adopted as the theoretical foundation for the paper. Marxists hold that the working class masses are the real makers of history. The images contained in **Once upon Four Robbers** are crucial signals of the playwright's ideological standpoint. The paper concludes that for the desired development to be possible in the country everybody must develop a change of attitude and put the country first above all other considerations.*

Introduction

Once Upon Four Robbers is a play that was written in a reaction to the decree promulgated by General Gowon's administration that made armed robbery punishable by public execution. The play, which is set in a market place, is

structured into a Prologue, Parts One to Three, an Interlude and an Epilogue. The storyteller presents the play in the traditional African folktale style of performance in which the storyteller begins by acknowledging the people present. This is meant to establish a good rapport with the audience. This kind of opening will make the play authentic at home and may also be a means of communication between characters, often replacing dialogue or function as a soliloquy, intimating to the audience the singer's hidden thoughts and traits. They may bolster up a character to confront a dreadful obstacle, create a spell, or induce a trance (Ukala 285). Osofisan is displeased with the wanton murder of armed robbers and wants us to have a rethink about the whole issue, or else, robbers and violence as well as other social vices will continue to reign in the society.

The play, which centres on four robbers whose names are: Angola, Major, Hasan and Alhaja, begins on a mournful note with Alhaja sobbing over the killing of her husband, Alani, the leader of the robbers who is convicted for armed robbery and executed. Alhaja sings a slow dirge for her late husband as the robbers vow to revenge. Hence, the robbers do not only boast of their previous successful raids at UAC, Mapo, and Customs and so on, they become a nuisance to the society and a thorn in the flesh of the state. The state security apparatus is incapable of putting them under control, while the death penalty decree only worsens the situation. One of them wonders about the essence of the death penalty decree. It, therefore, means that there are many sides to the issue of armed robbery. What Osofisan is saying in essence is that armed robbery and other forms of criminality in the nation are not the real problems in the society. What, then, are the real problems? *Once upon Four Robbers* provides the answers to these issues. Osofisan, in the play indicts the state and the society for the menace of armed robbery and other social, political and economic crisis in the nation. It is on this note that the playwright calls for the needed change for the rejuvenation of the nation.

The Concept of Change

The word "change" remains very controversial as it is used differently in different fields and contexts, each of the application differ from the other(s). However, change can be looked upon to mean a shift from one state, stage, or phase to another; a variance from routine or pattern, especially a welcomed one. The concept change can also mean to exchange, substitute or replace something. In the view of Ernest Davies; change has to do with "an alteration or replacement of an existing phenomenon, idea, value or mode of doing something or in which

something exist into another; which is preferable to the former” (503). All these perspectives, though differently conceived, point to the same direction.

In philosophy, the concept of change as postulated by Robert Baird refers to “a speculative world view which asserts that basic reality is constantly in a process of flux” (qtd. in Okoli 72). Baird refers to this as ‘concept philosophy’. To Okoli, reality is, indeed identified with pure process and concepts such as creativity, freedom, novelty, emergence, and growth are fundamental explanatory categories for change. This metaphysical perspective is to be contrasted with a philosophy of substance, according to which a fixed and permanent reality underlies the changing or fluctuating world of ordinary experience. Thus, while substance philosophy emphasizes static being, change (process philosophy) emphasizes dynamic becoming.

Change manifests in different realms; a most widespread of which is revolution. In the view of Bessie Head “It is preferable to change the world on the basis of love of mankind. But if that quality be too rare, then common sense seems the next best thing” (qtd. in Irele 11). This view is a justification for radical change that must be sought when change leaders attempt to implement change from afar without attending to the emotional undertones of their community/society. While the above position identifies that change can take violent undertones, it does not, however presuppose that violence is a necessary attribute of change. But note must also be taken that change does not occur without pains.

According to Paul, “Change is not made without inconvenience, even from worse to better” (27). This is because, too often leaders engage in one-way communication or ‘coercive persuasion’- a process that precludes debate and in which questioning is regarded as a form of revolt or resistance. This is what Paul refers to as ‘Linear Change Approach’.

There is another perspective of change which a Peruvian writer, Mario Vargas, cited in the Encarta Premium sees as: “A liberal dream of a better world, knowing the dream must ultimately be unattainable. Communism believed it was attainable and felt any means to reach it were justified. To this perspective, change is rather an illusion that is better imagined than attained. This, perhaps, is why desirable change is difficult to attain even among the most civilized societies, including Nigeria.

However, it is worthy of note that change is not predictable or sequential, it is rather a complex process involving hearts as much as minds. From all indications, the only thing that is constant and permanent in life is change.

Change is the only episode, phenomenon or decimal that is constant in human life; and thus, remains a basic law of life.

Concept of Ideology

Ideology is one of the most equivocal and elusive concepts in social and anthropological studies; not only because of the variety of theoretical approaches which assign different meanings and functions to it, but also because it is a concept heavily charged with political connotations and widely used in everyday life with the most diverse significations. However, in every society, there exist culturally unique ways of thinking about the world which unite people in their behaviour. This body of cultural ideas that people share is referred to as ideology. Ideology manifests in three specific categories: beliefs, values, and ideals. Beliefs give a people an understanding of how the world works and how they should respond to social and environmental forces. Values position a people to understand the differences between right and wrong or good and bad; while ideals serve as models for what people hope to achieve in life.

According to Larrain:

Ideology has a negative or positive meaning. On the one hand, ideology may be conceived in eminently negative terms as a critical concept which means a form of false consciousness or necessary deception which somehow distorts men's understanding of social reality. On the other hand, the concept of ideology may be conceived in positive terms as the expression of the world-view of a class. To this extent one can talk of 'ideologies', in plural, as the opinions, theories and attitudes formed within a class in order to defend and promote its interests. (13)

Larrain's view implies that ideology has both positive and negative undertones. Positively, it expresses the ideal world view of a class; while in its negative manifestation propagates false consciousness that tends to misdirect a people's understanding of their real world. Thus, change ideology in Nigeria would be the aspiration to attain an egalitarian society which must be built on the beliefs, values and the ideals which the people hold dear. Whether these ideological components have been adopted by change leaders in Nigeria in their bid to effect desired change for the nation remains a matter of public debate. This is because Nigerians have for a long time remained disillusioned with successive dispensations as each fails to give a clear direction on the policy framework of its

‘change agenda’. In a communique at the 19th Delegates Conference of the Academic Staff Union of Universities it was opined that “the disappointment of Nigerians stems from the fact that we have a government whose leadership promised change but which is not practicing transformation (fundamental change)” (35). What this portends is that change in Nigeria’s political life remains exclusively what the change leaders can do for the people as opposed to what the people expect to achieve. This coheres with the position of a French statesman, Jacques Delors in a speech to the United Union Summit, cited in David Killam & Kerfort, A. that: “You can’t be a true idealist without being a true realist” (77). This view is characteristic of the type of change championed by leaders in Nigeria, which unfortunately is self-perceived change which the populace deserves. However, fundamental change is not an individual desire but that which must appeal and be accepted by the people as a whole. This is why David Forgas opines that; “Many ideas grow better when transplanted into another mind than in the one where they sprang up” (135).

In Nigeria, change remains the most contentious word, particularly in the socio-political lexicon. The Nigerian contemporary society owes much to past uprisings against repressive governments, stagnant or restrictive economic conditions, and rigid class divisions. This has made the clamour for change endless as emergent change advocates and leaders have often replaced one evil with another, as through harsh recriminations, self-serving leadership, or betrayal of the people- the excesses of which sometimes lead to opposing counter-revolutions. This, perhaps, is why Dike contends that, “Social changes manifest in a shift from regions to states, from farms to cities, from agriculture to industries, and from power shift from north to south” (n. page). These changes, Dike adds; “is not been for the benefit of the common man”. This seems to be the application of change in Nigerian political, cultural and economic lexicon. Nilgun Okur in his affirmation to the imperatives of change holds that; “Life is making us abandon established stereotypes and outdated views, it is making us discard illusions” (3). What this implies is that if the problem of political leadership is the greatest our civilization faces, a related problem of almost equal significance is that of innovation and change. This has been the greatest concern of Nigerians for several decades in which the overwhelming direction of Nigerian socio-political structure has been toward studies of social stability and adjustment. The emphasis upon order and cohesion, upon problems of social statics has been so great as almost to destroy an interest in the dynamics of change. It is, therefore, a matter of considerable importance, not to say elation, to note recent signs of a re-awakening of interest in problems of socio-political and cultural change. Change in this sense

must, however, be distinguished from revolt or a rebellion, which may be either a failed attempt at revolution, a violent expression of grievances with limited purpose, or merely a change in allegiance.

Nigeria's politics is characterized by the desire to change an incumbent leadership often accused of one evil or another. According to Babatunde Fashola, change is "an act of restoring ownership of Nigeria to the Nigerian people" (par. 2). He adds that; "the change advocated for by the APC means, installing a government that would be accountable to the sovereign for its performance and responsive to the wishes and demands of the citizens" (par 3). Again, Michael Nwokocha quotes Muhammadu Buhari as saying, "change is not a mere slogan but the beginning of a new political era and socio-economic order" (2). Nwokocha identifies the cardinal objectives of the Buhari's change mantra to include amongst others:

Creation of a new political culture and consciousness for Nigerians, facilitation of Nigeria's economic development and economic paradigm shift from mono-cultural economy to diversification into the non-oil sector. Others are: job creation, enhancement of security, entrenchment of nationalism and patriotism in the society, inculcation of attitudinal change, promotion of value re-orientation, moral regeneration, civic and national orientation. (4)

This has remained a leadership culture in Nigeria as successive dispensations have continued to have evolved far-reaching radical reforms and transformations, to put the country on the part of progress and development; but is never realisable. Nevertheless, while taking note of these enormous hope and expectations, Nigerians are still groping in abject poverty both of mind, character and resources. The reason for this may not be far from the view of Karl Marx, quoted by Roberts Warren when he opines that; "The materialist doctrine that men are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed men are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men that change circumstances, and that the educator himself needs educating". Marx's submission points to the fact that change leaders have their individual perception and direction of change which may be only self-appealing as opposed to collective vision; and as such the change advocated and initiated by such change leaders may negate the desired change the society aspires for.

With the belief that drama is the product of the writer's thought processes and an excellent tool of propagating ideas and sensitizing men to dream and

aspire in their society, the dramatic construction of Femi Osofisan serves both social and political causes that could be used to hatch and realize revolutions. His dramatic ideology is one that has the power to destroy in order to reconstruct. This quality of Osofisan's, is strongly diluted with Marxist ideology. This is because according to Ken Smith cited in Nelson Obasi and Orjinta Ikechukwu; "any person seeking to change the world in a socialist direction, the ideas of Marxism are a vital, even indispensable tool and weapon to assist the working class in its struggle to change society" (36). Why this makes it obvious to admit that Osofisan could be classified as a Marxist dramatist who demands social change in favour of the oppressed and down trodden masses in the society as most of his plays express, he is not, however a consummate Marxist. This is because the change advocated for in Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* is double pronged. That is, from both the working class and the ruling class. The change ideology of Osofisan, according to Sandra Richards; "is in pursuit of social reconstruction; he considers writing to be a dialogue between the writer and the society, believing that people create social conditions and people can change social conditions for the better" (12).

Synopsis of *Once upon Four Robbers*

Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers* was borne out of the dramatist's strong dislike for General Yakubu Gowon's decree that armed robbers should be punished by public execution. Set in the market place, the play is built around four characters namely Angola, Hassan, Major and Alhaja. These four armed robbers are displeased with the fact that their boss executed by firing squad.

The primary intention of the government of Gowon was to force robbery to a halt through the public execution of robbers to serve as deterrent to others. However, the reverse is the case in Osofisan's play. The robbers after watching their boss get killed know that the government wants them but rather, they are poised to revenge the death of their boss and in fact, step up their robbery skills however they can. This then makes the government's promulgation an exercise in futility. The play, is therefore, built on the premise of the above as Osofisan wishes to let the government know that the solution to the problem of armed robbery is not by killing robbers through public gun fire, but by finding a way to make government an all-inclusive affair. Osofisan wishes to drive home the point that government needs to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor; government should discourage the idea of the rich getting richer while the poor get poorer and oppressed.

The playwright feels the major causes of armed robbery are unemployment and hunger, which are caused by embezzlement of public funds, the squalid spending habits of our egregious *contractors*, middle men of all sorts, while the masses suffer through lack of hospitals, impossible markets, deathtrap roads, overcrowded schools and so forth. Osofisan is convinced that, unless the government solves these problems among others, armed robbery will continue. In fact, to confirm hunger as one of the reasons for robbery, Major, one of the robbers in the play says, “forgive us. It is hunger that drives us” (31).

The play builds to its climax when Aafa gives the robbers a charm that will help them not to get caught as far as they stay together, or united, do not steal from the poor and do not kill. This means the robbers are licensed to steal in the midst of nothingness. In the end however, the robbers are caught and have to face a death penalty which is the usual public execution. The song Aafa gave them in different verses is sung and they clash with the soldiers at the execution ground. The stage vibrates on the incantations of the robbers and the orders of the soldiers. There is high level of confusion until everything comes to a freeze.

Concluding the play by freezing everything on stage is intended to pose a question in the hearts of the audience; should armed robbers be killed or not? Osofisan’s position is however very clear on the matter, he feels the solution to armed robbery and other social vices is not by sentencing robbers to death but by addressing the basic needs of the masses in the society through equitable distribution of the nation’s resources. The playwright wishes to make a statement that; in a country where everybody is guilty of one crime or the other, corrupt judges should not pass death sentences on robbers because they are guilty of bribery and corruption too.

Change Ideology in the play

Osofisan, in this text, indicts the state and the society for the menace of armed robbery. Osofisan believes that man is not naturally depraved but that man is a victim of the stringent socio-economic policies made by government. Such draconian policies make it difficult for man to realize himself as an upright and responsible being. Survival, therefore, becomes a game of the fittest and only the bravest can survive in a nation like Nigeria. To this end, he uses the medium of drama to canvass for the needed change for the betterment of society. Osofisan believes that these four robbers are the products of an unjust society where the wealth of the land is unevenly distributed. The oppressors keep getting richer and richer and the oppressed keep getting poorer and poorer. The poor are human beings too. They have needs like the rich. Should they remain silent in the face of

this injustice and resign to fate? Instances of dehumanization and corrupt practices that impinge on progress and development abound in the play. The playwright sees the armed robbers as poor people who are made poor by the social, political and economic realities of their lives. The robbers are the poor people that need to eat and survive. This idea is projected in the statement of Major, one of the robbers that: “Forgive us. Its hunger that drives us” (20). This statement is made when the robbers attempt stealing from Aafa to no avail but are rather held by the spell. Aafa then counters Major’s hunger statement in this way: “As it drives other people. But not into crime” (21). Osofisan is making a philosophical statement on the state of life in Nigeria. According to him, we live in a society where the poor get poorer while the rich get richer. He is of the view that, this is not supposed to be, but because the rich will stop at nothing to ensure that he does not leave his wealthy position even if through corrupt means the situation of the masses deteriorates.

The playwright feels the end of armed robbery and of course other vices will be feasible when the rich or those in position of authority in the society or the government decide to provide jobs for the unemployed youth. It also means those in positions of authority must live above board and do the right thing for the holistic development of the nation. This, to him, will be possible when the government starts putting in place and enforcing programmes that would eradicate poverty. Osofisan, through sarcasm, comments on the non-availability of employment opportunities in the country as being one of the reasons why crime is on the increase. When Major reveals that, they steal only from the rich, he was countered by Aafa that, they would not go away with their act because the rich are powerful and they are responsible for everything:

Aafa: Foolish... Get up you two, Allah is not likely to hear your prayers.

Fools, all of you. You steal from the rich, so where will you hide?

The rich are powerful.

Aafa: Where will you run? They make laws.

Major: Yes, and they build the law courts.

Hasan: Train the lawyers.

Angola: They own the firing squads.

Aafa: So why not give up? There is enough employment in the country.

(21)

The kind of employment that exists in the country, according to the playwright, is the type that demeans. This can be derived from the words of the characters in the play:

Major: Yes. The rich also own the servants.

Aafa: And you cannot be servants? You? You? (*Looks at them in turn*) And you self-styled Alhaja?

Alhaja: (*in "illiterate accent"*) 'wanted urgently: four boy and a one girls.

Standard six an adfantage but not compulsory-position-

Hasan: (*same game*) 'service boys. Waiter! Attractive salary.

Major: Five naira per week. (22)

At the point of public execution of the robbers, they explain the rationale behind their actions as manifest in the following excerpt:

Hassan: Yes, Ahmed? What excuse do you think I owe you? Everyone has his dream. Everyone has a point at which the dream cracks up. I have sworn never to be a slave in my own father's land. All I wanted was the right to work, but everywhere they only wanted slaves. (90)

From the above excerpt Osofisan presents a picture of the kinds of jobs that are available in the nation today; which are unattractive, demeaning and discouraging. But he, however, warns that this should not be an excuse for armed robbery. He expresses this in an African proverb which goes: 'half bread is better than none'. According to him, it is better to accept to be a servant to the rich and powerful than be executed through armed robbery by the firing squad owned by the rich. He advocated for measures that would be put in place to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. To him it is the wide gap that exists between the two groups that breeds armed robbery and other crimes in the society. He thus sees no difference between a man who uses his position as a government office holder to commit crime and an armed robber. The government staff's action and attitude to public fund is the cause for the upsurge of armed robbery cases in the society. It is in this regard that the playwright questions the rationale behind the execution of armed robbers when the office thieves are left untouched:

Angola: Right, Aafa, so the journey ends. At the Bar Beach, in some market place, at the outskirts of town. What does it matter? For those not in privileged position to steal government files, award contracts.

Hasan: Alter accounts-

Angola: Swear affidavits

Alhaja: Grant sick leaves-
Hasan: Sell contraband-
Major: Collude with aliens-
Angola: And buy chieftaincy titles as life insurance!
No!
Let our obituaries litter the public places and one day-
Aafa: What illusions! (24)

This re-echoes Major's statement which affirms that even the people are aware of corporate armed robbery as he reiterates that: "...The dog boasts in the town, but everybody knows the Tiger's in the bush". (8) Osofisan is saying that an armed robber is not different from a man or woman that uses his position to commit crimes such as holding back other people's promotion, falsely terminating others' appointment, altering accounts/figures, diverting public funds for personal use, taking brown envelopes to falsely facilitate contracts as well as colluding with foreigners to defraud the nation. He, therefore, calls on all citizens to be accountable to their actions in what-ever position they find themselves. He wonders why evil doers feel they have the right over other people's lives when they themselves know they are guilty of one crime or the other or the same crime they accuse others of. He says this when he condemns the act of killing armed robbers by firing squad. While the armed robbers suffer public execution for their crimes, the real robbers comfortably commit their heinous crimes uncaught.

Angola: No, Aafa, too many objections. First, one sergeant owes us a debt. Then there are many citizens who must be made to account for their wealth, and the poverty of their workers. Such accounts can be settled only one way. (28-29)

Osofisan in the above juxtaposes the lives of an armed robber and that of a pen robber and questions the rationale behind the execution of an armed robber while the pen robber that uses his/her pen to sap the country dry of her wealth is left unpunished. To the playwright, every member of the society is guilty of one crime or the other. He seems to be commenting on the leadership styles of leaders in the nation when he asserts through Angola's statement to Aafa that: "... too many people ride their cars along the sore-ridden backs of the poor. Is there no other way?" (29) This is to say that; it is criminal for leaders to use their positions to exploit the masses instead of providing the basic necessities of life to them. The greedy nature of Nigerian leaders is put to question. It is the sheer greed that

makes people to amass wealth to the neglect of the social-political and economic needs of the people they lead. This cuts across all strata of the society as even the market men and women perpetrate their own dimension of criminality. Going by the market song which goes in part:

The work of profit
brought us to this world,
this life that is the market.
Some sell with ease and flourish
and some are clients
who pay their greed in gold!...
We make inflation
and hoard away
as much as we may relish. (45-46)

The market situation is characterized by the ultimate desire to maximize profit at the expense of the mass poor. This has become an excuse to crime as the market women affirm:

Mama Toun: How can we live, if profit lower or cease?
Mama Alice: How shall we survive, if the Price Control
Officer refuses to be bribed? (92)

From the above extract, it is true that even the market traders have also been robbing their victims in the name of business profit. This justifies the content of the market song, which in its meaning alone attests to a human society that celebrates individual and self-serving materialistic tendency at the expense of others. To this Hassan re-echoes; “The world is a market, we come to slaughter one another and sell the parts” (91).

In Osofisan’s eyes and mind, even the military that execute the armed robbers are themselves worse than the robbers. They also connive and steal public funds. This is revealed in the following lines:

Corporal: They’re gone! They’ve run away!
Sergeant: Too bad. We got only one of them. Recover the
gun.
Soldier: (*doing so, discover money*) Look serg!
Sergeant: what?
Soldier: The money, it’s all here!
Sergeant: (*knocking him down*) shut up, you fool, can’t you
restrain yourself? (*Looks round rapidly*) couple, take care

of the money. And listen, you dogs who may have been cursed to extreme poverty! As far as we know, the robbers ran away with the money! Is that clear? We found nothing. Okay? Let us meet later tonight, at my brother's house. And if I catch anybody with a running mouth...(55)

This justifies why it is rare in the history of the security agents in the nation to successfully overpower and recover stolen properties from armed robbers. Even when they do, they make claims that 'the robbers carted away the money/properties'.

Another angle of Osofisan's change ideology is religion. While there is persisting social decay that results into the hostilities evident in the society, religious leaders in professing their faith have rather remained conniving agents of social malaise. They do this by failing to tell the people especially those in positions of authority the truth as demanded of a true apostle of either Christ or Mohammed. Osofisan, thus uses the character of Aafa to compel religious leaders to live up to their spiritual obligation of moulding characters. This is evident in the conversation from the play:

Aafa: Alihamidu lilai. Your husband, was it?
ALHAJA and MAJOR are started. He chuckles).
Alhaja! Yes, I recognize you. At the war front, when you traded across the lines, selling to both sides, it was convenient then, wasn't it, to call yourself Alhaja? But your longest pilgrimage as we all know was to the officers' beds, not to Mecca!
(19)

Alhaja: And so what, you disgusting old man! I survived didn't I? ...I survived but I don't go raking up much like a municipal waste disposal van. Spill it out then, since you are a refuse depot, let's hear the rest of the rubbish! (19)

These revelations embitter Alhaja as it comes at a time that is most trying and which she cannot take kindly. Obviously, all religions uphold truth which must be told at all costs. This is what Aafa displays even when it is evident that this can cost him his life – in the circumstance, this is done. What Osofisan does is to

indict religious faithful who connive with the rest of the people to cover or even encourage crimes.

There is also the question of insatiability of human wants which Osofisan identifies as the bane of societal unrest. For instance, the four robbers are guaranteed of the power which when judiciously used once is sufficient to make them rich. But would they be satisfied with any amount? This is justified through Aafa's statement that: "Well, it's just that you never can tell about human greed..." (30) Having expressed their desire to get just enough to organize their lives, the whole thing ends in treachery as the power is abused. Major decides to part ways with the other three robbers so that all the gains go to him alone.

Major: Stop! Don't move any of you. (*kicks out a sack*). Alhaja, take this sack and collect all the money. You heard me! (*Reluctantly, she does so*). And I warn you, no one else is to move. I love you all, but I would not hesitate to shoot any of you.

Hassan: The money belongs to all of us.

Major: Bring it to me, Alhaja... The money belongs to me now. (50-51)

While we deduce that the robbers had earlier promised a collective fight against the oppressive powers, this collectivism is thrown to the wind as soon as huge sum of money is involved. The whole money the robbers realize, Major boasts:

Major: This money! Money! A new life. No more scurrying in the smell of back streets. A house the size of a palace! And children! Listen, I am going to be a daddy! I will own the main streets, six, no, ... ten Mercedes, the neon lights, the supermarkets...(52).

The above statement is indirectly condemning the winner takes it all attitude among Nigerians. Rather, the playwright is advocating for a system that pursues the common interest of all. Evidently, even among the robbers, there is no trust and sense of collectivism. What this means is that no positive change can take place in the society when it is not grounded on collective will and action.

From all indications, as Osofisan presents, there is economic, political and religious criminality of varying magnitudes perpetrated by all and at all levels of the society. While those in public offices use the pen to rob the public treasury, the law enforcement agencies compromise and conceal crimes that have economic

benefits from them at the expense of the populace. There is also robbery committed against unsuspecting victims by traders in the name of business profit. These indices present the armed robbers as symbolic scapegoats in the decayed society. The playwright, therefore, calls for a change of attitude for progress and development. In the face of unemployment, hunger and deprivation while the rich openly display their wealth, the temptation of armed robbery and other criminality such as kidnapping as well as ritual killings are, therefore, inevitable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Change ideology and the extent to which Femi Osofisan adopts them in his dramaturgy, is the focus of this discourse. The clamour for change predates Osofisan but he popularized and ennobled its manifestation in the Nigerian society. Change arose out of the need to wrestle power from the tyrannical and despotic hegemonies that have expropriated and appropriated the commonwealth of the people for their selfish ends.

From his days, Osofisan knew that there is an ongoing dialectical struggle between two classes – the ruling class and the working class. The evils that Osofisan envisions during the period of writing his play, not only still manifest today but have become commonplace. In many parts of the world, especially in the Third World countries, it is the same story of exploitation, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, injustice and oppression, insensitivity, extortions, mismanagement of public tilts, policy somersault, irregular and sometimes outright withholding of promotions and non-payment of salaries of retired, among others.

Osofisan's change ideology is the development of a revolutionary approach to art through a growing radical tendency. The development that manifests itself in the dramatist's commitment to the employment of a revolutionary potential of drama to sharpen social awareness, adopt an alternative approach (socialist) to the obsolescence evident in the socio-political, economic and religious life in present day Nigeria, and presenting recipes for social change. His change ideology as presented in *Once Upon Four Robbers* is a conscious ideological commitment; a conviction that social change could come by the dramatists' ability to raise mass awareness to a positive revolutionary alternative to social decadence.

Osofisan advocates for a change of attitudes from all and sundry as every citizen has a duty and responsibility to the achievement of fundamental change as well as warning the working masses and youth of the dangers of entertaining

illusions in a capitalist government, including one headed by an allegedly righteous and incorruptible leader as in the present (Buhari's) case in Nigeria.

This paper strongly recommends that there is the need for Nigerians to clearly understand what change really is or should entail. Change does not simply imply reforming capitalism (i.e. by making the system less corrupt and efficient) as most Nigerian leaders have allegedly set out to do or through a thorough revolutionary change in the economic and political structure of society as canvassed by many. It entails a change in the way and manner Nigerians have been conducting the affairs of the nation. It is a systematic approach to dealing with change both from the perspective of an organization and the individual. It also means preparedness that begins at the top and this means that leadership – across all levels – must have absolute clarity in purpose and focus; there also must be alignment in strategic philosophy and resolution goals.

The reality is that without strategy, change is merely substitution – not evolution. Simply put, you can have an idea, but without the right strategy and execution of the idea, very little if any progress will be made. This clearly means that there must be a teamwork mentality, and without it nothing else matters. This level of clarity breeds the expectation from every citizen that only those willing to be team players belong in the organization and fit into the culture that is being created. People must be challenged to put their ideals to the test together– but acting in isolation with no respect for the team is not acceptable. It is impossible to create an environment of change and alignment when transparency is missing from the leaders. How can a nation progress politically and economically innovative when leaders harbour hidden agenda as against building momentum for the collective good in support of the change mantra?

While it is true that without a vision the people perish, it is also true that without action the people and their vision perish as well. This calls for positive action by all and sundry to effect the change which Nigerians desire. This view advocates for a change which must be vigorously pursued by both the change leaders and the people's actions.

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THEATRE AND FILM AS CATALYST TO LEADERSHIP CHANGE IN NIGERIA

Chukwuma Anyanwu
Delta State University

Abstract

Theatre and film are not only similar in their nature as media of “mass” communication; they are also similar in their relationship as both product and process. Again, they are sometimes used interchangeably. However, this paper is designed to explore their close affinity to leadership because as theatre and film are concerned with the collective and general good, even so is leadership. Using the literary research method and anchored on the theatre for development (TFD) theory, this paper x-rays how theatre and film are not only agents of change and leadership, it will also show them as having in them the characteristics and qualities which any good leader anywhere in the world should and ought to emulate. It concludes on the note that leadership would be better if it works closely with the other elements of governance even as the disparate units of theatre and film work together for a holistic and harmonious existence. Recommendations are then made, that those in leadership positions should, if possible, take courses in acting in order to appreciate how the director interacts with the other elements in the theatre and film for the good of the society/audience, among others.

Introduction

Theatre and film are composite arts. They are also communal in nature as well as interactive. By their nature, they serve as pulley, drawing together people from all walks of life at both sides of the camera for film, that is, there are different people behind and in front of the camera. In the same vein, the theatre has people backstage, on stage and in the auditorium. In each case, these people are of different background, culture and experience. They come together for a definite aim, a definite objective; to actualize an experience, project an event and in the end, leave something tangible for the society which is designed to make the people better and leave a pleasant taste in their mouths, a memory which helps them to have a new outlook, a different view and attitude to life and make their relationships better. It must also be emphasized that the people, the artists, who

project this wonderful experience we are trying to describe draw from the same material, the script; are also guided and led by one person, to whom they subjugate their individuality, their expertise, at least, for the duration of this experience. This person is the artistic director, who though, has the power to hire and fire, nevertheless, humbles himself, attends to and accepts suggestions from his cast and crew because he is aware that no man is a repository of knowledge all by himself.

Another thing is worthy of mention. That thing is the fact that the script may change, the entire cast, crew, even the equipment may change, the stage remains, to be adapted to suit the purpose of a new set of artists and script. Also, irrespective of the set of artists on board, their purpose is inevitably the same: to make life better and more pleasurable for the people. This is where leadership, theatre and film merge: in their objective. To serve the people for a better, richer and more beneficial proceeds from the theatre of life, the living stage, which William Shakespeare makes us to understand as the world, when he submits that “all the world is a stage where every man must play a part” (7).

At least, that is the ideal or should be the ideal objective of leadership, theatre and film: to serve the people and leave the society better than they met it. Thus, as regimes end and fresh elections are conducted to usher in new leaders for a stipulated period, even so do productions end and a new set of artists take charge even when the script and stage remain the same.

Definition of Concepts

The main components of this paper are evident in the topic. Inasmuch as they are rather familiar in terms, attempt would be made to put them in the right perspective in which they occur in this paper. Needless to restate that theatre and film, though, slightly different, would be used interchangeably as constituting the “humanistic sciences,” (2), because humanity is their central concern. The human preoccupation with theatre is captured in this way by Wilson:

Theater is an activity that we use to describe how we live. Think of how often we use theater as a metaphor to describe a part of daily life. We say that someone is melodramatic or highly theatrical. When we don't believe children, we say that they are play-acting. We refer to the battleground on which a war is fought as its theater. We describe the role we do in our professional and personal spheres as if we were performers on the stage of life.

Children and adults imitate behaviors that they admire, in the same way as actors and actresses mimic behaviors. (1)

He goes further to say that “theatricality is all around us in many of the popular forms that engage us. The relationship between theater, film, and television, for example, is quite apparent” (1).

As human sciences, theatre and film are preoccupied with how humanity engages itself and makes meaning out of existence. Whether they explore animate or inanimate objects, their concern is with how humanity relates with such engagements in order to make meaning out of them. On its part, leadership is equally preoccupied with people, with humanity. John Wesley is of the opinion that leadership “is doing all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the time you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can” (qtd. in Iwuamadi 2). He then submits that, “without sacrifice, there is no leadership because service is the first chapter in the book of leadership” (22). Again, while being interviewed on corporate responsibility of leaders and business organizations, His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, who is also the President of the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum, says, “I have long held the view that industry which has fuelled much environmental deterioration in the world can be harnessed as a creative force to promote sustainable development if its leaders have the vision and commitment to change” (26).

The Prince of Wales, in the above submission has pointed out some key components of leadership which are also those of theatre and film. These are” that responsible leadership is creative, is development oriented, has vision and must bring about positive change. Livio Desimone, the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of 3M as at 1997, in an interview with the magazine also says that, “strong leadership involves listening to all of our constituencies” (qtd. in *Forum* 35).

Listening, then, is one of the qualities expected of a good leader to possess. Indeed, listening is essential to leadership, but it must be distinguished from hearing. Indeed, it is also a quality necessary for a director in the theatre. This is because the director is a leader, a controller of men who has been trained to use people to achieve fixed objectives. The director’s main working instrument is people. This is why Wale Adenuga, the owner of Wale Adenuga Productions (WAP), and producer of the series *Super Story*, uses the catch phrase, “We are pencils in the hands of the creator,” to end his stories. Many of our leaders are hearers and not listeners. A listener digests and reflects because listening is in-

depth and learned while hearing is fleeting but natural. In other words, it is possible for one to hear without understanding whereas someone who listens invariably understands. A good leader must have a listening ear. Speaking on the principles of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), in the first in the series of Pre-NEC lectures, the late former President, Dr. Festus Iyayi, outlined the principles of ASUU leadership, principles which should guide all responsible leaders globally as follows:

- Integrity, transparency and accountability.
- Professionalism, objectivity and hard work.
- Courage, sacrifice and total commitment.
- Internal democracy, team work and group solidarity; and
- Patriotism, anti-imperialism and working class solidarity. (Iyayi 4)

The former president went on to say that the above principles dictate and control all that they do in the union, including their mode of dressing. It is when leaders operate without clear cut principles that they derail and do things like gangsters. In summation, leadership devoid of clearly defined principles, is bound to fail.

Change, by way of a simple definition, is the quality of not being static or constant. The ability to be different, take on a new outlook, shift position, not retaining its original appearance, not being steady but has the tendency to take on a new appearance, shape, position, etc, but always shiftless

Theoretical Clarifications and Methodology

This paper, as mentioned earlier, draws its strength from the theatre for development theory (TFA), a theory designed to guide theatre practitioners to use their profession for the development of man in all ramifications. This theory, according to experts, is traced to Augusto Boal and the experiment of “two Brazilian theatre practitioners who emphasized conscientization of the people, creation of conducive atmosphere for sharing experience, educating the people and inducing a desire for change,” (Ugwu 80-81). As Ugwu puts it, “theatre is to be decentralized and its language understood and spoken by the community members for the purposes of change...To actualize the change, the approach must involve the people and it should start from bottom-up level” (81).

The essence of the theory revolves on how to utilize the theatre for mobilizing the people and making them not only desire change, but they should also engender positive change that would lead to development. The idea behind the theory actually revolves on how to help people, especially the rural people to live a better life, take interest in their own well-being and general affairs, and where necessary, make the government listen and attend to their needs. Thus,

community leaders are expected to be mediators between the theatre for development practitioners and the people, by getting the former involved through the identification of the needs of the latter and then putting the latter in a receptive frame of mind for a joint project geared towards development. The community leaders therefore serve as liaison officers as well as agents of the TFD practitioners. This is because the TFD group can hardly function effectively without the community leaders; they must have people to focus on and through the leaders, the people can now be accessed.

The research method used for this work, as noted earlier, is the literary method which Ukala says is also called the “analytical method” (8). He said that this research method “focuses on written and printed library and archival sources, especially books, journals, theses, reports, literary works, such as plays, novels and poems. Data are collected from these and analysed in relation to the research questions and objectives” (8). This method is quite appropriate to this study as it helps to highlight the objective, which is to show how theatre and film are agents of leadership change, especially if leaders strive to employ the manners and methods of theatre in their leadership roles as it affects the led.

Theatre, Film and Leadership: Points of Convergence and Divergence

The relationship between theatre, film and leadership is quite an interesting and peculiar one. It is interesting because it seems so obvious; and peculiar because it is disturbingly similar in many respects. In the first place, they are all concerned with disparate collection of people. The number of people however, differs based on the type of play or film and on constituency, be it village, Local government, state, a nation or even a corporate outfit, institution or company. Irrespective of the geographical space occupied or the population thereof, the central point is the presence of people of different demographics and psychographics involved with theatrical/film production and with governance. Again, all are or should be concerned with making life better in all its forms. In all three components of this work, entry qualification(s) is/are similar especially with reference to connection or who you know: “It’s not what you know, it’s who you know” (Claire 6). One needs to paraphrase Sir Tyrone Guthrie when he compares acting to prostitution but this time the comparison is with politics. It is safe to say that politics, as a calling somewhere between thuggery and casual work is in demand as never before; politics as a serious profession, especially in Nigeria, is in grave danger of extinction. This immediately calls attention to the fact of the infiltration of mediocrity and sacrifice of merit on the altar of who you know in the industry and in politics. Still on this idea of infiltration and of balkanization of what should be

normal, “what do we have today in the Federal cabinet? Increasingly, men and women of poor breeding, fantasizers of moronic culture, witless assemblage of gossips and administrators of poison to communal trust and peace” (qtd. in Ebika 8).

The above is applicable in all the three components of this work. However, both theatre and film have inherent in them, the means not only for their own redemption, but the power to save leadership and or governance and those involved in it from itself. This is because the leadership problem as experienced in Nigeria is a product of jettisoning responsibility associated with it in preference to the privileges it carries. The responsibility that goes with the privileges of the position are underscored by the fact that, “leadership always carries power with it. The exercise of power always involves ethical considerations” (Amadi 94). All told, leadership and those who are involved in it, at all levels hold it in trust. Whether it was thrust upon one by circumstance, inheritance, appointment or one takes it by force, the underlying outcome is that it is held in trust. The trust endures depending on the leader’s personal traits and attributes. This is because no amount of force can hold a people down for ever. If no other force can counter it, at least, ageing and health, indeed, time wears it down. Having noted the above, which cannot be exhausted in this paper, we can now discuss how theatre and film can engender leadership change for the good and development of humanity.

Theatre and Film as catalyst to Leadership Change

The underlying similarity between theatre, film and leadership is the need for change. It does not matter who the leader is, or his style of governance, the focus of any meaningful leadership is the need for change, actualized through the ability to be a good leader or director in the case of theatre and film, the leader must do what the actor does in the process of studying his role. He has to first “come to terms with himself, come to terms with his physical environment and learn how to manage relationships with other people. In all aspects of his being the actor needs to be sensitively tuned to be able to respond to whoever or whatever he encounters and his responses must be within his control” (11).

This is the crux of what those in leadership positions should learn from theatre and film. That is the ability to “come to terms” with themselves without which they would be unable to relate with others. As noted earlier, all the other units of the theatre (experts in their various fields), subjugate, one would even say, “suspend” their expertise and align their knowledge to that of the director in the overall interest of the production. This is one thing Nigerian leaders should

learn from theatre/film: the ability to listen to the opposition and not be too “sensitive” to criticism. Indeed, sometimes, opposition, which most leaders abhor, is without doubt, necessary to a healthy society and its acceptance is a true mark of leadership. And as the blurb of *Censorship: Opposing Viewpoints* makes us to know, “those who do not know their opponent’s arguments do not completely understand their own.” (Blurb, *Censorship: Opposing Viewpoints*). This observation is a truism and it bears repeating, as this writer has done elsewhere.

No leader knows it all. It is the leader who recognizes the power behind his office, who has the vision to recognize that power is merely a dressing, an icing on the cake of his position who enjoys true support and followership. The power of all leaders is as ephemeral as a theatrical production. The only way to make that power endure is to enshrine it through achievement which is concrete by evidence of its human and structural development in every field, and which in the theatre gains some form of permanence via documentation either in print form through written review or cinema through filming.

A theatre director who wants his production to endure must necessarily get it documented in permanent form. In the same token, any leader who wants to be remembered must leave behind a memory in permanent form through his achievements. Where those before him stopped, he must start from and take a backward step to see why his predecessor stopped there before going beyond it. Every leader in life is a sort of actor as said earlier. Nobody was born to rule, and nobody rules for ever. So, leadership is power given in trust the same way an actor is cast for a role, even so, some leaders get their positions. The definition of acting offered by Hodgson and Richards is quite germane here.

Acting is an interpretation, an impersonation of aspects of the human situation. It may involve playing the role of another person or it may require the imagined response of one’s own person to a mood or set of circumstances. In either case, the qualities needed for the best acting are also those qualities required for the fullest living. (11)

The truism in the above quotation is self-explanatory. If leadership is not role playing (acting), why would the led, the people, prefer one leader to another? Why would governors, senators, local government chairmen, Vice Chancellors, presidents, etc. using similar, if not exact, resources, like actors with the same scripts, perform differently, under similar circumstances? Indeed, leadership, like acting, produces different interpretation of the same role from different actors.

But, tragically, African leaders, one would prefer, rulers, do not behave like actors. For them, when their tenure ends, the curtain does not fall, nor is there ever a blackout. Instead, once their role is played and the play (tenure) ended, it is at that point they begin to improvise a script similar to the one just ended, in the bid to continue with their role(s). In so doing, unlike actors, they refuse to recognize a change of scene or that the curtain has fallen. Even when their ruler ship role was devoid of any significant event, they would rather continue to play to an empty auditorium because they did not pass through any form of audition to get their roles. They refuse to remember that even if an actor cheats at an audition or bypasses the process altogether, like a footballer in the field, such actor would have exposed his limitations on stage even as a footballer does in the field. The tragedy however, is that such actors/leaders, still manage to get some sort of canned applause from sycophants in the auditorium.

A good leader, like an actor who has not mastered his lines, listens keenly to the prompter and if he is good, the audience may not know that he was being prompted. In most cases, even when the audience is aware, if the actor was good, the audience overlooks the lapse. So, a good leader must listen to advice from both detractors via criticism, and to supporters, via encouragement. In either case, he must be sensitive and alert not to take every advice, hook, line and sinker as that would amount to throwing away the bath water with the child or being ignorant of which to take and which to discard. His success lies in his ability to internalize his role, aware that he is the focal point, aware that notwithstanding the individual commendation(s) given to every actor, the overall credit is his own because he was a good coordinator. As the director/leader, he assigns role(s) to his actors and crew members, he has confidence that they would deliver, so he does not interfere with their interpretations but supervises and guides them to work with the central objective of the play/production in mind.

He uses a different approach to relate with his cast and crew, treating each according to his reading of their individual mental and physical attributes, always aware of individual differences. He knows when to call a stubborn cast member to order in public and when a one-on-one chat would achieve a better result. Leadership is about service and he leads well who listens well since listening is learned and hearing is natural. He must be a good listener but must hear all and not listen to all.

The bane of leadership in Nigeria, even Africa, is the preponderance on the self: one's ethnic interest, one's political affiliation, one's religious set, one's family and such selfish syndromes. A true servant does not discriminate against such sentiments, because his leadership is idea and vision driven and not self-

centred. Just as an actor does not choose his audience, even so a leader should not select or discriminate between those who voted him and those who did not. The sentiments which characterize and dominate leadership in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular run somewhat like this, as captured by Okoroegbe in his critical appraisal of Wale Okediran's *Tenants in the House*: "We cannot possibly extend the tenure of the president, when everyone knows it is the turn of the North to produce the next president,.. it is our turn. The North will set the country on fire, if we are cheated. We *must* produce the next president, or else" (emphasis mine, 206).

The above and similar sentiments have been expressed by political aspirants in Nigeria, including, unfortunately, the incumbent president, Major General Muhammadu Buhari (rtd), in one of his previous efforts to be the president of the country. He cannot be a leader who does not know how to manage a defeat or handle success. Much has been written about Achebe's submission on what he considers the "trouble with Nigeria, which he places unequivocally on the feet of bad leadership. "The play," says Williams, "is genuinely considered dead, or at least, unconscious, until the actors take it up again" (39). The play script is like a nation, it is dormant, almost lifeless, until quality leaders, visionary leaders, give it life through their leadership example. The example of Nelson Rohila Mandela, in Southern Africa, remains an everlasting testimony to leadership by example. This is because prior to Mandela's election to South Africa's presidential seat, the country under Pieta Botha and Fredrick de Klerk , was just a nation in pains, where laughter was discriminated and where a part of the people (the Whites) lived, and the Blacks, subsisted. Mandela recreated this situation through his selfless and visionary leadership, so far the only one in the whole of Africa, who had the right to pad the play when the curtain fell, but he took pleasure, like a good actor in responding to the curtain call and took his bow gracefully.

Conclusion

No theatre or film director goes on stage or location without a production plan, which naturally becomes operable right from the preparation/preproduction stage/phase. A good production plan, categorized into short, medium or long terms, is the hallmark of successful leadership. As Ray Ekpou says, "the architecture of success is built long before that future arrives. That is the way to succeed. I wonder whether our leaders agree with that." He then goes on to say at the back page of *The Guardian* of 28th June, 2016, that, "if Buhari wants to stand out from leaders who were largely warming their chairs in Nigeria, he must have

a plan based on agreed national objectives. Without a plan, we will just be wandering in the wilderness as we have been doing these many years.” The necessity for a plan for leaders to pursue their goals and objectives is unquantifiable as without a plan leadership would be like a ship that is rudderless.

This paper has examined the concept of leadership and how theatre and film can be used to arrive at positive change in leadership. It pointed out the close affinity between the concepts and showed that without a plan no leader can succeed even as no director goes on stage or location without a plan. Arising from the submissions, it is recommended that aspirant leaders should borrow a leaf from theatre and film practitioners if they hope to make meaningful impact. They should realize that leadership is as tenured as an actor playing a role; when the curtain falls, another set of actors take over.

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